

“Alberto Garutti”,  
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HUO  
 Hans Ulrich Obrist  
 AG  
 Alberto Garutti

HUO I would like to start this conversation by talking about gossip. A whole work of yours is based on gossip...

AG It was the basis of a work that I did at the Sant'Andrea Hospital in Rome, curated by Mario Pieroni. The subject of gossip is a very interesting one, and I'm thinking of the culture passed down orally for centuries, and of today's information circulation systems. After all, the Internet and blogs are really magnified gossip scattered to infinity.

HUO I was part of the Zerynthia project.

AG Earlier on I had thought it would be madness to show works in hospitals. When you go into hospital you don't care a hoot about art. People in there are ill and suffering, and worried about their health. Then you see the people who work there, the doctors, the nurses... people who spend their lives in wards and operating theatres. The work had to start from these people. My intention was to spark a mechanism, to build up a system of relations that would involve the hospital and its staff, people who spend their daily lives in a place by no means associated with the exhibition of artworks. I believe the artist outside museum spaces must shoulder a different responsibility towards the recipients of their work. They must “step down from the celebratory pedestal” erected by the art system for their work, and go out to the spectator to construct a fertile and necessary communion. They must fall back into the reality of life as it is right now, at a time when art is seeking once again to live outside the museums, in close alliance with the collective dynamics of society. Hence with architecture and its contexts, the media, and above all with a public no longer confined to the select members of a narrow art system. For this reason I feel that the sphere of “meeting” is important. As indeed it was in Rome. To create a work that would speak about the people who worked at the Sant'Andrea, I went to see the general manager and explained my project to him. After a moment's hesitation he agreed

and introduced me to other people in his office. It was fantastic; the project worked very well. Its theme was love stories that originated inside the hospital. The general manager began by telling me about Doctor Bianconi who had married Doctor Ilaria, who worked in cardiology. They had got married a few years earlier. I wanted Bianconi to recall the day he first saw his future wife through that loving, special eye... All of us remember that look. They had “glanced” at each other by the coffee machine, on the ground floor. We went to see him together, and identified the exact spot where they met. Then I took some photos of that spot and hung them in the hospital corridors, with a small caption underneath: **Dedicated to Doctor Bianconi and Doctor Ilaria.** The story of this first step sparked a chain reaction in other staff members, eliciting a kind of friendly gossip that enabled me to find other couples, other spots, and so to create a long series of images representing the hospital. One lady doctor told me she had had a love story with a person whose identity she did not wish to reveal. “He is here, and I still love him very much. But it is all secret,” she said. “However, I would like you to take a photo of the spot where I first set eyes on him.” I was interested in being able to produce a work that would somehow be self-generating, of which I would only have to light the fuse and then simply describe its propagation. To concern myself with dispersion as a natural, almost biological fact, to analyse the spread of information by starting from the inherent meaning of the concept of gossip itself, always on the borderline between truth and lies. This immaterial mechanism was established by changing the canonical hierarchies between artist and spectator. I confined myself to touching on life, by shifting a few chemical balances between things.

HUO We are in the invisible hospital, in a sense...

AG Yes. The work springs from and constructs its sense on a connective tissue, formed by a dense network of informa-

tion thanks to the complicity of numerous people.

But it is mainly a work geared to method, to the subtle and indistinguishable limit between art and the reality of life, to relationships with a public space. The meetings between people set the process in motion and are at the same time its integral part. The photographs are works and simultaneously tools to construct the invisible loom of places and of looking that make up the life of the building... So you see, the work is all this put together. And it is diffused, basically, just like the sound of voices, the whispering of people.

HUO Can we say that art is, in a sense, the pretext for a conversation?

AG Certainly, but in the widest and deepest form. Art is, after all, the art of meeting. What is a work if not an occasion for exchanging views, images and imaginations, a meeting of people, thoughts and cultures... in the same way as the exchange of goods occurs... Venice, for example, for centuries has recounted its extraordinary quality to us. And it is a pre-eminent city of encounters, of people coming and going and continually exchanging thoughts through objects.

The question of art is very much tied up with economic and political dynamics, and in my work adhering to reality means finding the actual sense of the work. It is paradoxically in the nature of “being useful,” finding its force in the “exchange,” with the spectator, the client, the museum, the city. I am interested in superimposing the roles of these actors and deliberately losing any knowledge of who the “owner” or the “author” of the artwork may be. In any case, for centuries artists were “at the service of”: of cities, princes, Popes, and big client-patrons. Clients are important: it is they who “compel” us to find solutions. When Mantegna was summoned by the Gonzagas to fresco the Camera degli Sposi, he accepted the challenge and a small space was transformed into a supreme masterpiece. Seemingly restrictive circumstances compel artists to develop

new design strategies and, as we have seen for centuries, to produce works of the highest quality. It all springs from a meeting which is, I repeat, itself a work! The work is elusive and only in the tension generated to go out towards it, only in that moment, does it come into being.

HUO And the same thing is said of design. Magistretti, Sottsass... they all say that, if there had not been enlightened entrepreneurs, Italian design would never have existed...

AG Yes, I agree. I don't think of the client as an entrepreneur or of the client as of Popes in the past. I think of a new client.

HUO Which new client?

AG The recipients themselves: us. I believe the real clients are the recipients themselves, as marketing tells us. The recipients are also the clients, without being aware of it. Precisely for this reason I am very interested in sticking to reality; and to constructing works whose form is defined by different contingencies with which the work relates during its theoretical and physical development. And I refer to people I don't know, people I bump into during the process; but also to political and economic institutions or bureaucratic regulations and social contexts. In this way the clients can be of numerous different sorts. The work is the fruit of different and heterogeneous tensions.

HUO There is a splendid book by Rilke giving advice to a young poet. What advice do you give to a young artist?

AG How can I ever advise a young artist? I think art is unteachable. One may attempt to provide a sentimental education in life and hence art. It is all very difficult.

HUO But if art is unteachable, what is the art teacher's job?

AG I am interested in the people I meet on the common ground of a work. This

problem is faced by abolishing the student's institutional status, which is no less intolerable than that of the teacher. What interests me is to create a "climate," because in this way the course is self-generated. It is the same procedure that I use when I do my works. The approach is the same. It is like the dialogue with clients; the work springs from a meeting... I believe it is increasingly necessary to shift the question of art to that of the artistic state of life. It is the critical, ethical and loving look that provides the key; it is that look that radiates the things in an "aura". And that is how the artist-public, teacher-student, author-spectator hierarchy is reversed, changed and thrown into crisis. I am interested in activating these mechanisms.

HUO To catalyse... And the number of young artists who have come out of your course is incredible, isn't it?

AG Yes, so it seems... Our encounters are head-on; we try to spot the errors... Being on good terms enables us to question everything. Errors, too, are a source of "wealth". In any case art tends towards perfection, so it is always imperfect!

HUO You have talked about your lessons at the Academy and at the University, but we haven't mentioned museums. What is your outlook on museums today?

AG To describe my outlook on museums I again feel the necessity to talk about the figure that completes its sense more than any other: the spectator. Let me explain. The process and the path that make up my public works are overturned in the specialised space of art. While in the city it is the artist who "goes towards" the spectator, in the museum it is precisely the latter that has to assume responsibility for the eye, and to move in an attempt to approach the work. With the work entitled *What happens in rooms when the people have left?*, furniture and domestic and ordinary objects covered with phosphorescent paint are camouflaged in the exhibition space, and

indeed are not recognised as art. The public will only see them as ordinary items of furniture. I wanted to alter the public's perception of the work: it can only be imagined, thought of, awaited. It is in this immaterial tension that the work is disclosed, fulfilled only in the meeting with its spectators, who are asked to make a patient effort to look for it.

The work functions like a litmus paper. It is hidden in the belly of the museum while silently revealing its weak points and its rhetoric. We can in fact maintain that art is everywhere, that what we see everywhere is already potentially an exhibition; and to decide that it is only our looking. I refer to what Blanchot called a "gift." It is as if an opposite process to that of Duchamp had developed. I think that the object today, the work of art, has a great desire to get out of the museum. But when the work of art returns to reality it loses its aura. And so it is precisely the spectators and the artists themselves, who are the first real spectators, that can restore an aura to the work. At bottom, it is perhaps we ourselves who are the museum. I mean it is necessary, in my opinion, to make sure that we become little walking museums: spectators capable of assuming the responsibility for looking. The museum is an entity that ought to teach people to charge things with an aura: a place where people can be taught to create a difference between saying, "I touch your hand," and actually shaking it.

HUO In this sense it's like a battery, isn't it?

AG Yes, it's a dynamo, a battery.

HUO What are your projects for architecture in 2007?

AG I have a large number of projects... For example to close off the green area around the Sandretto Foundation in Turin, which is already under way; a square in a residential quarter in Monteriggioni, directed by the Associazione Continua, or in Camogli for the Fondazione Remotti... a work inside the Deutsche's Bank new head

offices in Milan. The *To Those Born Today* work will also be realised again in an Italian city... I believe this work, done in 1998 for Bergamo and then in a square at Ghent for the S.M.A.K. Museum, has a strong relationship with architecture. I am trying to do it in all the cities that have asked me to. The theme of birth is of a universal nature. It leaves aside issues like nationality, language, religion and culture. It is a work that relates with the city on different scales; it is visible and not visible; it produces a sort of narrative planning. People, institutions, the public space of a square or bridge constitute a throbbing system, the story of life in the city. The work is composed of signs that recount “an elsewhere” that can only be imagined: a birth, a mother, an expectation. This leads to the observer’s personal construction of a mental image, constructing an invisible place that we look at for a brief moment, that dilates public space. Every spectator “observes” their own part of it. Here, too, the work is multiplied and propagated in infinite ways, as many as the number of spectators... That is why when I think of this work I always picture to myself a physical map of the pulsating city, and a mental map of the city that every passer-by produces... and then the image that I recount is really an invisible nativity, it is painting.

HUO Let’s talk about the devices, which are an integral part of your work.

AG Every public work of mine is always accompanied by a dedication, which is a caption. The caption seems irrelevant but it is instead very decisive in my work because it becomes a sort of declaration of reaching out towards... in this case, of the artist’s reaching out towards the citizens, the spectators. I use this caption as a tool: I define it as a double-entry key that activates different levels of appreciation of the work and is an integral part of it. Furthermore, it belongs simultaneously to the art system and to that of the city. I want the work to be comprehensible to everybody if it is to function, and at the same time I want it to produce a meth-

odological and critical thinking about the system of art. Briefly, the work project is structured as a veritable Machiavellian strategy, articulated on two levels that are the two sides of the same coin. The first is more popular in daily reality, the second for the art system is more specialised and theoretic. The first is good with the citizens, the second is destructuring in relation to the art world. For example, for the Istanbul Biennial directed by Yuko Hasegawa, I did the work on the Bosphorus Bridge which is the work *To Those Born Today*. All the lights on the bridge were linked to the Zeynep Hospital and for every baby born a light was switched on. In such a vast city I wanted to tell its citizens about this operation of mine through an advertising campaign. For the work was not aimed only at the directors of museums, at the collectors and curators, but primarily at the citizens; I wanted to use the language of advertising which is the one that gets across most easily to people. All over the city there were big posters with the photo of the Bosphorus Bridge, and a little Turkish family gazing at it. A brief caption said, **The streetlights on this bridge are linked to the maternity ward of Zeynep Hospital. Whenever the light slowly flashes it means that a baby has been born. This work is dedicated to that baby and to the babies born in this city.** I also did this type of operation in Japan, with the collaboration of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Museum of Contemporary Art and the University of Kanazawa.

HUO Kanazawa, this new museum by the architect Sejima...

AG Yuko asked me to follow a new theme which was: “The city is the museum. The museum is the city.” He wanted these works to be able to activate the relation between citizens and the museum under construction. In this case I also invited a number of families living in houses next to the museum. Thanks to the complicity and involvement of university students, we managed to place sensors in the homes of these families. At every movement, the sensor switched on a light on the outside

- of the building. To do this I had to go into these people's homes... with gifts that I had brought with me in a suitcase, from Italy.
- HUO So it was a reciprocal work, of exchange.
- AG Yes, it was. I think art is also the art of meeting, of reciprocity. It is no small thing for an artist to enter people's homes: at Watou, too, for an exhibition curated by Jan Hoet and Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, we did a very similar work. In the exhibition space, lights that had been installed in the walls were turned on whenever anybody moved beyond them...
- HUO A bit like Boetti's annual lamp, *Poliphony*.
- AG Boetti's lamp goes on when... we don't know. Here on the other hand whenever it is switched on it reveals that there is life inside the houses, that something is moving. A light that tells us about life. This work, too, is a dialogue.
- HUO This is also true of your work in Bolzano, which is also a very architectural one. Can you tell us about it?
- AG Bolzano was in some ways also a very difficult project. But this uneasiness of mine about being able to do a work in that context was also the mainspring that caused the work to come into being. The difficulty created the assumptions. The work sprang from the idea that nobody, as in other cities, takes any interest in art and very few visit museums. So I had a small room constructed where every three months a work from the Museion, which is located in the city centre, was exhibited.
- HUO A museum in the museum. In a sense, therefore, it means taking the museum to the city...
- AG Right. So when somebody passes, by even for a few moments, they are forced to see a work. As happened in the distant past with churches, when little chapels were dotted around the city, or with post offices that distributed across the land. There, too, there is a dedication, a going out towards the citizens, because we are in the city, not in the museum. A place that gives rise to an encounter with art, a "self-generating" exchange.
- HUO This connection with Yona Friedman or Cedric Price is very interesting. Is there a computer in your work?
- AG My work changed enormously with the advent of computers. Recently I recounted that the tragic episode of 9/11 was an epochal passage, and that since then art can no longer be self-referential. Because new dynamics have been opened up, new mechanisms whereby truly everyone of us feels involved in a collectivised ego, as if the contemporary ego had a collective sensitivity. I believe, however, that the real epochal passage was the computer, because our way of seeing reality, and architecture, has changed. Our psychology vis-à-vis the world has changed and so therefore has our relationship with space, time and nature, and with the architecture of cities which are primarily relational systems.
- HUO I am interested in your work on restructured architectures.
- AG At Peccioli in 1994, in 2000 at Colle di Val d'Elsa for "Arte all'Arte" I used the whole of the budget for my work to get an old building renovated: the headquarters of the Corale Vincenzo Bellini. On the opening day of the exhibition the Colle musicians organised a concert for the public, made up of ordinary people and people from the art world. Through music, which is art, the members of the choir rendered what art itself had given them. Here, too, my own contribution was minimal, sentimental and economic, with no precise hierarchies, far from the arrogant personality cult of art in public spaces. The process of the work is related through a caption engraved on the front of the building; the text is now part of the city, and every time it

is read it renews its sense. So the work continues to “function,” even though it may not be recognised as such.

HUO We are in a process and not in a product.

AG The occasion is one of “aesthetic” restructuring, but the work is the whole methodological development.

HUO We have conducted this interview of ours first in a car, then in a bar and now again in the car. What is the link between the car and your studio?

AG The car is my studio by now. I get my ideas in here, in this kind of autonomous capsule. But it is linked to the outside world, perhaps precisely because one is not in any exact place. True, the studio is where the artist works, however I am constantly on the move. It is the movement of thought, the movement of reasonings and above all the movement that produces encounters, exchanges. The studio is where I go to release energies accumulated in the outside world.

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Translation by Shanti Evans

HUO  
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 Stefano Boeri

1. Charles Arsene-Henry, Shumon Basar, Karen Marta, (ed.), *Hans Ulrich Obrist: Interviews, Volume 2*. Milan: Charta, 2010.

2. At the end of August 2010, Boeri put forward his own candidature as mayor of Milan in opposition to the incumbent People of Freedom mayor Letizia Moratti.

3. Since 1989 Alberto Garutti has held the chair of Painting at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Milan and, since 2002, the post of contract professor of the “Laboratorio Arte 2 (Art Workshop 2)” at the Department of Architecture of the IUAV in Venice.

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HUO Tell me then: is this book going to be a book produced by the magazine, *Kaleidoscope*, or will it be the magazine itself as a book or...

AG I confess that I don't know much about it, and in a way I've chosen not to know; I've let myself be guided by Andrea [Viliani, ed.] and by our reflection together on the fate of a book on my work that to some extent I've never wanted to do.

Giacinto Di Pietrantonio has written a lot for a book of mine, but I've always stalled for time with the intention of studying a method, a strategy that would be as best suited as possible to conveying on paper the complexity of a work that eludes even me from the viewpoint of its editorial structure.

In this case it's a small book through which, with the collaboration of Chus [Martínez, ed.], yourself, Stefano, Luca [Cerizza, ed.] and of course Andrea too, an attempt is being made to understand what might be the best ways to organize and describe my work, its often multiform processes which are hard to trace.

HUO It's interesting in fact, because your work—we talked about it for *Domus* as well as in an interview that I've now published in the second volume of my collection of interviews<sup>1</sup>—possesses this aspect of non- (or even anti-) monumentality: you work a lot on non-objects and quasi-objects, on this idea of the veiled object...

AG Stefano, are you there?

SB Yes, I'm here.

HUO Ciao Stefano.

SB Ciao Hansino.

HUO Stefano, it's urgent that you get on Skype... Skype is the future and the mayor has to be on Skype.<sup>2</sup> Alberto, have you ever thought of going into politics?

AG No, I've never thought of going into politics, but obviously I've thought that

art has the capacity to be political.

HUO Can you tell me something about your vision of art's ability to be political?

AG The work of art, to be such, has to be public. It can only exist through the encounter with viewers. I've often worked in urban space and I've always sensed the danger of self-referentiality in the art system and above all the role of the artist. A public work cannot be aimed solely at an élite of specialized viewers, but has to relate to a different type of community, to the city that is, to a public of citizens with which it is necessary for the artist to hold a dialogue. In this sense my work is political, precisely because it sets out to establish a web of relations and dialogues with the city understood as a body of people, of laws, of economic systems. When I work in urban space or in the surrounding territory, the procedures, the logic, even the thinking behind my projects have always needed to take into account their viewers, that is people—and people are us, the others are us. The citizens are not just the people to whom the work is addressed, but in a way also the clients of the work.

SB I think that there's another very political dimension to Alberto's work, which consists in the way he sets an example, in his being a reference for different generations of artists who have been molded by a work in the field carried out essentially around the Academy and around Alberto.<sup>3</sup> This is another way, and a very important one today, of passing on knowledge, a very rare thing, a great resource...

AG What Stefano says is true; I like to bring this sense of the political into my activity too. My work as a teacher at the Academy is an extension of my method of constructing works in public space. The approach and the process are identical. When I'm asked for the plan, I always answer that “I don't have plans,” and not as an ironic or critical dig at institutions, but because the state of improvisation contains all the think-

ing at the root of the procedure itself. I want to deal with reality, to get to know, to go along with a precise context. For me students, just like citizens or political and economic institutions, are territories, ecosystems in which to work, exchange, hold a dialogue, with no filter. My teaching work is very similar to the process of creation of a site-specific work.

I really believe that only idiots think it's possible to teach someone how to create a work of art. What I believe you can do is to try to carry out an operation of "sentimental education" in life and thus in art. What matters most at University or the Academy is to try to make sure that the figures of the teacher and the student meet on the common ground of the production of the work. Perhaps art is also the fruit of this process of dialogue without mediations. If there's one thing that I think I've always succeeded in doing over these years, it's creating a climate, I'd call it an atmosphere, once again a context in which the course generates itself and propagates in a spontaneous way. Just as for my public works, what I do is construct a set in which I let things happen, on the borderline between capacity for control and the maximum of naturalness.

SB A good climate, right: this is fundamental. Creating the right conditions so that individualities can erupt. It's the right way to teach, absolutely.

AG All the things that happen in real life and in the art world ought to go on in Academies and Universities, and instead unfortunately this doesn't often take place.

I have always sought a very personal dialogue too, without mediations and filters, at times tough and direct. A clear, frank relationship, based on the principle of loyalty, is at the root of our conversations in class. It's not demagoguery. I consider this sort of attitude a fundamental prerequisite in order to make the course dialectical and thereby raise the level and the quality of the works presented.

We can allow ourselves to be hard on

ourselves. It's a luxury that is not always granted in the art system—I'm using the plural because it's not me who judges and makes the criticisms, but we always do it together, my students and I.

SB The interesting, and if you like political, thing about your work is the way you position yourself...

If I think about many of your works, they are interventions that work almost by tapping into flows, habits, modes of behavior, and that feed on these to create a new meaning, to create a shift in significance. They don't stand on a pedestal with an inscription saying "this is art."

There is a correspondence, in my view, between this position you put yourself in and your approach to teaching. I don't know you very well but when I see you working with your students, when I see the students invading your studio at the Bovisa, I see that you're always in the midst of them. You govern the relationship from inside and not from above.

And by this I don't mean that it's an act of generosity or humility, because that's not the case at all...

AG No, certainly not. In fact it's the opposite.

SB Yes, rather it's an act of great strength, because governing from within requires a lot of power and provides great satisfaction. But it's an act that can be considered political in a situation like the current one, in which the Italian intelligentsia is essentially self-referential. In 95% of cases it is incapable of producing anything but a reference to itself.

AG Yes, I agree with what you're saying. It's not generosity or humility. In fact my way of proceeding in the city has its origin precisely in the analysis of the role of the artist when he works in public space. Always keeping a distance from any kind of populist demagoguery, I define the process that leads to the realization of my projects as "Machiavellian." It's a precise strategy aimed not just at the quality of the

work, but also at short-circuiting the system of art itself.

“Machiavellian” because I use the encounter with the public as a tool, a sort of picklock that will allow me to break into the social mechanisms and urban contexts in which the work will be located. On the one hand the work fits into and puts down roots in the social and geographic territory thanks to the relationship I establish with people, while on the other it is directed at the specific system of art, exploring its languages. For me the two processes are inseparable. Only through a dialogue with the recipients/clients can the work come alive, become a device capable of constructing new visions and scenarios, and fitting into the territory without looking like an extraneous object, imposed by its creator.

I started to work in this way at Peccioli for a project organized by Antonella Soldaini: my intervention consisted in the faithful restoration of an old theater in the town that the locals themselves showed me after many conversations. It was not just a question of participation. In that case my methodological approach became the very heart of the work: my role as the artist apparently dissolved in the community, with the aim of creating a small short circuit between the present story and the collective memory of the place, between contemporary linguistic experimentation and the energies, social and emotional dynamics that gravitated around that theater.

- HUO This leads us to another question: a new generation of artists works a lot on the idea of “production of reality.” For example, your student Petrit Halilaj has recently participated in the Berlin Biennale with a work<sup>5</sup> that consists in the construction of a house which he is going to live in after the Biennale. This aspect of the “production of reality” seems to me to find a parallel in many of your projects... What do you think?
- AG Exploring the reality of life, going along with it, is the starting point of all of my works. The outcome of the

work on the other hand is the multiplication of reality. And precisely for this reason my projects take place in several contexts simultaneously, that of daily life as well as the system of art... My works are used and lived, they are modified and wear out, they are works always wedded to the present. Through a short text, a caption, the work is immediately activated.

This is what happened for example with *Storms*, 2009, the work I created for the first room to be opened to the public at the MAXXI museum in Rome.

**In a room of the new MAXXI museum the lights will flicker when lightning strikes in Italy during a thunderstorm. This work is dedicated to all those who will think about the sky as they walk through.** This short text was an integral part of the work and was printed on the cover of 500,000 copies of *City*, the free daily newspaper distributed all over Rome.

The process of dissemination of information is part of the project because the true heart of the work is not in the pulsating room in the MAXXI, but in people’s gazes. Thousands of gazes of people walking through the city and, even just for a moment, raising their eyes to look at the sky above them and watching the birth of a new work of architecture as charged with magnetic power as the museum is. For me the work coincided precisely with that infinite multitude of gazes and skies observed by the people of the city. At bottom it was a work on the theme of the sublime, of the relationship between nature and art, of a very classical and I’d say pictorial work.

As I was saying earlier, the work is a strategy, it spreads a voice among people that propagates like an echo. I construct a scenario in which a new reality is produced that floats between my world, my way of looking at things, and a sort of collective conscious/unconscious.

This is why I think it’s difficult to conceive a book on my work. Chus herself said to me recently: “Your book should have no pictures.” It’s a problem that has to be solved. I’m very interested in exploring this question with you be-

4. “Arte a Peccioli,” Peccioli (Pisa), 1994-1997.

5. Petrit Halilaj, *The places I’m looking for, my dear, are utopian places, they are boring and I don’t know how to make them real*, 2010.

cause I always expect to be able to see and understand things about my work through the eyes of others. I love the idea of being able to lose the first-person narrative in the pages of a book on my own work, and thinking that the author, instead, could take the form of a multiple and multiform “I,” exactly as happens in my works.

HUO Another aspect that I found myself discussing with quantum physicist David Deutsch is that of “parallel realities.” From this perspective, I’d be very interested in talking about you, Alberto, as an architect.

AG It’s not possible for me to think about working with art without thinking about architecture too. My very method of working is architectural. We were talking about it before: the theme of acting in concert between people and institutions, the potentialities and challenges that the practical, technical and physical limitations and constraints of the city impose, these are the starting points for activating the mechanism of the work.

I’m interested in the possibility of interpreting the roles of the actors on the stage in a fluid way, of being able to mix up their functions and properties. I think it’s an important theme today, at a moment in which motivations of an economic and political character seem to influence the planning of public space more than anything else.

I have the sensation that it’s increasingly necessary to intervene in the new maps, the new geographies that society is drawing. The quality of the space no longer seems to be the main problem. Studying what already exists may no longer mean having anything to do with the traditional techniques of interpreting the city. I would like it, indeed perhaps it’s something indispensable, if now more than ever art and architecture went back to holding a close, constant and open dialogue. But it doesn’t seem so easy.

HUO As someone with a degree in architecture but who doesn’t practice the

profession, do you have architectural projects that have never been realized?

AG Yes, there is one work: a work commissioned from me three or four years ago for the mouth of the Magra River, in the vicinity of La Spezia. Really it’s a project that combines architecture, landscape, art and to some extent engineering. I was supposed to realize a work on the eastern bank of the river, along the last stretch of the watercourse’s estuary, right at the point where the Magra flows into the sea. Not far away from those places lies Carrara, with its quarries and dozens of workshops for the production of sculptures and pieces for building in stone. Instead of the usual reinforced-concrete breakwaters that protect our coasts, my project envisaged piling up, dumping in the sea a large quantity of concrete casts, discards, pieces of marble and fragments of many sculptures of various sizes. Some would have sunk into the sea, other parts would have remained flush with the surface of the water, others still would have partially emerged from the river. The barrier that separated fresh water from salt water would have become a sort of landscape of stones that contained the history of that region.

SB The theme of parallel realities that Hans raised is a fundamental one; and it’s fundamental today in a metropolitan urban situation where parallel realities are not just the overlapping of worlds...

This theme also concerns the fact that today there are parallel realities which accompany the very condition of urban life, the experience of moving around and the whole bubble of production of thoughts and images that each of us carries with him.

So the thing that interests me about your work, Alberto, and which in my view is your real work, as you may have already said yourself before, is the caption. In other words, the true work is not the fact that you construct technical elements that illuminate, that film, that color, that make things happen; your true work, that is to say the

mechanism which really sparks off its meaning, a meaning that connects up parallel worlds that would not otherwise be connected, is the caption.

- AG The function of the caption is crucial, and it's through it that the work produces the real multiplication of parallel realities we were talking of. It's a triggering device able to bestow narrative meaning on work, able to outline infinite mental landscapes.

For example, during the Istanbul Biennial of 2001, when I created the work *To Those Born Today* on the bridge over the Bosphorus, every viewer, passerby and citizen of Istanbul who read the caption—which in that case took the form of an advertising campaign—would have imagined in some way the moment of his or her own birth, would have unconsciously composed an immaterial, personal, unique and unrepeatable image. Sometimes I try to picture to myself the diffuse multitude of these imagined births; it's a parallel city, a parallel society.

In fact, the caption, in all of the many forms it takes, suited to each context (advertising poster, stone slab, leaflet, free newspaper and so on), in addition to disseminating and distributing the contents of the work itself, is the explicit declaration of that “reaching out” to people, to the viewers, of which I was speaking earlier: it is itself a political and methodological statement.

- SB In fact I think that with regard both to your works and to your practice of teaching, everything you do is a gigantic, continuous, prolonged caption. And this also makes it, if you like, “structuralist,” in the sense that it implies a whole line of reasoning on the nature of discourse, on discursive logic, that I really like; or “Habermassian,” if you prefer, in the sense that it conveys an idea of affirmation of public discourse.

- AG I'm very interested in this reflection of yours on the relationship between teaching and the caption as a tool for opening the doors to many parallel contexts. I've kept all the texts of my cap-

tions, perhaps to hold an exhibition of them. Each caption a scenario.

The caption is a thin diaphragm; it's the physical object that gives form to the “Machiavellian” strategy. It's a two-faced device. It introduces people to the work and brings them closer to it, and at the same time it is an explicit declaration to the public of the shift in methodology that I've decided to put into effect.

This short text in some way invests the viewer with a responsibility, it makes him a protagonist and above all it charges his vision with an aura.

At a moment when our society is growing ever more ubiquitous, when the museum and art are liquid, diffuse, it's increasingly hard to draw their boundaries. For this reason I believe it is the gaze of the viewer that has to be charged with awareness and responsibility. We are living in a time of continual change... I can even imagine that some shifts of a sociopolitical character could almost be seen as biological phenomena, as if they were the result of a higher design of nature. I'm referring, for example, to the many migrations of multitudes of people from one continent to another. I'm thinking of those huge ships full of migrants, clinging like insects to every mast or handhold so as not to fall overboard, in order to survive. It's as if nature were coming to our aid and strengthening the weaker races, made more fragile by lifestyles that are now unnatural, mixing up ethnic groups, merging the so-called Third World with the First... While medicine is weakening us instead of making us stronger, unconscious movements of peoples and races are producing a new hybridization that is reinvigorating human beings. Migrations as biology.

- HUO The other thing that came to mind, Alberto, when you were speaking of this new spirituality, was your sculpture of a *Madonna* which was shown at this year's Art Basel...

- AG The sculpture you saw at Art Basel is the statue of a *Madonna* that was commissioned from me years ago for a church in Italy. Seeing it at an art fair

may be strange, but to tell the truth I found showing it in a somewhat commercial context like Basel interesting. The work is not created through a genuine sculptural process. It's a ready-made. I had a 19th-century *Madonna* sent from Naples, made a cast of it and then realized a copy in ceramic. It was a classical sculpture, the most traditional of icons, very beautiful. I call it "very beautiful" precisely because I didn't make it, but took it from real life, from that popular context in which the boundary between sacred, profane and mysticism is very blurred. Inside it, in a hollow part of the ceramic work, I had a small device installed that made it possible to heat up the statue. The sculpture reaches the temperature of the human body, around 36.7 degrees: it's almost as if it were maternal warmth. So my intervention consisted merely in raising the temperature of a statue, but twisting its meaning in an invisible way. Thus the object is located in a new territory, in a setting halfway between the religious world, that of the faithful, and the system of art, its iconography.

The work is not intrusive, indeed it deliberately gets mixed up and confused with the endless number of religious objects scattered around the world and holds an intentional dialogue with popular culture—I'm thinking of the act of devotion of touching the *Madonna's* foot—producing a kind of aura purposely on the borderline between that generated by an almost pagan cult and the one that the art system itself produces. It was partly for this reason that the work was in the right place, from my point of view, at a fair.

It was not my intention to tackle themes linked to Catholicism with this work, but to deal with a certain widespread culture, to explore that latent need for secular spirituality that our society expresses in the most varied ways.

HUO I'd like to know to what extent someone like, for instance, Michael Asher is an important reference for you. I've chosen to mention Michael Asher because he leads us to the question of the context: many of your projects

are contextual, in the sense that they are public works which belong to the place for which they have been conceived... And at the same time they propose new circuits of dissemination.

AG Yes, that's true. My works are planned in detail to be placed in a precise location, and simultaneously seek the maximum dispersion. The micro and macro scale almost always coexist in my works. In a way urban design and the detail have a common root, the same conception. And I think I can say that one dimension stems from the other and vice versa; they are two different approaches to space that exchange roles during the planning and the functioning of the work itself. My aim is to prepare a reaction, to organize the relationship between the elements in order to leave them free for transformation. The work lives off its propagation and perhaps for this reason I cannot know its limits and boundaries.

The work that is going to be realized for Malpensa airport may be of interest with regard to my way of thinking about the problem of the context, as it is site-specific and at the same time dispersed, small and at the same time very big.

It is an intervention that completes Pierluigi Nicolin's competition project for the new gate of the Milanese terminal. The work is a stone slab of about one meter square that will be installed in the floor, flush with its surface. It will be located at many points of Malpensa airport, but also in a series of places directly connected with it, such as the railroad stations linking the airport to Milan and Lombardy. My intention is to distribute this work as widely as possible in the territory. On the stone is engraved in Italian and English the sentence **Every step I have taken in my life has led me here, now**, which is also the work's title. Anyone can come across this slab—in the bathrooms, in a corridor, near the platform, before getting on the train. It's a work that speaks specifically to the passerby, to anyone who will linger even just for a moment to read it,

6. In 2010 Inter was the first Italian club in history to win the so-called “treble,” i.e. to win the championship, the national cup and the Champions League in the same year.

treading on it for a fraction of a second. Despite its small dimensions, the work contains the story, the invisible account of its viewer’s life; that little slab of stone is at bottom a very small place, but one that contains many other places, cities and spaces that we have passed through in the past and a thousand others that we are going to pass through in the future. It’s a work a public caption that constructs infinite contexts. It’s a work on the theme of time, in which past, present and future are muddled up. And it’s strange to think of us three here holding a conversation, when we are far away and simultaneously close and in movement. Every step we have taken in our lives has led us here, now.

HUO Which is your smallest work and which the biggest?

AG My biggest works are undoubtedly those able to construct a sort of urban design, works in whose conception is contained the aptitude for their own reproduction and multiplication. For example, I’m trying to realize the work *Ai Nati Oggi* in the greatest possible number of cities in the world. The dense network of relations that it brings into play is growing. Birth itself, as well as being a universal value and so of incalculable size, is also an event that has something to do with the potential energy that a new life contains. The demographic changes in the world are interesting indicators for the future.

As for small works... There are some very small drawings that I’ve done, and tiny objects that are scattered around my house and amidst a sea of books. Every so often I find one after many years have gone by. They are very little works that vanish and occasionally reemerge when I least expect it. They make up a web of hidden objects that run through the time of my life and my home. I don’t see them and yet they’re around. It’s like keeping my sensibility on charge... I run into them by chance. I like to forget they exist.

SB I have a question that is perhaps is just a matter of curiosity: your passion for

Inter, Internazionale Football Club Milan, the soccer team...

AG The passion for Inter is a family thing, a tradition.

SB You have it too?

AG Very much! This year Inter has been a great thrill for everyone.<sup>6</sup>

I think that supporting a soccer team is an expression of disinterested love that it would be interesting to explore. There is something in it that is connected with that latent need for spirituality which is increasingly evident in our society. And spirituality and art are two really similar things.

By now everyone is aware of creativity, everyone knows more or less what it means, but abuse of the term has made it a synonym for something “aesthetically enjoyable,” perhaps the very opposite of the idea of art. It seems that anything can be done in the name of creativity. It’s the passage from creativity to artistry that interests me: as if creativity gave a push in the direction of artistry, which is at a higher level. And artistry has something to do with the spirituality of existence, they have the same underlying meaning.

HUO I’ve only got five minutes because I’m off to the theater. I’m going to see the great Eleanor Bron. There are a few urgent questions left. One of these concerns your heroes—even though we may be living in the wrong time to talk of heroes. In other words, your influences, your “oxygen,” other practices that have influenced or inspired you...

AG That’s a very difficult question because there are a lot of references and works that have been an inspiration for me. You’ve spoken of Asher, who is certainly a great artist, but among the works that have influenced me in some way I would like to mention Titian’s *The Assumption of the Virgin* in the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice. It’s a work of great contemporaneity. Looking at it I always feel I can understand what Titian’s thoughts and

reflections where when he had to solve the problem of the work's position, the space assigned to him by the clients.

The *The Assumption of the Virgin* is a big painting behind the altar, located between two large windows facing west. During the day, sunlight pours into the apse of the church through these two large windows, meaning that the work is always seen against the light, that is to say in the worst conditions of visibility.

I'm convinced that Titian conceived the narrative and figurative structure of the picture in relation to this difficult position. Thus he turned a problem that was complicated to solve into a site-specific work of monumental and powerful beauty. The altarpiece is essentially split into two parts: in the upper section the figure of the Madonna and the heavenly scene are illuminated by a dazzling golden light; in the lower half, in a more earthly setting, Titian painted the human figures directly against the light, in very dark tones.

So the artist has transposed into the work the visual condition in which the viewer finds himself in the space of the church, forced to look at the altarpiece against the light. But how could this unusual solution be justified in the visual narration of the picture? Titian divides the picture in two by painting a large cloud above which the Madonna floats; beneath it the people are covered by the shadow of This work has made a great impression on me precisely because of its marvelous dialogue with the architecture. It is not just an accurate response to the space in which it was located, but an incredible project of painting conceived for a viewer blinded by the sun, a work designed to be seen with the eyes dazzled by light. Titian took inspiration from this limitation of the architectural space, and thus succeeded in increasing the power of his intervention, by setting his painting in relation not only to the building that houses it, but to the cosmos itself.

And then, not far away, still in Venice, still at the Frari, Titian again: the *Pesaro Madonna*. Here there are some

figures looking at the Virgin, but along a flight of steps, in an architectural foreshortening somewhat in the manner of Veronese, appears a boy who is looking straight at the viewer. Observing that work, we are drawn directly into the altarpiece. Our real space enters that painting. In this work of Titian's I find many of the themes that characterize my works: the possibility of the viewer blending into the work itself and the intersection of several real and imagined spaces.

Palazzo Reale,  
Milan  
1<sup>st</sup> April 2012

HUO  
Hans Ulrich Obrist  
AG  
Alberto Garutti

HUO You have taught at different schools, like the Brera Fine Arts Academy in Milan, the IUAV in Venice, and the Fine Arts Academy of Bologna. Have you ever thought about making your own Black Mountain College, of creating a new school?

AG No, I don't think so. Though downstairs from my studio a large space has recently been vacated, where it might be interesting to try to make something happen with students, or something else. A sort of extension of the work I have been doing for years inside institutions. While I feel very distant from any academic or classical conception of schooling, my work as a teacher does not reflect a sort of "lack of discipline" as an end in itself. My practice in Academies or Universities is actually based on a very precise method. It might be interesting to apply certain constituent principles of the course to parallel practices, running alongside those belonging to the scholastic context. In a certain sense, that is what I do in my public projects. As I already mentioned in our earlier conversations, there is a certain assonance between the principles that shape the structure of my course and the working method I use in the space of the city.

HUO There is something that always struck me about the experiences I had with schools, since I started working as a young curator with Kasper König in the 1990s. At the time, König was the director of the Städelschule in Frankfurt. In the daytime I worked with him, and in the evening I attended lectures; it was as if I had become a student again. What I thought was magical about the Städelschule back then was the fact that the school of architecture was a part of the school of art. That is where my passion for architecture began. I believe it was a fundamental experience, not only for me, but also for many artists. Years later, I found that spirit again at the IUAV in Venice, where I had begun to teach: the context was that of an art school, but with very strong links to the architecture school that is part of the same

institution. With Angela Vettese and Marco De Michelis, we structured the art seminars together with the architecture seminars of Stefano Boeri, until everything converged in a single seminar. The connection between art and architecture is also a clear part of your work. Please tell me something about that.

AG I took a degree in architecture in 1971, though art was always in my mind and my thoughts. After all, it is also true that in the 1800s those who wanted to become architects had to attend a school of Fine Arts. It was only in the early part of the 1900s that the two disciplines were separated. Historical cities would not have had the same degree of quality had it not been for the combined intervention of artists and architects, in fact I would say of "artists", period. I consider every work of quality an extraordinary cognitive experience, notwithstanding the disciplinary context in which it can be filed away. The encounter between art and architecture is necessary, I believe, because it is capable of proposing a cognitive type of experience—revealing new dimensions, opening up horizons, proposing radical content.

HUO Like Emilio Primi you have produced very few catalogues, and they are all out of print. There are a few publications, like the one by the publishing house Kaleidoscope, which are also text books, but a true monograph on your work does not exist. Where would you begin to make your *catalogue raisonné*?

AG I have never wanted to make a catalogue. Some might say it is a form of masochism; actually, it is as if I had always wanted—probably fooling myself—to demand everything of the work, without the need for any form of mediation. It is hard to explain, but I believe this type of reflection has to do with the idea of a work that needs to develop, to travel to spread its content, independent of the existence of a catalogue. Actually I am very happy that I have never produced a book. Fifteen

years ago, when I bought my studio, I remember that during the move I suddenly stopped the workers who were loading a pile of catalogues onto the truck: “Wait, put them here,” I said. And we threw them all away, because in the end I always hated those catalogues. They were not the way I wanted them to be.

HUO Do copies of this catalogue still exist?

AG I have one copy, but by now it is very old and worn, the pages are falling out. Sometimes I may show it to a friend, in a private setting. This catalogue contains some crucial passages on my work, but it certainly does not contain the works I would insert in a book that is supposed to narrate the process of my artistic practice in a reasoned way. A hypothetical *catalogue raisonné* on my work should begin with the images of the first exhibition I did in 1975 in Milan, at the Diagramma gallery of Luciano Inga Pin. In that period Inga Pin was an important reference point for the artists of my generation, like Francesco Clemente, Sandro Chia, Enzo Cucchi—the artists who would later form the Transavanguardia group. The exhibition at Inga Pin’s gallery was very important for me, I remember it as a revelation, because it revealed certain aspects of my work, and also of my way of being, which would then shape the character of all my artistic practice: the critical attitude, and uncertainty as the driving force behind research and knowledge. The most important work, the backbone of that exhibition, explored the theme of error, of doubt, and came from certain writings and thoughts of Montaigne, things I was reading at the time. It was entitled *I believe I remember* and it consisted of a series of 32 black and white photographs showing me in the room where I slept at the time, surrounded by the objects of my everyday life, against the backdrop of a domestic context. In an extremely politicized historical period like the mid-1970s, paying attention to absolutely banal objects or demonstrating interest in the idea of an “individual narrative” was almost

risky, because it meant shifting away from that social and political reality that was so much the center of the aesthetic practices of the time.

HUO Who were your heroes and sources of inspiration in those days?

AG I grew up observing what was being shown in Italian and European galleries at the time, namely Conceptual art. I was interested in its shared tendency to develop autonomous codes and languages. I perceived it as the context in which a new relationship was happening between environment, man and object, in which it was possible to address the relations between word and image, analytical narrative and romantic interpretation. For me, and for many artists, I think, fundamental personalities for the construction of an international imaginary included Franco Toselli, Françoise Lambert, Massimo Minini, with whom I still work. As well as artists like Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd, Trisha Brown, Gordon Matta-Clark, Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Richard Serra, and of course Mario Merz and Alighiero Boetti. But it is interesting to see how at the Diaframma gallery a movement was generated that was almost the opposite of the Conceptual. If you think about it, the beginning of the Transavanguardia can be traced back precisely there, with the exhibition by Francesco Clemente in 1975. Luciano did something very important. Though I was very timid, I was a regular visitor at the galleries, especially the four or five places where the artists looked at exhibition space as a working tool: Gian Enzo Sperone in Turin, Salvatore Ala in Milan, L’Attico and the gallery of Ugo Ferranti in Rome, and also the gallery of Lucio Amelio in Naples, which purchased some of my works.

The encounter with Minimalism was also very important for me, and the approach to the idea of analytically retracing the process of construction of the work, narrating the process of making art, after having somehow taken the practice back to zero. I was intrigued by the artistic experimentation

- of Minimalism as a reaction to and a natural consequence of the ideological and political premises of the time, without which all conceptual art would not have made sense. The aspiration to make clean forms and the idea of emptiness in the work of certain artists of that period would have totally lost value had they been deprived of that ideological and political pressure from which everything took form. Form and content cannot be separated, just as instinct and brain are inseparable.
- HUO And when did you have the revelation that took you beyond the gallery, beyond the museum?
- AG I can also recall this passage very clearly. Though my intention was never to go against the galleries, or against the system, but to simply listen to what was happening in the world, to certain transformations that were happening outside the art context. The shift towards public art and the passage from the museum to the city happened in the same historical moment as the first Gulf War and the advent of the Internet in Italy. I felt it was urgent, at the time, to deal with a reality in transformation, apparently far away from the gallery-collector-museum machinery. The art system is very important—only a simpleton could think that art is not also an economic reality—but the danger, in those years more than ever before, was that of getting closed up in too much self-reference, losing touch with the realities of life. For centuries art had a relationship with life and the everyday dimension, with a positive, ethical approach. In my view, it is necessary to ask ourselves every day about the role and the ethical responsibility of the artist, and to do this we cannot help but confront the artwork with the historical reality in which it acts, and will act. How can we produce art if we do not listen to the world? As Alighiero Boetti put it, “to bring the world into the world”...
- HUO You mentioned the first Gulf War, I recall that day very well.
- AG It was 1992.
- HUO That day I was with Peter Fischli and David Weiss in Düsseldorf. The next day their exhibition was going to open, and we spent the night in a hotel in front of the television, but without seeing anything...
- AG So did I...
- HUO Perhaps a kind of collective memory exists of that night. In an interview with Guido Molinari, you said that the Gulf War and the spread of the Internet triggered a series of chain reactions that have also had an impact on the psychology of people and on our way of thinking and making art. If war has changed geography, perception and the sense of space, the Internet has changed the conception of the world and of its complexity. Following this epiphany, which we can position at the start of the 1990s, what is the first work in which we can see this shift, that no longer has to do with the modern ego but with an ego charged with a new responsibility, which you felt could not be overlooked?
- AG This passage coincides with the making of a project that began in 1993-1994 at Peccioli, for an exhibition curated by Antonella Soldaini. Peccioli is a small town near Pisa, very beautiful in its simplicity. It was a town in the avant-garde, and also quite affluent, a virtuous town because it had the management of the garbage dump of Florence. The curator asked me to do a work in the city, telling me: “choose a square or a street.” But my concern, at the time, was not so much to find a central spot that would give my work great visibility, but to make the work be accepted by the townspeople. This is why I dedicated the work to the citizens of Peccioli. This was the first time my work had emerged from the confines of my home, getting beyond the idea of the domestic landscape that had characterized my practice until then. I should point out that the “home” was not a private place for me, a place to close myself up and reject the world;

quite the opposite, it was the place of relations, with the telephone, the answering machine, the computer. It was a place of personal but also interpersonal reflection, a microcosm in which to activate different relationships.

The project done in 1996 for the exhibition curated by Rita Selvaggio at Casa Masaccio, in San Giovanni Valdarno—the house where the artist was born, now organized as a museum—is another revealing example of the shift of the ego you mentioned.

HUO Also in the small museum of Bolzano, you invested a great deal of time, managing in the end to establish a relationship with the local residents...

AG Thinking precisely about this project, I can undoubtedly say that concepts like “difficulty” and the “limit”—themes to which I would like to devote an entire chapter of my possible *catalogue raisonné*—definitely have something to do with making art. Even the history of art is the result of the overcoming of a limit. Just consider the limits imposed, for example, by the Church: to conform to an evangelical narrative, to the rules of liturgy, to the architecture of churches... Limits those artists capable of producing and developing a project, starting in conditions of difficulty and constriction, transformed into a formidable energy...

HUO What was the difficulty of the room-museum of Bolzano?

AG In Bolzano I found myself in a condition of extreme solitude. Bolzano is a difficult city in which two cultural realities coexist, the Italian and the German, and they are very different. The difficulties ranged from managing to complete a site visit to finding ways to get into contact with the locals. But I was also asking myself, “what am I doing here? I am spending public funds, but nobody seems to care about art here.” It was precisely this clash with an urban context that repulsed me, this suffering, that triggered the work. When they asked me to choose from the sites indicated by the provincial au-

thorities, I chose the one furthest from the center. On the outskirts of town no one was interested in art, no one ever went to the museum. I thought, “alright, now I’ll show you.” So I decided to build right there, inside the public gardens, a small room, three square meters, designed as if it were a small subsidiary of the Museion—the museum in the city center—with the idea that every three months, one work from the museum collection would be displayed there. Every time someone, taking their kids to the park or going to buy groceries, passed in front of the little museum a sensor would light up the inside. The passers-by were thus forced, if only for a few seconds, to come to terms with the artwork. Letizia Ragaglia, who had invited me to make this piece and now directs the Museion, told me that, in recent years, this little room has become a very popular feature of the neighborhood.

HUO So the structure of your *catalogue raisonné* is beginning to take form. One chapter should undoubtedly be on light, a feature of many of your works, including *To Those Born Today*, done for the first time in 1998 in Bergamo. For you, art has to do with light, just as emptiness has to do with fullness in architecture. Light narrates reality, it is a metaphor of art, but also an application of technology, as is clear in your work *Storms* (2008), done for the MAXXI in Rome.

AG The work *Temporali* began for Fondazione Remotti in Camogli, a deconsecrated church that is now a contemporary art center. But the project has had further developments, as in the case of the MAXXI museum, which commissioned the work when the museum was still under construction. There too, every time lightning struck, a system would turn on all the lights installed in one zone of the building, via Internet. Here the light gave meaning to the darkness, and vice versa, just as in the design of a building empty space gives meaning to full zones. For me, light has great symbolic force; nevertheless, in the public works it is important above

all for its narrative immediacy. The idea of “narrative quality” has a very strong relationship with the works *To Those Born Today* and *Storms*: they detect and reveal, encouraging the passer-by to imagine something. In the work *Storms* I have simply attempted to put the enigma of art into relation with the enigma of the universe, with a context that is equally unconceivable, as Borges said. This was a work on nature, on this strange, indefinable thing that exists above us.

HUO Another chapter of your book could be about nature...

AG Yes, of course. Basically the work I did with Francesco Bonami at Villa Manin, in a town in Veneto called Passariano di Codroipo, has a lot to do with the idea of nature. Villa Manin was a contemporary art center built inside a nobleman’s estate from the 1700s, with an enormous, spectacular park containing very old trees. When they asked me to do something there, I decided to build a large enclosure, whose perimeter would form, on the lawn, the historic coat-of-arms of the Manin family—a geometric result that only the swallows can see, though, because you can recognize the form only from the air. A space cut out of nature, off limits to human beings—the work is entitled *As if nature had left out men*. While the park is perfectly groomed by four gardeners, inside the enclosure nature can grow wild.

HUO I’d like to conclude this interview with a question regarding another possible chapter of your *catalogue raisonné*: drawing. I am thinking above all of the series of works *Samples* (2008). Do you draw on an everyday basis? What is the role of drawing in your work?

AG Drawing is very important for me, drawing and painting. For the exhibition at the PAC, I would like to bring a big painting, and some drawings. *Samples* is a work that is composed of drawings—but I could also call them paintings—which began for an exhibition at the gallery of Massimo Minini,

in Brescia, in January 2008. “Alberto, I would like to do a show of yours,” Minini said, “but enough of these projects in the city! I want you to make paintings, because I have to sell them.” I made paintings that speak of the city, of places. *Samples* is a family of monochrome paintings, whose surfaces bear a thin black line that almost dances on the canvas to make a calligraphic form. The length of the line is equal to a relationship and a distance, explained in the titles: **I walked from Fondazione Sandretto for 1221 meters, until I reached the UBI bank; or I walked for 1556 meters to reach the Assumption of the Virgin by Titian**. Using a pedometer, I measured the distance between two places, and based on this I then made an abstract drawing on a colored background. Though the drawing does not represent the route in any way, the path is somehow contained in the abstract composition. Each of the distances indicated represents the physical space that separates the patrons of the various works, the institutions that purchased them, the nerve centers of the city, for political or economic reasons. To respond to the dealer’s request to make works to sell, I made a work on the very idea of selling, disguised as a painting, with its own calligraphy. In this sense, I like to connect *Samples* to the pure idea of selling and trade. I am interested in bringing out the role of money as a tool of negotiation: the exchange of goods, thoughts and cultures has nourished complex cities like Venice for centuries. What else is a gallery, in the end? A cog in that composite machinery that is the city. *Samples* appears to be a very simple, calligraphic, aesthetic work, with gentle forms, nothing more than a “collection of samples,” as the title says, precisely in the mercantile sense of the term: anyone who would like to purchase one of these works need only selected the background color—pink, blue, beige—and decide with me on the distance to be measured—from my studio to his house, from the entrance of the foundation to that of my house, and so on. The work is made exactly as ordered by the client, representing this encoun-

ter through the distance that separates us and, at the same time, now connects us. As if it were a portrait or a view. In short, it is an ancient story, artists have made portraits and views for centuries...

Locarno  
7<sup>th</sup> August 2012

HUO  
Hans Ulrich Obrist  
AG  
Alberto Garutti

- HUO Your retrospective at the PAC will take place parallel to the exhibition of artists who have taken your courses. What is your degree of involvement in that project?
- AG I am very much involved in the show, though it might not be very evident. I wanted to keep a certain distance from the project: it seemed like the most natural way to behave. So together with Paola Nicolin, we decided to ask Luca Cerizza to be its curator. Over the months, I have perceived a certain enthusiasm on the part of many of the artists invited to participate. Roberto Cuoghi, for example, an artist I really love, is making a special work about me for the occasion.
- HUO A portrait?
- AG Yes, he has already done a casting of my face. It is supposed to be a secret, until the opening, but I want to tell you: Cuoghi will make my death mask. I thought that was moving.
- HUO Is it a work that belongs to the series of mutant portraits, like the one he made of Dakis Joannou? (*Megas Dakis*, 2007, ed.)
- AG No, this is a casting of my face and my hand. Simone Berti will also do something about me. So, as you can imagine, my involvement in the show is clear, but the position I have chosen to assume is lateral. I think that is a position of greater force.
- HUO The opposite of putting yourself at the center, as Deleuze would say, in the middle of things but in the center of nothing...
- AG Exactly, it is a position I have always decided to take, not just regarding my own work, the teaching, but with respect to systems in general. So also for this reason I have chosen to simply stay there and observe this exhibition, in order not to pose any limits to the possibility for all the artists—especially the younger ones—to be the protagonists of the work, and with the aim of not undermining their work in any way. Paradoxically, it is only by maintaining this lateral position, I believe, that it is possible to make things work and to produce a certain type of radicality.
- HUO Most of the interesting young Italian artists have been your students. On this occasion, for the first time, we have the list. Something like when Michael Craig Martin did the exhibition with all his students from Goldsmiths in London...
- AG This is the first time I have had a chance to add up the number of my students who have later become respected artists: there are 69 of them. Then we can add the new generation, those taking the courses right now. Strange, isn't it? Everyone thinks Garutti has been pulling all kinds of strings to get his students into the art circuit, while what I do is the exact opposite.
- HUO What is your teaching method? It's probably a question of alchemy. Like when they asked Stanley Kubrick how he had managed to make his films...
- AG First of all, it has to do with the lateral position we were talking about. The question, though, as we have already said in the past, is another one, I think. I believe that art cannot be taught. The true problem is to manage to understand how the sensibility of a person who takes a course and tries to learn something from another person works. For me, the initial approach with the students is very important. The first year is fundamental, because in the end I simply work on removing the dross. It is very difficult, at times painful, but it needs to be done.
- HUO So it is not a matter of adding, but of subtracting.
- AG My objective was—and still is—to reach level zero. Many young people reach the Academy or the University burdened with cultural sediment that, in my view, is an impediment to interpretation of the problem of the contemporary condition: we might say

that they are at a level of “thirty below” with respect to the level required to work on art. My job is to bring them to “ten below,” then “three below,” “two below,” “zero.” When you have reached zero, then maybe you can get into positive territory. So the whole problem is to remove the encrustations created by Italian scholastic culture.

HUO So you have to undo the damage caused by previous education. How is it possible to do that?

AG First of all I talk a lot with the students, with each of them. When I discuss things with a young person, after a while I think I can understand if he or she has the potential to become a good artist or not; it is something I can immediately sense. I can grasp, in an informal conversation, passages that have to do with the work. The personal relationship with each of them is very important, because the real problem is not to teach how to make a work of art, but to establish a sort of empathy, a shared sensibility. The real problem is to meet on the common ground of the work, also activating a critical capacity regarding institutions and the figure of the professor. I can say that I am also critical with the students, in the sense that I am never interested in the work of a diligent drudge who brings me a correct piece of “homework,” with an eye on getting good grades. What I truly want is simply to be able to meet the student on the common ground of the work. To be able to create an atmosphere in the course, so that anyone who enters the Academy does it to rethink his experience up to that moment, to “bring the world into the world,” as Alighiero put it.

HUO Creating an atmosphere also means creating a situation that triggers relations among the students...

AG Yes, it means not only relationships between students, but also reflection on their life, the things they like, their story, the reasons they are there... I talk a lot with them, about everything, but never in private, always in a public way.

HUO In front of the other students?

AG Yes, always in a group. It is a very useful way of understanding how I can penetrate into certain mechanisms. At the Academy I use the same procedures I have used to make my public works. When I am asked to intervene in public space, before making the work I visit the place different times, I meet the local residents, and I know this may seem invasive and irritating. With the students I use the same procedure. Always starting with a straightforward, frontal relationship, based on maximum honesty. The students understand perfectly that if they can establish a good relationship on a personal level, they will never be subjected to the judgment of the “professor.” To create an atmosphere means working so that the course self-generates, then, and every student can bring a vision, a sensibility, and thus contribute with their complexity to the construction of the course as an organism.

HUO So the situation of “creating the conditions” is similar to what Cedric Price says about urban planning, when he says that those who design cities should not create a top-down master plan, but the conditions that make self-organization possible. Did you learn this over time, or did you have a revelation, or a mentor?

AG Probably I have just done what I wished my teachers would do with me, when I was a student. My father, who was a professor of Latin and Greek, always repeated this phrase: “first duty, then pleasure.” While I tell the students: “first pleasure, then pleasure,” because if it is not fun to work in the Academy and to work on art, good results cannot be achieved.

HUO This is another rule: “first pleasure, then pleasure.” Excellent. Is this a teaching you wanted to formulate to then transmit to others?

AG Yes, to give it to others, but in terms of what I might say is an almost amorous impulse. As in a love story, it is not an impulse of ego, it is just as egotistic as

it is altruistic. It is a game of exchange. Otherwise what good would it be to be an artist or to make an artwork, were it not an experience aimed at knowing and exploring a new worldview?

HUO I have always had mentors, great artists and curators from whom I have learned. Jean Rouch, the film-maker, for example, taught me that one thing that can be transmitted is courage, the idea that we need immense courage. What do you think?

AG I think that among the generating actions, the motors of the world, there is a perhaps even stronger force, namely the impulse of love. Behind this type of “motor” there is a mechanism that escapes us, which is that of the conservation of the species. Before courage, I think about the loving impulse as part of our genetic and evolutionary course. Actually, I truly think art has to do with biology: I like to imagine that it is part of this type of biological process.

HUO The transmission is not just genetic but, as Richard Dawkins says, it is also memetic: the transmission of ideas, of memes.

AG Another crucial point lies precisely in critical awareness. “What is the thought of the work?” I always ask each student. In this sense, when I told you about the self-generation of the course, and when you asked me about the hidden secret of my teaching, I told you that the dialogue is so intense and authentic that all those who take part in our encounters have to take responsibility for their role and, therefore, also for the course. Taking responsibility, without compromises; the process is also very tough, and for this reason many try to escape.

Just the other day, Roberto Cuoghi told me why he signed up for my course. He said that in the courtyard of the Brera Academy he had seen a nun walking, wearing a very beautiful blue habit with red trim, and he followed her. After a few minutes he entered my classroom, and he saw this nun at the center of the room, and I was talking precisely

about that garment. This sister was important for a thousand reasons: for her dress, for the way she occupied space, for the way the draped material moved, the type of fabric, the workmanship, because there were two sheets of cloth that concealed a body... and then, because at the school from which I had been expelled, the nuns wore precisely this type of habit.

HUO I met Cuoghi for the first time more than 10 years ago in Milan, when he was wearing his father’s clothing.

AG His father was ill, and then he passed away, and Roberto wanted to take on the physical form of his father. Here too there is a strange similarity, because one of my very first works was one in which my father was the indirect protagonist. I had asked him to put on all my clothes—jacket, trousers, raincoat—but backwards. I then asked him to put his hands in his pockets, therefore in back of him, and I took his picture. This black and white photo dates back to the 1970s, it is quite disturbing because you see a person whose face is made of hair, an almost Magritte-like figure, surreal, a bit strange.

HUO This could also be an anchor point for the exhibition. The photo of your father would have been a good start...

AG There are also other works that somehow relate to that one. For example, a small series of photographs I had completely forgotten, also dating back to 1975, which was what led up to the first exhibition at Massimo Minini, then Galleria Banco. That same sequence of images is also connected with a work I made much later in Milan, in 2011, at Hangar Bicocca. The work is composed of five black and white photographs, in which there is a sheet of paper I had hung on the wall, which moves...

HUO Papers fly...

AG Yes, this object becomes the protagonist, it has a life of its own. And I found myself, thirty years later, watching it descend from the ceiling of the Hangar.

HUO I am very interested in this idea that everything, in the end, is already contained in the first work.

AG Everything is already there in the work *Horizon*, too, the black and white crystals I made starting in 1984, of different sizes and forms, which I showed in my room at the Venice Biennial in 1990. Speaking of “horizons,” I don’t remember who told me, quite recently, that very few artists live by the sea. I answered instinctively that maybe this type of explanation would make sense: that the sea is such a powerful, enigmatic place—it spreads out an indefinite, unreachable line before us—that seeing it every day, for an artist, might be unbearable.

HUO Many works exist connected with the idea of an unreachable horizon, by artists like Caspar David Friedrich or Gerhard Richter, though they did not live by the sea...

AG ...their gazes look out on the grand enigmas of landscapes and distances. It interests me to think about the idea of a horizon that expands, and is enriched as it expands. The further up you go, the more the problems get complex.

HUO Like Segantini who wanted to see his mountains, set off from Milan to go to Engadin, higher and higher

AG The idea of the gaze contains the experience of a spatial dimension that extends along a horizon and, likewise, the horizon line can be metaphorically juxtaposed with the very concept of “existence.” You mentioned Caspar David Friedrich and Gerhard Richter, two of my great passions. All this reminds me of something about you: I met you indirectly many years ago, when I was in Sils Maria (1992, ed.), where I had gone to see a little exhibition in the house of Nietzsche, and I bought a little book signed by Richter.

HUO That was my second exhibition, as a student, after the one I did in my kitchen. But let’s get back to your exhibition, since I have a lot of questions

about it, especially regarding the eternal paradox of the retrospective: I was struck when you said that in a few minutes you manage to realize if you are looking at an artist, or not. Is it totally a matter of intuition?

AG I think so, it is like falling in love. I am very open to others, and this helps me, perhaps because through them I want to understand the things I do not know about myself. When I am faced by a young person—timid, like any student who enters a classroom for the first time at the Academy and has to talk with a professor—I would feel really terrible if I thought, even for an instant, that I was behaving the way my professors used to behave with me. The student sees me as an important point of reference, and it is a little drama, because obviously I can never really be that. When students seek me out, and rely on me, I shift all my attention towards them. Often it is a totally absorbing process: I am extremely interested in them, so much so that in certain situations I am not able to perceive the tragic sense of such a strong bond. At a certain point the time comes to be on your way, the time of death. I was talking about this the other day with Roberto, in the studio, and I told him: “Well, with this death mask I’m getting a head start!” The end of everything is a gorgeous problem, one I hadn’t ever thought about until a certain age, and it definitely has to do with the relationship with young people. This is why it is a fantastic, but also tragic, relationship.

HUO Many artists who teach told me it made them aware that great artists are rare.

AG I think the opposite is closer to the truth. All human beings start out with an excellent chance to become who knows what, maybe even the president of the United States, but along the way that chance is often altered by the environment in which they live, by the people they meet... My work, in this sense, is also very political, it attempts to prompt critical reflection on the educational institution. Every time you use

- the word “teaching” I feel a certain discomfort, because I don’t want to be a professor in the usual sense of the term. Everything I do inside the University and the Academy is entirely part of my work as an artist.
- HUO This is interesting, because it brings us to Beuys. Beuys talked about teaching as a part of his social sculpture.
- AG Of course, but in the case of Beuys this statement has to be inevitably positioned in a precise ideological-political context, while in my case it does not start there, it becomes that later. My approach, to use a rather generic term, is “artistic.” I mean that the question is about how “to poetically live your life.” How can we not experience, every day, an elementary pain that accompanies us in life and therefore crosses an infinity of fields, from politics to ecology, education to architecture? Well, that pain, in my view, has to do with the sense of the artistic I was talking about. It is something that is a part of our very existence: the awareness that everything eludes us, of “loss” as a condition that is so unavoidable as to generate, by reaction, an ethical idea of reconstruction. This is why I talk about biology. Of actions and transformations that are set in motion precisely as natural forms of survival. You and I, perhaps, would not be here were we not motivated by an ethical idea of reconstruction.
- HUO Your practice very often goes beyond the object. How is it possible to do a retrospective of your practice? Marcel Duchamp said we recall only the exhibitions that also invent an exhibit design. The exhibit design is the instrument that enters the memory. I would like to ask you to tell me a bit about this idea of retrospective, and if you already have an idea about the exhibit design in the space.
- AG There will be a very new work that occupies the entire exhibition space, a work that might be a little bit jarring for the audience.
- HUO What does that mean?
- AG They might not like it. Viewers will have to sign a release, to accept a situation I will impose on them. I will show some of my earlier works that may not be familiar to many people, and then of course a whole block of works that have been important for me over the last twenty years. They are often public works, so of course there is the risk of falling into a documentary form when you bring them into a museum, which I detest.
- HUO Architecture has the same problem. There is nothing more boring than architecture exhibitions showing only models.
- AG The work *To Those Born Today*, which I have done in many public squares, starting in Bergamo and then in Ghent and Istanbul, and which I will bring to the PAC, is one example. To avoid an approach of documentation, when Fondazione Pistoletto asked me to take the work to Biella I went to the hospital in Bergamo, to the maternity ward, and talked with the director of the hospital, who was very courteous and interested. I got them to give me the addresses of all the families that had had a child when I first installed the work. Then I went to see them, I photographed each family with the child, by now quite grown up. Each in his or her home. In this way I produced a work composed of fifteen photographs, a cutaway of the city and the society, in this case of Bergamo. There is the home of the clerk, the home of a wealthy woman, of an immigrant from outside Europe... as a whole, a little overview of the society. Then, in every photo, there is my jacket, which nobody sees, but if I tell you about it you can find it: in one case it is left on the sofa, in another on a chair, in yet another it is hanging from a coat rack. A bit as if I wanted to stay there with them. The *To Those Born Today* is thus presented not through documentation, but through what the public work has produced: its artistic quality has produced another reality.

- HUO This is interesting because it creates a photographic link with the works at the start of the itinerary. So you want to put a few works from the start of your career, and perhaps these, in particular, are epiphanies, otherwise you wouldn't put them there...
- AG Yes, of course. But there will also be other works from that period: the *Ricami*. I didn't want to sacrifice those, or the wood pieces with holes, or the large striped oil paintings I showed in 1990 at the Villa dei Giardini in Modena. Villa dei Giardini is an 18th-century work of architecture, surrounded by a park. I was invited by Flaminio Gualdoni, then the director of that exhibition space, and I decided to place a table of my design in the first octagonal room. The table is the place of encounter, conversation, socializing, and it is also a bit animal-like (I once designed a table under which to sleep). Then there was a large work made in black and white chip composite and cement: a floor, 6 x 4 meters. Alighiero Boetti liked it a lot, he walked there with his red socks; somebody must have the photos. I also have some works by Alighiero, including one with a dedication to "Garutti's son," because Francesco (Garutti, ed.) had just been born and Alighiero couldn't remember his name... Then, on one wall, there was an embroidery on beige silk, a black embroidery, with the measurements of my house. In the second room, a wall with a large painting with white and blue stripes, painted with oils, on the right; and then, in the back to the left, a large piece of wood with veneers. Turning back, after having crossed the large hall with the table at the center, on the axis of symmetry of the villa, one entered the other wing of the building and encountered a large black and white floor, of the same size and position as the first one. Then came an embroidery, just like the first one, in the same position; in the next room, a large painting with white and blue stripes, in the same position as its counterpart. In short, at the end of the visit, it was clear that the backbone of the whole project was precisely the architecture: I had made a symmetrical exhibition inside a symmetrical architecture. The works in the left wing of the building were equal to those in the right wing. The exhibition was specular.
- HUO Like twins.
- AG Yes, like twins! Once they asked me to design a house for two entrepreneurs from Verona, who were twins, and I thought about a house entirely based on a mirror image.
- HUO This exhibition is not very well known.
- AG You are right, there were only about twenty people, and I never published anything, but I have the documentation, though unfortunately it isn't very good.
- HUO All this will go into the book, created to go with the exhibition. I think the book should have 1,000 pages.
- AG It is important to have a book in which all the stratification is evident. Since there are all the photographic works on architectural space of the 1970s...
- HUO So at the start the link with architecture is photographic.
- AG Architecture is the great mother. The visual arts would never have happened without architecture. When I think of painters, I imagine them inside rooms, inside houses and palaces. Even perspective, if you think about it, was born in a territory, Europe, and Italy, in a particular way, where architecture has a defensive conception, the city has a defensive conception. So from a spatial dimension of this time, people thought it would be fantastic to ask painting to knock down the walls, to make the space complex.
- HUO Where painting is born, as Werner Herzog shows us in his very beautiful film (*Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, 2010, ed.).
- AG ...you say a thousand pages... and to think that I have never wanted to make a book! Maybe because I have never

found the people with whom to have a dialogue. Maybe my relationship with the students comes from this, I feel good with them. I don't feel like a teacher, I feel like a student.

HUO But there are many possible ways to make a monographic book. Boetti called me in 1990 because he wanted to make a book, for which he asked all his friends to choose their favorite work by him. I wrote about *Mille Fiumi*. It would be nice to ask fifty of your friends to write about one work.

AG Great... that is so in tune with my way of thinking about the work.

HUO Two books could be made: one of the opening, layered—and in chapters—and one at the end.

AG That would be fantastic.

HUO We could take up Boetti's very generous attitude: that way you will never have the expert who writes the book and monopolizes the thought of the artist. Though I respect that approach, I don't think it would make sense for your work.

AG I would be pleased. And the idea of calling on people to write a text about my work is very connected to my practice, as in the work *Horizon*.

HUO Tell me about this new work.

AG There will be old works and there will be the public works, but there is one work that holds them all together. Anyone who enters the space will have to sign a release and declare that they are willing to accept one precise condition: in the PAC there will be 28 microphones hanging from the ceiling, which will record everything that happens during the show. I want to then make a small publication that contains this self-generated script. The spectator will lie, make comments, even say foolish things. They will certainly no longer be free to be just any viewer. They will have to take responsibility for their role. I am not talking only about the visitors who are

used to seeing art, but also about the casual visitors, on weekends, with their kids, who come to the museum: they too will have to assume this responsibility. So I imagine that there will be many people who will leave the museum, to be able to comment as they please!

HUO In this way you also produce an enormous archive.

AG Yes, definitely. The real protagonist of the work is the viewer. In my public work, for example, the captions are a fundamental device to explain meaning, because I want people to understand the operation I set in motion. The caption fully embodies my methodological approach: the artist comes down of the pedestal to put himself at the service of the viewer, who is the true protagonist. In the museum just the opposite happens.

I believe that visitors, when they enter the museum, have to take responsibility for their gaze. This is why I made the phosphorescent furniture that makes up the work *What happens in rooms when the people have left?* (2001) and glows only when the museum is closed. It is hard to recognize that furniture as artwork, but I was interested precisely in that difficulty. I wanted the viewer to make an effort, to try to find the work. At the PAC the spectator is under microphone surveillance. I hope the microphone work changes the sense of the exhibition: it is a classic retrospective that will be transformed into something else by this work.

HUO It has a dual code. I also like the idea that artists never know what viewers say about their exhibitions.

AG Yes, and I don't want the recording devices to be hidden—that is unpleasant—I want the system to be stated, and I know that many viewers will then tell lies. Some may forget about the presence of the microphones and speak the truth. Others might play with the situation...

HUO ...some will do a performance, knowing the mikes are there...

- AG So you can understand that the whole meaning of the exhibition changes.
- HUO Will the microphones be like Duchamp's coal bags in the Surrealist exhibition of 1938. How will the mikes be installed? Will there be playback in real time via Internet?
- AG No, absolutely not, I want everything to be silently gathered.
- HUO The idea that the exhibition is a cutaway of a conversation is also very nice. People talk in homes, usually in the museum they feel a bit intimidated, so they talk less.
- AG Indeed, it is about the responsibility of the viewer, who has to decide whether to talk or not. It is a complex problem.
- HUO ...Adorno also talked about it.
- AG There was this problem in the phosphorescent furniture work too: on the one hand, there is the easiest way to approach the work, the emotional route (if there is a poetic idea in that work, it is that of imagining houses when the people are not there, imagining furnishings that when people are absent and the house is empty, see the light of the day and the night, hear the noises, the insects, the beep of the answering machine); on the other, there is the problematic issue of the responsibility of the spectator. It is like saying: "Dear viewer, while in the city I provide a caption and come towards you, in the museum you have to take responsibility for your role and seek the work. The work is there."
- HUO Duchamp says the viewer does 50%, here the viewer does more.
- AG Duchamp takes an object, puts it in a museum and the object becomes an artwork. In an increasingly ubiquitous society like the one we live in, everything is public, and it is as if the museum had become more liquid. If you take the museum away from the artwork, the bottle rack goes back to being a bottle rack, it loses its artwork aura. To make the work keep its aura, its status as art, we as viewers—the artist is the first viewer—have to make ourselves into "little walking museums," that is, we have to look at things and charge them with an artistic gaze, with "artness." This is the shift I was talking about before, which transforms the problem from art into "living life in an artistic way." Today all this is speeded up even more by the media and the question, if possible, is even more crucial.
- HUO As Picabia said, the museum risks to be a cemetery, while here, through these voices and microphones, the retrospective is present, we are not in the past.
- AG The presence of the microphones will produce an interesting interaction with the documentation in the show of certain public works. Anything said about the work and recorded will update even the most dated operations, bringing them into the present.
- HUO This has the potential to be not a book of one thousand, but even ten thousand pages! It would be the longest piece of theater of the absurd in the history of theater, because it would be a sort of theater of life. All these transcribed monologues, dialogues, trialogues, polyphonies, may also might want to send a message... this too is possible... like stepping out onto the balcony, each person can have his say...
- AG It will happen. As you said, the work almost invites the viewer to stand on a little stage, to talk. The work is this.
- HUO Will there be other new works in the exhibition?
- AG There will be a very new work in the show, which is very important to me: a stack of sheets of colored paper with all the captions of my public works.
- HUO The viewer then can go to the various places, and see the works.
- AG Exactly, it is a walk in the landscape. The caption, for me, has been so important that I have made a work about it.

- HUO There is the idea of a cartography of the work, a map...
- AG Actually the PAC project was conceived to be a map that inside an institutional space like the one designed by Ignazio Gardella organizes old and new works, through a system of references, connections and codes it is up to the spectator to grasp. The itinerary is paced by sculptural works, like the ceramic *Madonna* (2007), a giant poster printed for the Istanbul Biennial in 2001, the benches made for Fondazione Zegna, and also projects that were never realized, seen here as fragments of interrupted narrations. This is the case, for example, of the enclosure designed for the garden of Fondazione Sandretto in Turin. It was commissioned by Francesco Bonami and Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in 2004-2005. The enclosure was supposed to follow the edge of the garden, which belongs to the city; it was never made because the city was about to host the Olympic Games and the city government was deeply in debt. The project for the aluminium enclosure features metal disks of different colors and diameters: each piece harbors a secret, a message in code, found during my many visits to the working class neighborhood where the foundation has its facility. I was looking for evidence, secrets, stories of the difficulties experienced by those who lived and worked in those zones, in a constant condition of segregation, exclusion. The fence would have contained the codes of many conversations with the workers of Fergat, who had worked in the factory that was demolished years ago, where Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo now stands. This, on the other hand, is a large painting done in 1990, the only one I cannot explain. (On a computer screen, he indicates a large canvas with white and blue stripes). I think this is an enigma in the show, a sort of acceleration of the horizon. I don't know, but looking at it is like being blinded by something, like when you stare at the sun.
- HUO I am very happy that we are finally in the same place, here in Locarno, after so many travels...
- AG That reminds me of the work *Every step I have taken in my life has led me here, now* (2010).
- HUO Which, again, is linked to the theme of the retrospective.
- AG Yes. This is the last public work I made; it should have been scattered everywhere. The more it is spread out, the better it works. Exactly the opposite of what usually happens in the art system, where the unique piece is worth more. This work, though small, contains the voyages of all the people who read it and want to think about it. Because the message does not address the audience, it addresses the reader. It says: all the steps "I" have taken.
- HUO This is somehow linked to what Lawrence Weiner says, namely that in art we don't care about generations. All the steps have brought you into this present, in which we take part.
- AG It is precisely the idea of the present, another recurring theme in my works: when a light turns on, a child is born, a lightning bolt strikes... And that work at Villa dei Giardini in Modena...
- HUO ...could be done again, in an identical way. And photographed. In parallel with the exhibition in Milan, or after it...
- AG It would be fantastic. After all, the exhibition also contains the series of the *Skeins*, cardboard tubes around which a very slender nylon thread is wrapped, whose length corresponds to the distance between my house and the door of the S.M.A.K., the houses of the collectors who commissioned the work, and so on. These works are the mother and father of the work of the drawn line.
- HUO They are also linked with cartography. The red thread! Everything is around the captions, the public work, the cartography of threads, the voices: it is a multiple cartography, many dimensions of cartography. The exhibition will be very amazing...