

INSTITUTION  
 Francesco  
 Manacorda

Dear Alberto,

Liverpool,  
 29 September 2012

Thank you for the stimulus to write about the institution. It is always hard for me to resist the temptation to rethink how social and organizational architectures influence our way of thinking and feeling. The last time we met I was working with one of your students, Lara Favaretto, on *Simple Rational Approximations*, a hypothesis for a museum of the future imagined by an artist in relation to her interests, idiosyncrasies and passions. On that occasion Lara was able to construct a convincing visualization of the double oxymoron “prototype for a temporary institution”. Indeed, because permanence and ossification are precisely the biggest dangers for the functioning of institutions, whether they are conceived as organizations (like schools, hospitals and ministries) or as encoded behavior sets (like sports, marriage, law).

We don't need Alberoni to remind us that every time an idea is organized and structured, its crystallization tends to reduce the intrinsic component of risk, suffocating the dynamism and elasticity of the event. Instead of Alberoni's dichotomy between movement and institution, I have always been more interested in the less well known opposition between revolt and revolution, analyzed by Furio Jesi in relation to *Le Bateau ivre* of Rimbaud. For Jesi, the revolt is an event that suspends the historical flow—almost a metaphysical epiphany, whereas the revolution takes place to achieve a vision, through a precise strategy that takes the form of tactical planning. I think it is truly singular that the three key words of this definition—vision, strategy, tactics—form the operative skeleton of modern commercial (companies), cultural (universities, museums, foundations) or political (parties, states or NGOs) institutions. Of course, you will say, all this has to do with the collective exercise of a social group that tries to determine and regulate its coherent—and at times equitable—functioning.

Clearly my interest in this subject is connected to the museum institution due to my present job, but also because the museum somehow represents an exemplary institution: on the one hand, it is born as a three-dimensional encyclopedia to narrate universal history (behind this tendency we can glimpse Hegel and his interpretation of Enlightenment as-

pirations); on the other, infected by the auto-reflective virus of contemporary art, the museum today is a place capable of questioning its function as an integral part of its program, even during its normal activity. The museum has been a public institution since its conception; nevertheless, over the last five years the borderline between public and private has been remarkably shaken, leading to a radical redefinition of the parameters of such a territorial demarcation. Not only do private foundations exist that take the place of the public institution in the field of contemporary art; with perhaps even more radical consequences, public governance no longer necessarily implies State financing as the main source of support. This revolution can also be seen through an inverted equation: just as in England less than half the funding of museum institutions comes from public coffers (the figure is even lower in the U.S.), banks like the Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds, though they are private institutions, belong to the public, from a financial standpoint... As a result of this new model of public institution, their definition shifts from institutions of public ownership to institutions of public interest.

I believe this fact should be carefully interpreted, examining its long-term implications. The biggest concern, obviously, has to do with the lack of recognition on the part of the State of the priority of cultural investment. But the potential of this changes lies in the redefinition of the idea of public that from the State (which is only an instrument of the public) shifts towards the public of users: the community of individuals that establishes a two-way dialogue with the museum, for example. This movement implies the dangerous transfer of cultural responsibility to the community, a harbinger of a policy of reductions and erosion of the social State (in what the Tories in Great Britain call “Big Society”), but it has the potential to put at the center of contemporary art institutions not their self-referential world, but the world as a whole. The time has truly come for art to come to grips with the public that rejects it, instead of concentrating on already converted viewers. This reasoning brings to mind your project for the *Little Museion* in Bolzano, where you managed to overturn the concept of public art through the “publication” of art, rather than simply making reference to the public place as a display

context for a new work conceived to exist “outside the walls” of the museum. I would have liked to see that very much, but unfortunately I was not in Italy at the time... Do you know if the inhabitants of the Don Bosco neighborhood, later, ever went to the big Museion, and if they enjoyed it?

I don’t think I told you about this when we last met, but for some time now I have been working on the idea that the museum can be rethought as a public intellectual (actually I owe this phrase to Ann Demeester, director of the de Appel Museum in Amsterdam). This is a metaphor connected with a function that, from the 1970s on—to be precise, since the death of Pier Paolo Pasolini—has been vanishing in Italy (with the exception of Roberto Saviano, but on this subject I think I’ll have to write you another letter). The so-called public intellectual speaks from the podium of an intersubjectively recognized moral authority, embodying in a way the figure of the preacher, but in a secular field. In this sense the role transmits knowledge, reflections and opinions to those who do not have them. Lately, I am trying to understand if it is possible to apply the powerful example illustrated by Jacques Rancière in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* to the metaphor of the museum as public intellectual.

In the book, the French philosopher proposes the example of a teacher who asserted the absolute equality of all intelligences, not as the result of a pedagogical process, but as an initial postulate. The most radical consequence of all this is that the schoolmaster puts himself in the position of ignorance, activating a negotiation with the student for the production of knowledge. The result of this pedagogical approach does not rely on the importance of transmitting knowledge and verifying that it has been attained, but on checking to see that the questions that permit acquisition of knowledge get asked. Imagine being in a museum that asks its public to try to understand, together, why *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* by Man Ray is a disconcerting work. Out of the metaphor, it is as if the museum institution were defining itself as the pedagogical institution par excellence: a vehicle of learning in which, during its functioning, both the vehicle and the passenger learn together. Here, then, we are reminded of the preference of Edward Said for amateurs, as opposed to public intellectuals, due to their openness and readiness for

disciplinary trespass: would it be possible to conceive of a museum as a public amateur? What would be the consequences of this metaphor?

The first significant transition is connected to the passage from the machine to the brain as the depiction of the institution; the second has to do with the level of risk—as mentioned above—the amateur is willing to accept: the amateur does not have a methodological certainty, or one of content, to communicate, but instead an attitude of curiosity, open to learning right on the battlefield. I have always admired your series of drawings, *Samples*, precisely in relation to the representation, almost in the form of choreographic notation, of a series of behaviors that have produced a work. What fascinates me is the reading of the drawings like seismographs of earlier mechanisms of production and negotiation, but correlated with the production of meaning. I wonder if such a procedure of inscription can be used to measure the amateur behavioral modes of the institution: a map of physical, economic and dialogical movements that lead to the artistic programming. You may think it is a stupid idea, but what seems important to me is how hard it is to represent, using only natural language, the institution’s degree of openness to shared learning.

Of course all these stimuli for thought lead to a question I would like to explore with you, the next time we meet: will a museum institution ever exist that is capable of changing in relation to social, economic and political conditions, as an organism adapts to its environment in a continuous flow of becoming? My proposal, which may be even harder to conceive of, is to think that in order to position the museum institution in the future, those who run it should learn not only from the public, but also from artists. You are the ones who know how to rethink things from parallel universes, and the chance to incorporate this openness in the openness of institutional mechanisms is granted—through proximity and familiarity—only to museums... As a well-known Don Juan once said, every missed chance is lost forever.

I hope to see you soon, to continue this dialogue.

With great admiration and affection,

FRANCESCO MANACORDA

METHOD  
Angela Vettese

1. This text is the result of conversations over the years with the artist, until the start of October 2012. The terms in quotation marks are those Alberto Garutti uses repeatedly to narrate and describe his work. The phrases in quotation marks, unless otherwise specified, come from descriptions and quotations found in the artist's archive.

In his production conceived (not exclusively, but mostly) for outdoor space, Alberto Garutti underlines the aspects of the work as a procedure that includes the audience from the start: bringing to work to its completion, the artist listens to the stories of the place, making his own personal response to the theme of the site-specific or, to use a term less closely linked to the 1980s, *context-specific* work. While the final result of the work may not be particularly visible, it is always designed to make the history and identity of a human context resonate, vibrating like a tuning fork. The work is always conceived as an “encounter”<sup>1</sup>, based on a recurring method: the artist starts with a patron/client, uses the limits posed not as obstacles but as opportunities, triggers relationships with a community that is also the first prompter of the work, proceeds to find a solution that responds to the set of gathered narrations, and finishes by making a visible object that may be a restored place, a sculpture, an object or just a caption in the form of a plaque or printed matter. From here the path starts over again, and the work is converted and completed through the thoughts and discussions it generates. Word of mouth and the birth of a new little collective legend represent the ultimate result for those who live beside the work, perceiving it without necessarily having any familiarity with contemporary art, and for sector specialists: the mechanism addresses the art world as well, to which the work returns as a constant translation, in contemporary terms, of the traditional canon. All this explains the intentional lack of a unified stylistic character. The time gap from commission to completion can even last for years, a fact that underscores the way the method implies sedimentation and a continuous alternation of options, opinions and moments of implementation. The latter are subject to great care, in an attempt to make the result as precise and incisive as possible. The final appearance has to be able to conduct the stories to History, from the physical place to the place of a thought, from private life to its status as a foundation of politics. Garutti uses preliminary contacts with local people as the “picklock” to renew his artistic method. He does it by starting with the existential passages we all cross, that make verbal communication engaging and fluid: many people are stimulated by stories of fall-

ing in love, the birth of a child, fun, shared activities like singing or dancing, but also solitary activities, like seeking an expression of spirituality and, in general, by the thought of our life and the general meaning of existence.

Keeping a distance from any autobiographical tendencies, the artist works by reconstructing that objective weave that is formed when the threads are subjective elements: desires, events, encounters, places of memory.

It is worth recalling, at this point, certain aspects of Garutti's background: the contiguity with classical and literary culture, also absorbed in his family from a father who taught classical letters; the tendency towards human relations, as proven by his many years of teaching; the ease of approach to the project, acquired in his architectural studies: it is no coincidence that his work group is composed of young architects who help him to plan the work as if they were organizing the various phases of a construction.

From the first factor, he may have gained a conception of the universal repetitive nature of behaviors. Greek culture, in particular, focused so closely on such behaviors as to transform them into myths. We can see this reflected in the artist's tendency to transfigure specific cases, depriving them of contingent features and thus shifting them from the here and now to a more timeless condition. This same procedure was implemented by Italian Neo-Realist cinema: the plot takes form and meaning in a community of the few, but manages to become interesting only if it is shifted into a realm of experience shared by many. The same is true of the procedures used by Pop Art, namely the description of contemporary mythology through the stars and models created by the media. What Garutti decisively avoids, with respect to the habitual Pop aesthetic, are the means of reproduction of the image and the creation of the celebrity through them. His particular use of technology centers on the new possibility, that arose in the 1990s, of interacting in a personal way with the world of information, thanks to the extension of electronic networks and connections. After the Gulf War, the media that convey popular culture exist in the web, and we no longer find passive users, but active ones instead. Garutti has learned to make use of this unprecedented mythopoiesis, which is poten-

tially capillary and far from the dictates of illustrated magazines and movie stars.

An embryo of the relationship with the audience as participative monuments generated by a new mythopoiesis can already be seen at the time of the exhibition “Colonia italiana” in 1979, and in an early solo show at the Diagramma gallery of Luciano Inga Pin. In a text connected with a series of images, Garutti talks about a contemplative dimension linked to the philosophy of Montaigne, and demonstrates a willingness to place himself in a “poetically moved” state.

All this takes on its first solidity in the series of the *Horizons*, begun in 1987. These works are panes of glass of different formats and sizes, painted on the back, half white, half black, slightly reflecting and therefore capable of showing the face of the observer in a very vague way. Each piece exists by virtue of the relationship with a patron/collector. The person is so important to the work that his or her name becomes the title of the corresponding pane. All the *Horizons* should one day be shown together, with the border between white and black at the same height, to form a single line. Combining the individual cases, a collective narrative would take form, though within formal terms reduced to a minimum. The artist says: “When I make a new horizon I always imagine that that straight line could leave my studio, enter the homes of collectors and join with the others, to constitute the ideal horizon of my life.” The community described by such a garland of paintings, though, would find a point of consistency only in the artist, the only binder between all the names/titles.

The first case in which the episodes of an existing community, independent of the artist, entered the work was the restructuring of a theater in Peccioli, near Pistoia. The artist tried to understand which places were important to the local community, and in particular to the senior citizens. The objective was to restore dignity to a place firmly imprinted in collective memory and, for this reason, the focus was at first on a school, with overtones of De Amicis and the 1900s. This operation failed due to bureaucratic difficulties. In the meantime, many inhabitants had told Garutti about an abandoned theater where, as young people, they had enjoyed moments of entertainment. The entire operation lasted from 1994 to 1997, terminating with the restoration of the façade of the

theater and the installation of a stone that reads **This work is dedicated to the young women and young men who fell in love in this little theater**<sup>2</sup>.

Making this work, the artist offered his capacity for observation, project planning and formal translation. The entire budget was devoted to an intervention that would not seem external, but instead “born from” and “useful to” a meaningful portion of the citizenry. In an interview about that work, Garutti explains his conception of work as encounter: “I understood that it was necessary to practice a ‘going towards’... And in the end, what is a work if not an encounter? ‘To go towards’ contains a political idea; and in this sense, my work is political, precisely because it sets out to establish a wave of relationships with the city.”<sup>3</sup>

At Peccioli, for the first time, we see the first expression of a way of working Garutti defines as “Machiavellian”: on the one hand, the work is addressed to the townspeople, on the other to the art system and the renewal of the very idea of the public work, in years in which these practices were spreading<sup>4</sup>. In this way, a simple renovation becomes a discourse in a civic key. In the words of the artist, “For me the priority was to make a work that would not be rejected by the townspeople, a work of minimum environmental impact, that would shift the linguistic level in order to avoid populist demagogy. All this meant, then as now, working on the method, and in a political way, rather than making a political work.” A similar procedure was applied years later, in the context of the 2000 edition of the program “Arte all’Arte”, when Garutti promoted the restoration of a place where many former young people of Colle di Val d’Elsa had gathered to sing, the Corale Vincenzo Bellini.

After these experiences, and almost without the contribution of environmental changes, except for the installation of some electrical and electronic connections, comes what is perhaps Garutti’s best known work, namely *To Those Born Today*<sup>5</sup>. The result of a competition held by the Builders’ Association of Bergamo for the reconfiguration of Piazza Dante in 1998, this work is a complex of operations that involve a particularly varied range of people. Every time a child is born at the Ospedali Riuniti, the father (if he is in the delivery room) or the obstetrician, or one of the physicians or paramedics, pushes

2. Curated by Antonella Soldaini.

3. In: Achille Bonito Oliva, “Alberto Garutti,” in *Enciclopedia della parola. Dialoghi d’artista. 1968-2008*, Skira Editore, Milan, 2008, pp. 396-405.

4. Consider the proliferation of events in Tuscany in the 1990s like the interventions at Castello di Volpaia curated by Luciano Pistoia, “Arte all’Arte,” “Dopopoesaggio,” “Tuscia Electa,” also created following in the footsteps of the “Skulptur Projekte Münster” (1977, 1987, 1997, 2007). From the mid-1990s, this type of work, different from that of American Land Art, because it is inserted in territories shaped by man, has been the subject of many reflections, including: Suzanne Lacy (ed.), *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Bay Press, 1995; Victor Burgin, *In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture*, University of California Press, 1996; Malcolm Miles, *Art, Space and the City: Public Art and Urban Futures*, Routledge, 1997.

5. The work is made to be installed in multiple places and circumstances. To date, it has been done at Piazza Dante, Bergamo, 1998-2000, as the winning project in an invitational competition organized by ACEB, curated by Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, Angela Vettese and Tullio Leggeri; at the exhibition “Over the Edges,” curated by Jan Hoet and Giacinto Di Pietrantonio, for the S.M.A.K. and at the Vrijdagmarkt square in Ghent; in Rome, on Via della Conciliazione, in the context of the celebrations for the Jubilee Year 2000; on the Bosphorus Bridge during the 8th Istanbul Biennial, “Egofugal: Fugue from Ego for the Next Emergence,” curated by Yuko Hasegawa, in 2001; in the exhibition “Initinere,” curated by Gabi Scardi, in 2003, at Piazza Diaz and Piazza Indipendenza in Casarano; on the Ponte Storico of Gallipoli; on the Patriarch Bridge, Moscow, for the exhibition “Impossible Community” curated by Viktor Misiano at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art, in 2011.

a button. The button activates a reaction of the streetlamps at the piazza, day or night, which looks like a breath: a gradual increase of energy that lights them, and then fades back to normal after about 30 seconds. The mechanism is explained by the caption which, at this point, becomes a necessary, indispensable activating mechanism. In this and other productions of the same series, a plaque reads **The streetlights of this place are connected to the maternity ward of the hospital... Every time the light slowly pulsates, it means a child has been born. The work is dedicated to that child, and to the children born today in this city.**

In effect, this work lends itself to rather mawkish interpretations, as well as being brandished as a banner by anti-abortion movements. The exchange of ethical views, after all, is part of the work, a side effect. In its apparent transport, in any case, this sort of *social sculpture*—to borrow a term from Joseph Beuys, though Garutti does not propose the same ethical certainties—does not actually take a position on the question of whether life is something to be celebrated or conserved at all costs. What we find out, when we see the light intensify, is simply that someone has been born. The work per se does not offer answers to questions on the value of the individual, except that this is the *primum movens* of any collective life. Certainly the work takes its place in a visual tradition for which light represents life and good, but this latter term is advanced in a secular, neutral way. Garutti assumes that spirituality, religious or otherwise, represents an innate tendency of human beings and a binding force for more or less vast groups of people. A civic sense is nurtured, seen as a stimuli for reflection that can even touch on mysticism, but it can also don the garb of reason in its most lucid aspects.

After word of the installation spreads, in each of the places in which it has been inserted over time the work has been transformed into a story. Gossip is another desired side effect the artist calls into play, as a further pressure of cohesion and one of the ways the work makes itself known. It travels from the mother, the child, the person who pushes the button or just from the thought of having to push it, from the intensification of the light, from the witnessing of the phenomenon by passers-by near those streetlights, from people talking about when and how the lights

were seen, from the discussions generated among family members of the newborn child, hospital staff, passing citizens, even from complaints—which have been advanced—that the light seldom rises, or that the installation does not function regularly.

The work makes us also think about the particular way Garutti's method does not reject, but even seeks out a relationship with the classic *topoi* of the history of art. The artist explains: "When I think about this work, I always imagine a map of the physical city that pulsates, and a map of the mental city every passer-by produces. The image I narrate is, in the end, a nativity scene, a classic theme of painting."<sup>6</sup>

A project done almost at the same time as this one, but only implemented in 2005 in Buonconvento<sup>7</sup>, entitled +39 0577 806793, makes all these elements even more explicit: in the church of SS. Pietro e Paolo, hundreds of light bulbs were installed, that could be lit up remotely by calling the phone number of the title. The cost of the phone call was donated to make water purification plants in Sri Lanka. The device, later dismantled, was made of white and blue wires, giving rise to a celestial optical composition, a color connected with the worship of the Virgin Mary, though it was the result of a combination of electrical wires without any chromatic pretensions. This device granted people at a distance the possibility of making a thought or simply a desire for presence become visible. Light, then, the least physical thing we can imagine, is converted into a material element that signals a state of being there.

Another such device is that of a Madonna made for the New Church in Trezzano sul Naviglio<sup>8</sup>: a white ceramic copy of a 19th-century statue, with a ready-made logic that does not challenge existing iconography. The figure was warmed to 36.7 degrees, the temperature of the human body, by a mechanism placed inside the statue. Based on the ritual of touching devotional statues, the work attempts to generate a continuous *de bouche à oreille* about that surprising and unexpected tactile experience. "I accepted the challenge to interpret a sacred icon, a challenge that has resulted in many extraordinary works in the past—the artist says—because I was interested in touching the world of popular culture without modifying or disrupting its symbolism, sticking to the tradition while still experimenting with a new language."

6. Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Alberto Garutti," in *Domus*, 901, March 2007, pp. 116-123.

7. Work presented in the context of "Arte all'Arte 2005," organized by Associazione Arte Continua, church of SS. Pietro e Paolo, Buonconvento (SI), 2005.

8. Work made in the context of "Residenza d'artista – Workshop di ceramica nell'arte contemporanea: VII Edizione," curated by Daniela Lotta, Residenza Municipale, Faenza, 2007.

It is important to remember that for Garutti the Church, apart from the religion that permeates it, is above all a center of expression of a sense of belonging, closely connected—as anthropologists often emphasize—to a need for artistic quality: perhaps also due to that junction between art and social life, “cities without churches, mosques and synagogues, and every other type of sacred place, are unthinkable.” The work also shows us another aspect of Garutti’s method: the focus on the affective side of relationships, which we see in action in the simple transfer of warmth, also in a metaphorical and precisely maternal sense.

To bear witness to the fact that religion is not the point, family ties are at the center of operations that appear to be more playful, like the series of benches made with marble in Trivero, for Fondazione Zegna, in 2009<sup>9</sup>. The work consists of benches positioned in outdoor spaces, on which the caption **The dog shown here belongs to one of the families of Trivero. This work is dedicated to those families and to the people who will sit here and talk about them.** The idea of making a work on the territory is connected with animals that have a strong link with odors and paths, and with the psychology of their owners. Furthermore, they seem to constitute a society in their own right, with their relationships of rank and reciprocal seeking. Finally, like artworks, dogs tend to stimulate conversation and encounters, becoming mediators between human beings and with nature. Those animals, on which large amounts of care, time and affection are lavished, are destined to remain in memory as an important domestic presence, even when they are no longer alive. The hope of the artist is that this unexpected form of urban furniture will generate word-of-mouth communication that will propagate the work beyond its material existence, which nevertheless has been personally refined by the artist and cannot be considered irrelevant.

The value of “gossip,” provoked intentionally by the artist or brought to the mind of others, is explicitly reiterated in many other works, always functioning as a wave of more or less cultured, more or less marginal information, always and in any case aimed at spreading beyond a single fact, a single object, a single individual, also when the community involved does not have ties other than the fact of finding themselves in the same situation.

This is the case of the plaque positioned, at first, only at the Malpensa Airport, in the new entrance designed by Pierluigi Nicolin, which says: **Every step I have taken in my life has led me here, now** (2007–2012). Destined to proliferate in different places of arrival and departure, this phrase reinterprets an ancient ritual of travel, which now exists in an unprecedented condition of frequency and speed. Here the plaque marks the borderline crossed by an endless community of travelers who do not know each other. Only those, almost, who know of the existence of that engraved stone, with a color not very different from that of the composite used for the flooring, will seek out and perceive the work. Those who find it by chance will probably tell someone else about it. Those who talk about it will help those who will see it elsewhere.

The artist, then, supplies his own answers to the possible critical aspects of Public Art, which has often been presented as a solution to the mute nature of works in museums, but which just as often seems to fail to communicate: in many such works by others, what stands out is the rejection of the works, the repetition of the same mechanisms in different cultural contexts that are therefore not always ready to accept them, and an excessive tendency to make the works spectacular<sup>10</sup>.

Garutti takes the work out of its institutional context to position it in that liquid museum that is inhabited space; he puts it at the service of a viewer, treating that viewer, first of all, as a member of an aggregate; he retraces collective mythology without being afraid to fall into what might seem sentimental, even courageously confronting the issue, which is often avoided by experimental art. Garutti makes his resources of patience available to the audience even *before* the work takes form. He is aware, finally, that beyond any utopism the work springs from the language of art and hence returns, seeking to change it. Art does its job and only indirectly, through its own renewal, can it have an impact on and at times change the social structure.

9. “All’aperto,” curated by Barbara Casavecchia and Andrea Zegna, Fondazione Ermenegildo Zegna, Trivero (BI), 2009.

10. In a very vast bibliography, at this point, cfr. in particular: Harriet Senie and Sally Webster, *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy*, Perennial, 1993; Tom Finkerpearl (ed.), *Dialogues in Public Art*, MIT Press, 2000; Walter Grasskamp, *Art in the City – An Italian-German Tale*, in Florian Matzner (ed.), *Public Art*, Hatje Cantz Verlag: Ostfildern-Ruit, 2001, pp. 516-525; Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another*, MIT Press, 2003.

DRAWING  
Viktor MisianoTHE INTERACTIVE DRAWING  
OF ALBERTO GARUTTI

Drawing, as the primary basis for artistic practice, comes prior to all the other techniques and genres of art and, to some extent, determines them. This is the interpretation of drawing supplied by the modern era, always inclined to seek quintessence and generative paradigms at every turn. Furthermore: ever since the first steps taken by modernity—or since the Renaissance era—drawing, as the basic mode of visual formation, ensured the existence of a link between art and architecture, between artistic and scientific thought, if not even an identity between them. As a result art, operating with idealized forms, not only illustrated the ideal but created it, making itself into the projection of an aesthetic and social utopia. Precisely for this reason, drawing—though stemming from human bodily existence—was seen as a rational practice; channeled into extreme routine in the academic system, it incorporated the geometry of perspective and of the *camera obscura*. At the same time, as it was considered the most direct medium of artistic subjectivity, drawing was hailed as the most authentic vehicle of the auteur principle, of the genius and virtuosity of the artist, as well as his independence.

The exceptional place of the category of drawing in the European culture of the Modern Age is determined by the fact that precisely the sense of sight, among all the human senses, began to play a more important role in that period. By introducing a disciplinary order, modernity tried to assign a place to things, to give them clear borders, never leaving the map of the world thus created without surveillance. The procedure of surveillance itself demands that the observer—the artist who depicts nature, or the watcher of the Panopticon (Michel Foucault)—look at the object from a certain distance, placing himself above it in a literal or axiological sense.

The works of Alberto Garutti bear witness to how the primacy of the visual has now been reduced to zero, forcing drawing to cross the borderlines of sight. It is no coincidence that some of his works address touch (*Madonna*, 2007), or hearing (*Dedicated to the young women and young men who have danced in this room*, 2000). But even when they call for a visual act, in the end they challenge

its possibility, revealing the limited nature of what presents itself to our gaze (*Room*, 1993). Though there is always something seductive about the visible, it is still predetermined by what remains hidden (*A sheet of gold 20 centimeters wide, 20 centimeters long, with a thickness of 3 millimeters, has been hidden inside the walls of this room*, 2004), and if what we seen seems to possess a self-sufficient expressive force, this is due to a large extent to the fact that it is extraneous to the place in which it is located, to its being unexpected or even ambiguous (*Little Museion*, 2001). Drawing, for Garutti—even if we admit that it continues to indicate the place set aside for things and the confines between them—performs this function by removing the element of surveillance: any attempt to give form to what is without form, for him, an act against nature, the equivalent of a constriction (*As if nature had left men out*, 2005).

Another significant element is the fact that in Garutti's work that gaze loses its distance, and the subject loses its control over the object. Nevertheless, this does not mean that he acknowledge an independent life of things: their light (*What happens in rooms when the people have left?*, 2001) or their warmth (*Madonna*, 2007) is possible only to the extent that we are there to look at them or touch them. In other words, if Garutti agrees on the fact that today “things still strike us,” this simply means that we establish an inseparable actor-network relationship with the material world (Bruno Latour). And since that relationship is configured as a network, it reflects both parts of the chain, namely the things and man, in all their material essence. Because if “the moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality” (Luce Irigaray), the institution of network relations conveys to us the presence of the artist. And, in effect, nearly every work by Garutti includes a very clear act of witnessing: the artist was here. His works would never have been made had he not been in the maternity wards of Moscow and Ghent, at the Ospedale S. Andrea in Rome, at Palazzo Doria-Pamphilj in Valmontone, or Palazzo Ciaramelli in Colle di Val d'Elsa, and so on.

On the other hand, the network conveys not only the artist, but also those who have interacted with him, and the things that have caught his eye. In every work by Garutti real individuals are present: those who made it,

those who commissioned it, or the person for whom it was made. Most often they are the same persons, just as the same persons are always the viewers of his works and their participants. As a result, drawing for Garutti does not spring from the *a latere* gaze of the observer, but from an interactive gaze, immersed in interaction with others. The kind of interactive drawing he develops shakes up dichotomies like individual/collective or author/spectator, generating new social forms of that which simultaneously appears to be general and particular. This is why his works are not just an object offered for contemplation, but also look at the viewer. Their ethical nature is here, since the “meeting of gazes” is the substantial premise of ethics (Emmanuel Lévinas).

After all, the meeting of gazes is ethical only if the one who looks is at the same level as the other. For this to happen, Garutti asserts, the artist has to “come down off his pedestal.” But what happens to the work in the moment in which the artist descends to Earth, giving up his panoramic view? What type of mastery is needed to make use of the interactive drawing? After having rejected the mission of placing boundaries on things, the artist now has to acquire the capacity to recognize those boundaries that are created in a natural way, to understand the interactions and the laws concealed behind them, to learn to go beyond them and to draw transversely with respect to them. He no longer has the possibility of determining the logic of the relationships between things, but he can try to grant them a free path, though he is not able to control them. In other words, modifying the philosophical terminology of Antonio Negri or Michael Hardt, classical drawing can be defined as “constituted,” while the method of Garutti identifies with the notion of “constituent drawing.” One very clear example is the project *Love Stories* (2002), in which the artist triggers a series of chain reactions among the doctors of the Roman S. Andrea hospital, introducing what he calls “gossip” inside their community.

In parallel, the project done by Garutti in the town of Trivero (*The dog shown here belongs to one of the families of Trivero (...)*, 2009) comes from the relationship established with local schoolchildren, just as that of Valmontone was based on contacts with senior citizens living there, asked by Garutti to tell stories of the past. In Wijnegem, on

the other hand, the artist was inspired by the traces left by birds on the roof of the exhibition space, traces that forced him to think about how desolate our life would be without their singing and chirping. In Rome, a similar effect was produced by the visit to a dried-up fountain, which seemed to evoke the image of water and its life-giving force. Thanks to the artist’s efforts, the birds have returned to the roof, and the water has begun to flow again in the fountain. Nevertheless, it is hard to reduce all these cases to a single result. What is lacking is that particular capacity that could reconnect these actions together, meaning it would be hard, in this case, to talk about mastery. Making friends with a group of teenagers, asking elderly people about their memories, calling a plumber, scattering bird seed on a roof, missing the chirping of birds and the gurgling of water—all these things belong, in fact, to the order of our usual emotions and abilities, or in other terms to “living knowledge” (André Gorz). In this perspective, success does not mean demonstrating professionalism in the normal sense of the term, but maximum engagement with respect to the work, sacrificing not our own abilities and capacities, so much as “ourselves.” i.e. our own generic qualities (Paolo Virno). At the same time, the product created by Garutti is neither an exclusive commodity nor an isolated case of joint social work, but a type of knowledge that, by definition, does not lend itself to being quantified in abstract units (André Gorz). Nevertheless, the knowledge is thus even more the “living” knowledge generated by generic qualities; by nature, it has a super-individual, general, common character. Hence the particular character of the kind of public art Garutti ascribes to himself.

As we know, the tradition of public art goes back to the genre of the monument, in which the potential of classical design is manifested in all its fullness. Made to immortalize illustrious personalities or great accomplishments, the monument consolidates historical narratives and, at the same time, the sense of belonging to a give social aggregate. Simultaneously, it is the most evident manifestation of the distanced panoramic gaze, that reconnects the nodal points of urban space around itself, organizing the set design of the city. Nevertheless, Garutti operates not with social narrations but with collective memory, which he tends not so much to immortalize

as to provoke. Precisely for this reason, what interests him are not the memories as such, their object and content, but primarily those social and cultural structures in which memory is rooted and reproduces itself. In other words, what concerns Garutti is what used to be called the “frame of memory” (Maurice Halbwachs). These “frames” can be real buildings—like Palazzo Ciaramelli at Colle di Val d’Elsa (*Work for Corale Vincenzo Bellini*, 2000), or simply different places in various parts of the hospital complex of S. Andrea (*Love Stories*, 2002), with which individuals or groups associate episodes from their past. Or certain established forms—iconographic (*Madonna*, 2007) or heraldic (*As if nature had left men out*, 2005)—that strike the artist not so much for their original meaning as for their ease of recognition, their ability to generate multiple associations. Finally, it is worth noting that Garutti also addresses his praxis to the monument, utilizing it as a cultural form, as yet another “frame of memory.” It is no coincidence that one of his favorite motifs is the commemorative plaque, dedicated not to major events or personalities, but to individual and collective affects. The plaques, in fact, are addressed to “those who will look up” (*Dedicated to those who will look up*, 2010), to those who are “thinking about the sky” (*Storms*, 2009), to those, along the way, who “will hear music” (*Work for Corale Vincenzo Bellini*, 2000), or those who once “danced in this room” (*Dedicated to the young women and young men who have danced in this room*, 2000), or simply to those who have lived in a certain neighborhood (*Dedicated to the inhabitants of the houses*, 2001; *Dedicated to the inhabitants of Via dei Prefetti 17*, 2004). Yet the plaques are also addressed to anyone who treads through the chaos of the city, reading the words there, aimed at everyone but dedicated, each time, to that particular passer-by: *Every step I have taken in my life has led me here, now* (2011).

The very fact of addressing “anyone,” namely an individual with their own individuality or a priori specificity, is a programmatic gesture for Garutti. In fact, the “whatever” singularity is a new social figure of postmodernity (Giorgio Agamben), arising when the society that organized itself through design, glorified itself thanks to the monument and imposed identity from without through well-defined boundaries and hierarchies goes

up in smoke. It is replaced by a new social aggregate—a community consolidated by geographical proximity, not by shared memories and affects. This is the foreseen recipient, in the final analysis, of the interactive design of Alberto Garutti as a particular variant of public art.

If the monument in modern societies was applied to organize urban space, shaping it to the established hierarchies of power and order, Garutti not only makes himself but also his works come down from the pedestal. If the modern city was organized in a kind of set design, the city of communities lives, instead, through places. Hence Garutti’s task, namely to find such places and to discover the communities that are rooted there. But often his purpose consists, instead, in creating a new place, in this way permitting the return of a community that once existed but then vanished (those who have “danced in this room”), or one that exists but does not fully recognize itself as such (the “inhabitants of the houses”), or to a community “that is coming” (those who are “born today”). These places, though, are created based on an anthropological approach, ignoring the logic of urban planning, or even disobeying it. This is why the public works of Garutti find space on an abandoned roof, populated only by birds, or in a coffee vending machine. Or scattered here and there around Milan, offering themselves to the gaze of passers-by, not as landmarks for orientation, but as pure chance (*Every step I have taken in my life has led me here, now*, 2011).

Nonetheless, we should also keep another aspect in mind: coming down of the pedestal and finding himself in direct contact with the gaze of the members of the community, as well as in an actor-network relationship with things, Garutti also recovers what the ancient Greeks called *synoikismos* (*synoecism*), rediscovered recently by urbanism (Edward W. Soja). For him, the city is not just a creation of artistic project development; it is not just the context in which art is generated, but also the place itself that creates the art—or, more precisely, that art that can arise only from here and no other place. Therefore it is not enough for the artist to dissolve his auteur role in the dialogue with that group for whom and with whom he creates the work; for him, it is important that it is not just the work that talks about the place, but also the place that somehow speaks through the

work. Precisely for this reason, for example, in the project *To Those Born Today* (1998-2011) the artist has added nothing extraneous to the urban environment: it is the city itself that announced the birth of new members of the community, by turning on streetlamps.

Urban set design and the anthropological place also differ due to their respective time frames. The classical design is identified with Aristotelian time that unwinds as a series of identical events. The monument is located in space to somehow configure a fact that remains irrevocably confined to the past there, but one whose example is capable of influencing the present and, in turn, pre-determining the future. In the case of the anthropological place, the space is mediated by time and, moreover, not by a rational time, quantifiable in abstract units, but by an existential time that imprints itself with its traces on things and the environment. In Garutti's works we are faced with an Augustinian notion of time, when the past survives in the present, overlaying itself in multiple layers and expanding with an infinite duration. Precisely in virtue of such an expansion, the future is rooted in the present, revealing itself as in those dreams (*les rêveries* of Gaston Bachelard) that transport us into an indefinite elsewhere, on both the spatial and temporal levels. This is why Garutti's works urge us to think of the sky (*Dedicated to those who will look up; Storms*), or manifest themselves in the form of light (*Dedicated to the inhabitants of the houses; To Those Born Today*), water (*Irrigators*, 2003) or warmth (*Madonna*). In fact, precisely these natural elements remove us from the quotidian dimension of the present to transport us into a temporal perspective, nurturing our imagination and our need for poetry (Gaston Bachelard).

The fact that a place generates dreams is a guarantee of its force and potential, of its capacity to absorb in itself not just a larger time, but also a larger space. Thus the limited dimensions of an easel work can host kilometric distances (*Samples*, 2008), and the romantic dream of a sky split by a lightning bolt can reunite, in one community, persons separated by enormous distances, but connected by mass communications media (*Storms*). If society needs a physical space and boundaries to guarantee its wholeness, the community generated by dreams knows no limits and can create trans-local and virtual places.

This leads to another particularity of the interactive drawing of Garutti. Its main purpose—namely to create community, getting beyond the deadly rationality of classical drawing—not only reconnects the concepts of construction (*Bauen*) and dwelling (*Wohnen*), in keeping with the dream of the philosopher Martin Heidegger, but also reconciles politics and aesthetics. By doing this, Garutti follows the trail of another philosopher, Aristotle, who stated that the community, as a political collectivity, arises thanks to free communication among individuals who strive for something lofty, perfect, immortal, meaning—we might add—a dream. This is why the community is a marvelous reality in and of itself, free of canonical models, not exhausted in the single incarnation of a law. In other words, it is a work of art.

All this contributes to make Garutti's position extremely particular in the context of the most interesting poetics that have originated over the last two decades. Many share his tendency to interpret community as the goal of artistic praxis, and to attribute it a political value. For them, the artist of the community should identify with a given political position, set himself concrete social objectives and allow himself to be mobilized by a sense of solidarity and compassion (Grant Kester). Nevertheless, in Garutti's view such an idea of community seems reductive, since it is fundamentally dictated by the classical design that tends to diversify social space, drawing boundaries and assigning identities. The foreseen recipients of his art, on the other hand, are not the “humiliated and the offended,” but “anyone.” The community he creates does not originate with political foundations or social mobilization, but from the dream and from a free form of communication among individuals. Finally, his ultimate purpose is not so much social justice as that idea of the fullness of human existence that includes it. Precisely (and only) for this reason, the community he creates is not a group of activists, nor a form of popular initiative, but a work of art.

In like manner, Garutti's work is extraneous to the very timely discussion in recent years on the “esthétique relationnelle” (Nicolas Bourriaud). It would be hard to chalk up Garutti's interactive drawing to this type of strategy, since in spite of the indubitable relational character of his praxis, it is not concentrated on the art system. The shared

element that unites the individual members of his communities is not, in fact, a matter of corporative belonging or shared professional abilities, but of innate qualities and a living form of knowledge. Therefore, by situating the community beyond society, he does not seem to be inclined to relegate it to the confines of the world that gravitates around contemporary art (*sociability*). But, at the same time, he cannot share in the critique raised against the “esthétique relationnelle”, namely that the collective dimension thus generated is not political, because it is not based on competition (Claire Bishop). The community, for Garutti, is not based on conflict, but on the frame of memory that unites its subjects. In fact, the communities he creates are not in contrast with political indifferentism or conformism (as was the case for modern societies), but with the symptoms of the new postmodern era, namely social breakdown and atomization.

Garutti also maintains his independent position inside the larger movement of participative art. In fact, though he bases his work on dialogue with others, involving them in his practice, he does not transform them into an object for display; in other words, his works do not fit into what is usually defined as “delegated performance” (Claire Bishop). As a result, they avoid the criticisms generally, and also quite correctly, made of similar works, which are accused of ethical vulnerability and “sociological condescension” (Hal Foster). The public art of Garutti is not based on manipulation of others, but on a well-considered investigation done in the field of a by now consolidated *habitus* he would never want to breach. In fact, this investigation is indispensable for him, not to display that *habitus* in the most correct form, but to address and dedicate the work to it in the best way. So while he includes others in the making of his work, Garutti does not hide behind a collective authorship, and does not mingle with it. Since his work’s goal is the creation of a community, it is obviously open to living knowledge and a sensitivity to innate qualities; nevertheless, the communities he creates are crystallized around a poetic dream. Therefore what is required, first of all, to generate a new collectivity is to be a human being, but also and above all an artist, to perceive all the infinite cultural meanings rooted in the luminous announcement of streetlamps that proclaim the birth of

a new life (*To Those Born Today*), or all the iconographic richness of a lightning bolt that rends the vault of the sky (*Storms*).

Finally, for this same reason, Garutti cannot overlook the debate between supporters of the autonomy of art and the agitators who would like to make it break out of its boundaries. In fact, since his works are communities, they should by definition challenge the sensibilities of those—as the artist puts it—who “cannot even imagine that they are standing in front of a work of art.” But, at the same time, to the degree that the communities created by Garutti are works of art, they cannot help but become part of the art system. This same conflict seems to be generated by that procedure generally defined as “distribution of the sensible” (Jacques Rancière), done precisely by classical drawing, bent on splitting reality into segments and rankings, suppressing any possibility of intermediate space. Garutti’s praxis, on the other hand, springs from a rhizomatic conception of the complexity of the contemporary world, in which every proposition becomes effective only if it manages to fully realize itself in its widest range of dimensions and components. Therefore the interactive drawing of Alberto Garutti attempts, no less than classical drawing, to be the indeterminate medium of a truth that is addressed to all. The difference lies in the fact that his universalism is not abstract, but determined by the concrete frames of memory and the real events encompassed within it. “In this occurrence it is not a lofty truth that descends to Earth, but the Earth, History that generates an infinite truth. Addressing the truth to all does not mean making it universally accessible, but instead permits every person to identify with it” (Alain Badiou).

Ceglie Messapica / Moscow,  
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“Committo -mittere -misi -missum (1) [to unite, connect, combine]; esp. [to bring together in a contest, to match]: hence [to compare]. (2) [to begin, set on foot, initiate]: with ut and the subj., [to bring it about that]; esp. of crimes, etc., [to commit, perpetrate], and of penalties, [to incur]. (3) [to entrust, commit], esp. with reflex. N. partic. as subst. commissum -i, [an undertaking; a crime, fault; a trust, secret].

## I

NOTES ON COMMISSIONS AND MODERNITY  
IN RELATION TO THE ARTISTIC PRACTICE OF  
ALBERTO GARUTTI

“I consider the client not only the person who commissions a work, offering the possibility of its making, but also a dialectical pole that is fundamental for the work’s ideation. I am interested in the constraints, the limits, because they contain challenges that often prompt experimentation and advancement” (From the artist’s archive on the work *Samples*).

Arriving at or departing from Terminal 1 at Milan’s Malpensa International Airport, travelers in transit go through a large space with a line of light, designed by the architect Pierluigi Nicolin. A few dozen meters further on, even more discreet, unnoticed by most, the work by Alberto Garutti is a stone set into the floor: “every step I have taken in my life has brought me here, now”. A text that, as Alberto Garutti puts it, with his usual expressive minimalism, “will be read by those who read it.”

The work is the result of a public competition, and therefore it is a commissioned work. Not infrequently, Garutti plays the role of the contemporary artist through the traditional mechanisms of “commissioned” art. An art that is often “public,” a recurring term in Garutti’s practice, not only because modernity has exponentially expanded the role of a “private” art—thus making a clearer distinction necessary between the two contexts with respect to the past—but also because precisely artists like Garutti (or Maurizio Cattelan, the only other Italian artist to have been, in turn, also defined as “relational”), investigating the relationship between private and public, and between artist, viewer and context, operating with the audience and the context of art, as “fundamental di-

alectical poles,” have contributed to make these adjectives—public and private—critically interdependent. Garutti relates to the public client as if he were an artist-citizen, in the Renaissance sense of the term. This attitude may remind us of the artists involved in decorating, each with a sculpture, a frieze, a painting, an architectural detail, the four facades of the grain market of Orsanmichele in Florence. The architectural artifact that was later transformed into the chapel of the Florentine craft and trade guilds is the result of the stratified work of multiple artists operating in the context as a set of voices: Bernardo Daddi, Orcagna, the school of Giovanni Pisano, Piero di Giovanni Tedesco, Niccolò di Pietro Lamberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, Donatello, Nanni di Banco, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Luca della Robbia, Andrea del Verrocchio, Baccio da Montelupo, Giambologna...

Through his works Garutti explores the survival, in artistic practice and in the demands of the client and the reception of contemporary public art, of shared functions and formal canons of public art, such as the monument, the plaque, the dedication, the relic or the symbol of religious devotion, which all share one aspect: the commission that generated them and, therefore, the relationship of the artist with a demand produced in the sphere of the identity and the collective feelings of a community, actively addressed by the final work, so that it becomes the community’s representation, and so that the community feels it is represented by the work.

In this sense, the artist goes against one of the fundamental claims of modernism (or, more precisely, he reinterprets it in the light of its own historical contradictions): the independence of the artist and the autonomy of art with respect to what is imposed from outside on the development of forms and concepts. When art stops being experienced as the reproduction of the real, in the 19th and 20th centuries, and becomes its interpretation, it shakes off the academic practices and methods in which the formal synthesis prevails over the process of construction of the work. It is undeniable that in the 20th century we can trace at least two parallel art histories. One proclaims the autonomy of the artist, while the other points to his “social” roots (a “social” history of art). It is equally certain that starting with the neo-avant-gardes of the 1960s, and until the postmodern-

COMMISSIONS  
Andrea Viliani

ism and relational aesthetics of the 1990s, the autonomy of the artist from any external influence championed by modernism gradually reverted into a dystopian illusion, on the one hand, and an equally illusory utopia of relation, on the other.

This is why the relationship between the artist and public clientele seems to be not only like the precipitate of prior practices and reflections, but also and above all like the pursuit of their possible, hypothetical solution, the adoption of an appropriate tone to avoid epistemological and practical contradictions considered impossible to resolve. The ongoing relationship of the artist with a practice and a theme like that of the commission, the clientele, is above all the pursuit of a problematic reconciliation, between sincere commitment, on the one hand, and veiled irony on the other. The ironic dimension of Garutti's practice can be seen (just consider, for example, the hermeneutic function of the witticism) as a form of extended, democratic and provocative knowledge of things, as openness of the project to the coexistence of ulterior levels of interpretation, to a more collective and contradictory dimension of experience that includes the routine of the standards imposed by the society and common thought, on the one hand, while combining them with alternative socio-cultural patterns, on the other: hence the only apparently contradictory coexistence between poetically elegiac conciliation, on the one hand, as revealed in the dedications to his public works, and sincere engagement on a factual plane, on the other, as is clear in the detailed preparatory research on which each project is based.

The question of the tone to apply for each commissioned project, for Garutti, is one both a theoretical and practical order: the search for an appropriate tone with which to intervene in public space, in relation to a specific request, means responding in each instance to the question of the role of the artist and the art institution (and thus, we might say, of the artistic action) in the sphere of the community to which they both belong, and of how, at the same time, the art system defines itself—as one of the subjects that contributes to make up a community, in relation to its space-time boundaries—in the attempt to present itself as a super- or inter-community.

The artist and the audience, art and socie-

ty: this binary relationship, this mutual connection is the (historically relevant) theme, then, to which all the commissioned works of Garutti respond, beyond their specific theme and client. "Patronage. The activity of those—private persons, communities, public entities, governmental organs—that commission artists to make artworks. The identification of the client or patron of an artwork is an element of great importance for art history and criticism, and for the cultural contextualization of the work. The client, who requests and promotes the making of a work and assigns the job to one or more artists, generally sustains the production economically; nevertheless, especially for major projects, the client can be distinguished from the donors responsible for the financing of the work. Alongside the traditional problem of the identification of the client, questions emerged on the identification of the modes with which the presence and social role of the client are revealed in the artwork, or on the distinction between which aspects of the work should be referred to the client and which to the artist. The mechanisms of collaboration existing between the client/originator and the artist, who determines the configuration of the work, are of great interest. In every case, the religious, political and ideological orientations, and the social and economic condition of the client, are reflected in the conception, the form, the themes and program of the work he has promoted, and at times also determine its style, at least along general lines. The representation itself of the client in the artwork could follow formulae that were to some extent widespread, or constitute an utterly individual elaboration, therefore rich in meanings. In the contemporary world the question of the client takes on new aspects, in the analysis of the expressions of public patronage, of new activities of private patronage, and their interplay with the phenomenon of sponsorship." Patronage, rather than opportunity, is the pragmatic context and delegated conceptual tool, for Garutti, with which to explore these relationships of meaning and power in the context of the contemporary art system, i.e. to explore the limits of his own artistic action in relation to the productive and image dynamics of the contemporary scene. Garutti's commissioned works are catalysts of the multiple personality of contemporary man, of the as yet intimately modern experience

(if we consider the way of getting lost in the crowd of the *flâneur* Charles Baudelaire) of the social context, in which the weakening of singularity in the collective dimension of the community involves collaboration, engagement, conscious or unconscious, with the other: in each city, Garutti seeks out the collaboration of its citizens, its streets, squares, churches, but also its institutions. At the same time, the artist investigates economic and exchange systems that underpin the life of the city itself, paying attention to the connective tissues, and then concentrating on the immaterial and narrative dimension of processes that join forces in the construction of a socio-urban identity.

Garutti's epigrammatic aplomb in his approach to the role of the contemporary artist under commission responds to the perception, which has become conviction and recognizable behavior, that it is inevitable soft to tone with respect to the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* regarding autonomy vs. relational nature of art: not just because these two dimensions are historically interconnected in the forging of our experience of modernity, but also and above all because—as designers are well aware—everything is made of details, and the project is a result of ongoing efficacy. To quote the poet and novelist Stephen Spender, modernism has been, in the end, or still is, “a single vision that restores wholeness to the fragmentation, even by realizing it as disaster, as the wasteland.”

There is a memory of Boetti in someone like Garutti who approaches the complexity of a fragmentary or fragmented reality with which we always have to come to terms. The artist contemplates the unity of the real with grace and detachment. Conceptual elegance is the result of awareness of the unavoidable complexity of artistic action in the human and social architecture—and therefore in the art system—of today's world. Maybe this is why Garutti's commissioned works do not only have an understated tone, but also grasp and articulate the dynamic, fluid, transient, impalpable element, above all of potential, liminal experiences, like those of the voyage and the trajectory, of chance in relation to will, of the act of faith and the act of law, of wonder and amazement, the sacred and the profane.

Archaic and contemporary works but, in the end, timeless ones. Works rooted in the

“here and now” of the context, of the commission, of the project that has brought them about, but in the final analysis also global, ready to be ascribed—with the right modifications—to other contexts, commissions, projects. Public and private, in the interdependency of these two spheres described above, yet infinitely superimposable, thus belonging to everyone and no one. What emerges is a reasonably absurd *modus operandi*, of satisfying while at the same time always putting in check, or at least into perspective, the concept and the very practices of patronage, as if Garutti were always placing himself in the shoes of the client, to think with the client's mind, to understand sensibilities, the innermost reasons behind the commission. The assumption of these works is therefore reformulated and repositioned in keeping with a specific request (patronage), around a more general reflection regarding the multiple functions, statutes, legibility or recognizability of artistic action in the context from which the request of the individual client originates, each time. A sort of meta- or super-patronage.

#### Works

*The analysis of two series of works by Alberto Garutti reveals mechanisms of production and translation of the idea of patronage in his oeuvre*

In *Horizon*, (1987-2012), for example, the work exists as a single piece or as a set. It is a sequence composed of individual panes of glass of different formats and sizes, painted on the back, half black and half white. Together, they form a horizon. Each work reflects a relationship with a precise client (whose name is part of the title) and, together, they constitute the career biography of the artist: “When I make a new *Horizon* I always image that that straight line could go out of my studio, enter the homes of collectors or join the others to constitute that ‘ideal’ horizon of my life, the union of all those who love and support my work,” the artist says. In *Samples*, (2008-2010), on the other hand, the viewer comes to terms with translucent monochrome surfaces. They are digital prints, scored by harmonious volutes, arabesques, gently geometric and delicately decorative, of a black line whose length corresponds to that of the path taken by the artist between two places in the same city. On

the frame of each work, there are indications of the starting point and the point of arrival, and the distance between them. “Each of these works is generated by a single, continuous line that measures the precise distance between places, persons, the political, cultural and economic institutions of the city. These works belong to a catalogue of other images, that can be made to measure and adapted to infinite persons, clients and cities”. This is the caption that activates the meaning of the work. An analogous, or similar, description can be applied to the series of the *Skeins*, (from 1997 to the present), whose title evokes the plot-scenario of relationships on which the work is based.

The term “campionario” (collection of samples), usually applied to merchandise, also has a double meaning, like the intentional simplicity of the final form assumed by the image, which might at first glance look like a form of furnishings. This work, in effect, is Garutti’s most radical. It approaches the theme of patronage as one of interrelation between the artist and the context of reference, in which every eventual client is the initiator of the work. The series, as a whole, is the portrait of that art system—to which every artist cannot help but refer—that Garutti indicates, in its functional and power relationships, granting it the most synthetic possible depiction. An abstract and apparently inoffensive portrait (in line with what court artists did for centuries with respect to their powerful patrons), in which it is the name of the institution itself, and the fact of its having been selected or accepted by the artist, that takes the sole responsibility for revealing its role, its importance, its responsibility inside the system: a work to interpret on two levels, one of perception (metaphorical) and one of naming (declaration of relationships of force and meaning). In the aporetic attempt to make a *catalogue raisonné* of his own work—an aporia caused by the relational and narrative matrix of the work that defies any form of documentation, to which perhaps this book can provide a solution—the artist has chosen to represent only this work of summary, or cataloguing, of all his production, or more precisely of the combinatory or “sampled” poetics that lies behind it. It is the title-epigraph of a site-specific work, made for the exhibition “Le opere e i giorni” at the Certosa di Padula (Sa) in 2004, that instead synthetically explains the assumption of the work.

**A sheet of gold 20 centimeters wide, 20 centimeters long, with a thickness of 3 millimeters, has been hidden inside the walls of this room.**

The existence of this sheet inside the cell of a monastery, for the contemporary visitor, is a pure act of faith, a reminder of other gestures and other signs that came before it, in that same place. What is sacred today? How can contemporary art approach this dimension, after centuries of religious art and in a context of secularization that has led the artist and the contemporary viewer to a condition of deafness and blindness to the meaning of those places, but also of those mechanisms of patronage (on which, especially in Italian art, an entire age-old history of art has been based)? Garutti approaches the dimension of the sacred along a metaphorical path, working on absence, on the presumption of presence of the art object, and he even makes use of a legal instrument to bear witness to his intervention before the incredulous eyes (the positivist materialism, the technological and mass media imprinting) of the viewer: a notarized certificate of the effective installation of the work. Another piece that approaches the theme of the sacred responds to the commission received in the context of the iconographic program of the new subsidiary church of the parish of Trezzano sul Naviglio (Mi), after a similar intervention in the church of SS. Pietro e Paolo in Buonconvento (Si), in 2005.

In this case, as the epigraph indicates **This work is dedicated to the inhabitants of Buonconvento and all those who, even from very far away, will decide to pass by here, even with just a thought.** Hundreds of light bulbs installed in the left nave of the church are made available to be lit up, like candles. To light them, however, a telephone call is required, the contemporary version of an act of charity.

With *Madonna*, 2007-2008, on the other hand, Garutti makes a copy of a 19th-century statue of the Virgin, inside which a device is placed to raise the temperature of the sculpture to that of the human body, 36.7°C. The memory of the relic, the desire to touch it, to enter into physical contact with the divine, creates a short circuit that is, perhaps, a paradoxical approach to folklore and aesthetic experience. Entering the rituals and norms of the liturgy of worship, Garutti creates a contact between himself as artist and the

community to which he makes constant reference. To do this, he pays attention to the behaviors and habits of the community that has commissioned the work, getting to know it in its everyday idiosyncrasies, finding a shared language, addressing a “cherished” theme. To make public art and to respond to a commission, for Garutti, means respecting the disorienting role of aesthetic experience in the moment in which it is shared with the audience: placed on the same plane, spirituality and the quality of being artistic are not opposing but interacting elements. The gnoseology of the artistic gesture, engaged in its collective dimension, establishes a relationship with the imaginary and behavioral sphere of popular culture. Perhaps for this reason, Garutti’s works—especially those that have been commissioned, namely most of them—have a simplicity and apparent ingenuousness, that of a fable or legend, an oral narrative, a saying or proverb, a folk song, a rural wall painting... capable of redeeming, exorcizing the disenchantment of the contemporary world and the hermeneutic qualms of contemporary art, that nevertheless remain alert behind this pacific façade.

Garutti embodies that growing interest that emerged and took form in artistic practice, starting in the 1990s, with artists like Félix González-Torres, Dominique Gonzalez-Foster, Rirkrit Tiravanija or Liam Gillick, regarding the dialogic and performative aspects of conceptual art, reinterpreted in terms of social narrative, like a yarn spun around the characteristics of the contemporary world, expression of a current neo-oral expression. Works conceived more as fables than as manifestos.

So let’s imagine Garutti as the consummate player of the “comedy of art,” a wandering entertainer who has seen many cities, many squares, spoken at many public events, always narrating more or less the same captivating script. That’s it: even the question of patronage, for Garutti, is perhaps then a mask, the recurring staging of the limits and serial rules of art, in which the spectacle of the already familiar becomes a pretense for an eventual artistic “experimentation and advancement.”

## II GARUTTI OULIPO-IST?

OuLiPo is the French contraction of “Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle,” i.e. “Workshop of Potential Literature.” Taken from <http://www.oulipo.net>:

“OuLiPo is a (non-restricted) group of French-speaking writers and mathematicians that aims to create works using, among others, the techniques of writing limited by certain constraints. It was founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais. Other outstanding members are the novelist Georges Perec and the poet and mathematician Jacques Roubaud. The group defines the term *littérature potentielle* as the “pursuit of new structures and schemes that can be used by writers in whatever manner they wish”. Constraints are used as tools to stimulate ideas and inspiration; among the most important are the “story creating machine” of Georges Perec, applied in the construction of the novel *Life: a User’s Manual* (*La Vie mode d’emploi*). Besides the more established techniques like the lipograms (*A Void—La Disparition*—again by Perec) and palindromes, the group invents new techniques, often based on mathematical and/or chess problems, like that of the permutations and the Knight’s tour”. Members, as of 2010 (they continue to be listed even after death): Noël Arnaud, Michèle Audin, Valérie Beaudouin, Marcel Bénabou, Jacques Bens, Claude Berge, André Blavier, Paul Braffort, Italo Calvino, François Caradec, Bernard Cerquiglini, Ross Chambers, Stanley Chapman, Marcel Duchamp, Jacques Duchateau, Luc Étienne, Frédéric Forte, Paul Fournel, Anne Garetta, Michelle Grangaud, Jacques Jouet, Latis (the alias of Emmanuel Peillet), François Le Lionnais, Hervé Le Tellier, Jean Lescure, Daniel Levin Becker, Harry Mathews, Michèle Métail, Ian Monk, Oskar Pastior, Georges Perec, Raymond Queneau, Jean Quéval, Pierre Rosenstiehl, Jacques Roubaud, Olivier Salon, Albert-Marie Schmidt. In Italy, in 1990, OpLePo was founded, contracting “Opificio di Letteratura Potenziale.” Garutti, like Italo Calvino, can be included (or—said with a bit of irony—like the artists of Orsanmichele), as an OuLiPo-ist, or at least an ideal candidate to join the movement. The way in which Garutti addresses his relationship with patronage is one example of this: what seems like a

limitation on the freedom of the (modern) artist becomes, for Garutti, the challenge to overcome that constraint, through ingenuity and intellectual effort; freedom is an interpretation of shared rules that have to be respected to communicate with the audience, and the work is a (civil) user's manual for the work itself.

In short, a decision regarding patronage has to be made: either it is an anachronism, or it is an opportunity. Beyond this bizarre dichotomy (similar to those of artist/society or independence/relation), there lies an OuLiPo-ist art. And with this short essay (it too, after all, commissioned), on the interpretation of the theme of patronage by Garutti, I may simply have wanted to suggest to Alberto to become part of the OpLePo group, to introduce the OpLePo approach in the world of contemporary art (something I think he has already, unconsciously, done in his long period of teaching at the Brera Academy, IUAV and The Academy of Fine Arts of Bologna). To take on an art that has been happily and responsibly (or absurdly?)... self-commissioned.

MC Do you remember me, when I was your student?

AG But Maurizio, you were never my student! Even if you had been, in any case, I would have forgotten. Because I don't like the figure of the "student," I tend to reject it... and I like the figure of the teacher even less. I am interested in people meeting on the common ground of the work, with all the problematic issues that implies. In my courses I try to do what is generally done outside the classroom, in the art system, where works are observed as something concrete. Obviously I sense the responsibilities involved in my institutional role. But my critical position on the student/teacher dynamic creates differences... In fact, I think art is "un-teachable." If anything, it is a question of method: I work on the emotional aspects, trying to remove cultural incrustations, to activate a critical sense of the work.

MC Mr. or Ms. Spectator: what is the gender of the viewer?

AG We might say that the eye of the viewer has no gender, but that would be too simplistic. There is a difference between the male gaze and the female gaze, though I cannot explain it; I just have a sense that women know something we men don't. This excellent question confuses me and makes me think that there are also viewers who are not human beings. I am reminded of something written by Jorge Luis Borges, in which he says that the enigmatic eye of a horse gives meaning to the corner of a ruin covered with weeds; I've always wondered what animals see when the look at something I too am seeing...

MC What do you hope people will learn from your works?

AG I don't think about it in those terms, because when I make a work it is more like I am trying to "understand." For me, making a work is a cognitive experience, resembling what I imagine is the work of a scientist or an engineer.

What I want to happen is for people to mate! For love stories to start! It may seem like just a witticism, but it isn't. I believe that everything we make has to do with the conservation of the species, with this fundamentally inexplicable, mysterious process. I believe that art, just like politics and economics, has a lot to do with biology.

MC Why haven't you ever done a magazine?

AG I've never done a book, let alone a magazine...

MC Does art have responsibilities?

AG If I think about art, apart from the fact that it is "tautologically" what we consider to be art, I would say it has no responsibilities. Anything but: art is always a positive project, because it produces regenerating pressures with its aesthetic qualities—just as nature is regenerating. After all, I have never thought a tree had responsibilities! If anything, the question is whether artists and those who handle and communicate their work have responsibilities. In this case, I would say that art has no responsibilities, but perhaps artists do... though I would not be comfortable with the idea that artists could be deprived of the freedom to not be considered artists.

MC Please describe your wardrobe.

AG Garments of my father, my father-in-law, an old gentleman, that I already wore thirty years ago. I have conserved them all. In the attic at home, it could take a month to describe them all.

MC What is the object you cannot live without?

AG I could invent surprising answers, but to keep it short I'll say that I could never give up my smartphone.

MC What scares you about going into retirement?

AG How can I retire if I have never worked? Being an artist is not exactly a

AUDIENCE  
Maurizio Cattelan

MC  
Maurizio Cattelan  
AG  
Alberto Garutti

job. I got involved in what I do without ever thinking it was a real occupation. After all, we know most of the work is delegated to others, so it is a process of choreography, a collective operation in which various agents are assigned the task of making what we call the work. If I think about my job as a teacher, I know that I would definitely miss the contact with young people...

MC What is your relationship to your studio?

AG It is the same relationship I have with my country house: to gather wood, fix fences, feed the donkeys, prune the trees, cut the grass... The studio is an agreeable place, where I do practical things. But the real studio is the car: that is where the ideas for the works come from, I can really concentrate there. When I am driving I am not in one place, and perhaps this makes thinking easier. If I were a traditional painter, I would stay in one place and paint. But my work spreads out into space. I always think about the works I have to do and their programming, especially at night. During the day I concentrate on establishing a relationship with all the people who work with me on the making of the project, like a film director, in short. In the end, I'm almost never in the studio.

MC Why Milan?

AG My parents brought me here when I was a kid. I like this city very much. It is unique in terms of urban organization, perhaps the only Italian city with a single center, a radial structure, where all the main streets lead to the center. It has this very beautiful neo-classical framework. I also find the often hidden nature of the city interesting. Milan is a city of nature, and the work *Ficus PAC* (2012) (the ficus plant shown at the PAC) starts with this relationship with nature, between internal domestic spaces and external institutional, public spaces. The image of the exhibition is entrusted to this work, which contributes together with the others to construct an urban landscape that enters and exits the space set aside

for contemporary art. Milan thrives on these dynamic contradictions: and complexity is created in the dynamism. Milan is expectation. Also of something you don't yet know. And then it is the "rising city," where I still find the space to say, like Savinio, "I listen to your heart, city." You go around on a bicycle, I look out the window. They are two forms of waiting, I think...

MC If you had to choose two works from the whole history of art, what would they be?

AG Ah, that's hard... A still life by Cézanne, *The Blue Vase* (1889-90), is a work I often copied as a child, from a reproduction my father had in his study. I did it many times.

That reminds me of a voyage, by ship, from Genoa to Barcelona, on rough seas. The wind was scented with pine, even 80 miles off the coast. I asked a sailor why that was, and he said "very strong wind comes from Provence."

One day from the garden of Cézanne's house I saw Mont Sainte-Victoire, luminous, white, even more so because of the great clarity of the atmosphere, creating fragmentation of light and shadow... I realized that the wind helped Cézanne.

I could also choose *The Assumption of the Virgin* by Titian (1516-18) at Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari. I like to imagine Titian's mood; I am convinced that he was vexed, because he had to cope with a situation no painter would ever want to face: namely the need to make a large painting between the brightness of two large windows, on the wall chosen for the work. I am certain that this situation of difficulty was decisive for the construction of the work and its overall composition. To solve the problem, Titian put figures against the light, creating a large cloud, to put some of the figures into shadow. In substance, the cloud divides the painting in two: below, figures in shadow in an earthly landscape, with trees and blue sky; above, a golden, heavenly landscape. The work was resolved, influenced by the architectural space in which it was inserted. In the

*Pesaro Madonna* (1519-26) in a nave of the same church, Titian offers proof of his ability to cope with architectural space: among the many figures looking at the Virgin, there is the portrait of a young man looking towards the viewer, who is there, in that place. It is as if the young man had sensed the viewer's presence. Titian paints a scene in which we viewers can enter: there is no boundary between real architecture and the invented space of the painting. Two unforgettable works!

MC Do you ever feel lonely?

AG No, I have always been in contact with people, I can't imagine being alone. I like to spend time alone, but to know the others are there.

MC Do you consider your work "simple"?

AG I consider my work very simple. Of course, to achieve simplicity you have to pass through complexity...

MC What were your nightmares as a child?

AG I never had any nightmares! Just eddies and whirlpools, white sheets, when I had a fever. I can still recall that today...

MC Whom do you trust?

AG The people I love.

CAPTION  
Stefano Boeri

The work of Alberto Garutti has the status of the caption. The caption, seen as a device that comments on a text, is the true work of Garutti, the heart of his way of operating. Furthermore, the caption is also an expression of Alberto's way of existing in the world: a lateral stance, at times grating and fickle, at other times docile and captivating. The caption is the movement of the artist—and the work—towards the viewer; while the forms of this encounter are always enigmatic, the desire to establish relations is clearly an impulse, a necessity, a need. Garutti responds to this need by working as an artist. For the same reason, it is impossible for me to separate Alberto's work from the nature of the caption itself: namely that of being a device that activates the meaning of the work through the transmission of knowledge. I think that establishing connections between parallel worlds, between different stories and knowledge that would otherwise be distant and disconnected, is what I mean by "political action". This way of making connections through a simple, direct, understandable language is, after all, part of the very nature of the relationship between Alberto's work and politics. His works are not political, but they act politically in the territory. The caption multiplies the parallel realities, granting a narrative meaning to the work and putting the viewer in a position of responsibility. At times I think the fact that his father was a teacher of Latin and Greek at the San Carlo high school left its mark on the artist's childhood. To be a child of the teachers (kindergarten or elementary school teachers, or university professors) also means being exposed to a multiplicity of stories and realities and situations that inevitably enter the home, I think, through the voices of your parents, multiplying your horizons of reference. The stories are those of the students who listen, but also those found in the books and other educational tools used by the teacher to attract—or maybe I should say to move towards—those same spectators of stories and actors of parallel realities that teachers see before them every day.

From this viewpoint, the caption is the means through which the public work is communicated, the device of mediation between the object and the citizens, the image and the viewer. The caption is an integral part of the work, and it is necessary and indispensable in the context of the city and the territory, to

tell the audience about the work and bring them closer to it. Often composed of a short text in which it is always possible to find a dedication, the caption exists in multiple formats. The physical form of the caption is different in each work, with the aim of distributing the idea of the work in the most efficient and appropriate way. In Ghent, for *To Those Born Today* the text describing the work was not just engraved on a large stone installed in the pavement of the square. The short text, printed on thousands of napkins, was also distributed to all the restaurants facing the Viedermark Platz. In Istanbul—on the Bosphorus Bridge—and in Kanazawa—for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Contemporary Art Museum—the caption was transformed into a major advertising campaign on billboards and posters around the city. For the tenth edition of "Arte all'Arte," the caption was transformed into a colorful flyer, while for *Temporalità* it became the cover of one of the most popular free newspapers of the city, thus spreading onto public transport, park benches, sidewalks, the corners of all the cities where the work was installed, in Rome, Turin, Camogli and so on.

"The caption is the device that 'turns on' the work, that allows it to propagate even when it is apparently not 'on'. It is an object with many forms that produces participation. It announces, explains and adds levels of interpretation and meaning to the work itself. The public space of the city is transformed, for the visitor, after the encounter with the caption, into a place of waiting, charged with new meaning, an altered urban scenario, an environment for the production of infinite images. Each passer-by, reading it, will imagine his or her own birth, for example; each passer-by, after reading, will remember it or tell it to others, producing a positive form of gossip that spreads the thought and the story of the work. This short text that accompanies every work produces, as a natural consequence, a widespread and heterogeneous atmosphere of images, stories, word of mouth, places and persons over which I obviously have no control. My work was simply the activating mechanism, the motor of all this." This applies to the captions on the benches for the "dogs" of Trivero done for Fondazione Zegna, but also for the large stone attached to the façade of the Corale Vincenzo Bellini, produced for "Arte all'Arte 2000." The caption facilitates the participation of

different audiences—passers-by, local residents, tourists, art experts, etc.—always including a sort of dedication that suggests a possible way of approaching the work, a condition for its perception from a collective standpoint and, simultaneously, from an intimate, private perspective.

For *Storms* (2009): **This work is dedicated to all those who will think about the sky as they walk through.** For “Arte all’Arte”: **This work is dedicated to them and to all those who will hear music that reaches them from this house when they pass by.** For the benches of Fondazione Zegna (2009): **The dog shown here belongs to one of the families of Trivero. This work is dedicated to those families and to the people who will sit here and talk about them.** For *To Those Born Today* (1998): **Every time the light slowly pulsates, it means a child has been born. The work is dedicated to that child, and to the children born today in this city.** And so on, all the way to the work **every step I have taken in my life has led me here, now.** (2011).

This latter piece has been conceived precisely as a caption-work. **Every step I have taken in my life has led me here, now** (2011) has been designed as a phrase apparently without an author, that the passer-by can glimpse by chance, rushing along the circulation routes of a busy station or airport. An integral part of the surface of the city, it is engraved on a stone set smoothly into the pavement or flooring. The stone is an example of a “pure caption” that sets the work in motion, encouraging the viewer to think and to imagine the dense network of relationships all people activate with their own existence, suddenly revealing the complexity of experience, underlining the value of the kinetic, potential energy harbored in the life of each and every one of us.

This work-caption, once again, is a precise statement: it is an anonymous object that speaks the language of the city, of its stones, its surfaces, and at the same time it is a device capable of producing images.

The caption thus turns out to be part of the political discourse—the caption as platform of distribution of the work of art that could also not be recognized as such—and, at the same time, of the figurative discourse of the work. It is a tool, an “explicit statement” of that movement towards the viewers, whom the artist feels are the true patron/clients of every one of his public projects.

LANDSCAPE  
Chus Martínez

I PREFER THE SUN  
ALBERTO GARUTTI'S LANDSCAPES

On the 17th of January 1972, the French artist Henri Chopin wrote, “I prefer the sun, I’m fond of the night, I’m fond of my noises and of my sounds, I admire the immense complex factory of a body, I’m fond of my glances that touch, of my ears that see, of my eyes that receive... But I do not have to have the benediction of the written idea. I do not have to have my life derived from the intelligible. I do not want to be subject to the true word which is forever misleading or lying, I can stand no longer to be destroyed by the Word, that lie that abolishes itself on paper.” Chopin refers here only to his own body, however his strong advocacy states his will to understand the intelligence of the senses, as well as to depart from our growing addiction to language. Is there a way to forget (if only temporarily) about the social dimension and turn our attention to the mingled bodies? To matter and flesh as experienced through the senses?

“I mentioned that the ‘method’ can be considered, in substance, the work itself. It is the part that structures the project, the critical approach to the context, the system of reference in which all this takes place. The ‘method’ produces objects, images, *detournements*, encounters between people, animals, statues, captions distributed in a thousand different ways. The ‘method’ is deployed in relation to places and produces a ‘physical and visual’ restitution that can vary greatly, taking heterogeneous forms: for *To Those Born Today* I used urban street-lamps, in Colle di Val d’Elsa and Peccioli I worked with artisans and musicians, in Rome for the solo show ‘Acqua’ (2004) I intervened on the plumbing of an old building to reactivate its lymphatic and hydric system and to bring back to life an old Roman fountain on Via dei Prefetti, and in Bolzano I produced a small concrete building.”  
Alberto Garutti

The nineteenth-century invention of the constitutional state was an attempt to link the public sphere to an idea of law. It guarantees its citizens certain basic rights—something that amounts to establishing the public sphere by way of identifying the public

character of every act of reason. By linking law to rational debate in this way, the idea of the State as a top-down dominating force is abolished.

The bourgeois public sphere depends on particular social and economic factors that are unique to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Jürgen Habermas borrows the term “civil society” from Hegel. Civil society is the sphere of production and exchange of goods that forms part of the private realm and is distinct from the State. Hence, civil society is essentially the economy: it operates according to its own laws, but is able to represent its interests to the State through the public sphere, whose life’s blood it purports to be. Actions that were part of the private, of the *oikos*—the household—started to be part of the public domain, as activities formerly confined to the domestic framework emerged into the public sphere; the economic activity of the civil society was oriented towards the public commodity market, and hence both internal and external to the State. “Public” relates to public authority, the State; “private” relates to the economy, the society, and the family. Public and private are defined and separated in terms of law and institutions. The public sphere exists as an extension of the private world that in this way moves into the public domain. Public relates to the State but also means “open to all.” This amalgam, then, somewhat paradoxically transforms the public into a critical judge that regulates access to, and the constitution of, its principal inclusivity.

Rational-critical debate occurred in the eighteenth-century public sphere among members of a property-owning, educated, reading and reasoning public. It centered on literary questions and political issues, like the public authority of the State. The key shift in the modern world is the loss of apparent distinction between the private and public spheres: only with the development of a modern State and economy did public and private assume their currently recognized forms. Interest groups on both sides started to operate together, resulting in a societal complex that, following Habermas, reduced the possibility of a true public debate. The decline of rational, meaningful argument is amongst Habermas’s major criticisms of the modern State.

The reactivation of the lymphatic system of a building constitutes a radical re-reading of

the “rational” understanding of both terms, the public, and the notion of space. The projects of Alberto Garutti in the “landscape” are an exercise of emancipation. They attempt to explore the body’s power, transferring the living qualities to inanimate matter. Imagine that the world exists. And that all animate and inanimate matter could be imagined as possessing a sense of the real, and therefore, knowledge of life. This would demand an scandalous approach to things evoking their fabular potential to imagine the world differently. A fountain, a pipe, a concrete house, all kinds of small or big intervention alter not the “place” but the way all the elements that constitute the place “think.”

With the increasing velocity of the age of technology, knowledge is conceived under the aegis of a dominion. Concepts have become a material, and the concern regarding “having a concept” to work from has too often turned into a question of possessing a thing. This new materialism of the immaterial cannot, though, be contested by dissidence, since the very concept of dissidence is part of the same system. This cognitive trade-off runs parallel to the blind strategy of a mind devoted to the old values of resistance that are retold from inside the system where the fantasy of an outside is continuously re-created. Nothing but fiction is able to escape this logic. And artists like Alberto Garutti produce fiction at the core of the real. This is, contrary to what one may think, a very Cartesian question. Like René Descartes, the artist asks: Where is the soul? (Where is the soul in the social?) Garutti’s answer is that the soul is not to be located in one solitary and invariant quasi-position in the body, the pineal gland (as for Descartes), but rather in the contingencies of the body with itself, and with its environment, with the landscape. The soul of the pilot of a ship extends coenesthetically into the whole of his vessel, just as the driver parking a car feels his fingertips extending all the way to his front bumper, and the amputee continues to occupy the empty space of a severed limb.

Here it is useful to return to the question of intuition, to the reception of the sensuous that demands a form of understanding but, at the same time, remains partial. All subtle forms of intervention in the landscape do not change it; they are actually not intended to change it, but to create a different order in

the way the parts relate, and therefore in our way of perceiving the real, the landscape as a whole. They are clues.

How is this condition of being partial to be read in a productive and critical manner? In his introduction to Adolfo Bioy Casares’ *The Invention of Morel* (1940), Jorge Luis Borges writes that the future of the novel is the detective genre. He addresses two main traits of the genre that support his statement: first, the production of clues; second, the existence of a mystery. The clues maintain a relationship with the mystery and are produced as a prelude to its resolution. Yet they are not essentially connected with the mystery, nor even are they connected to one another; it is the mind that reads them as clues, that sees what may be a relationship. They produce an understanding of the mystery, of the mystery being mysterious, and they are partial to the very limit of the notion. All the fragments together may reveal a form of knowledge regarding the mystery, but they are never equivalent to it. The status of the clue is interesting, because a clue is different from information and it is not yet a form of knowledge. It is an epistemological entity, because it acts in knowledge, but you cannot define it except as a clue. The clue alludes to a basic expectation of fulfillment—the clues are there to solve the mystery. This is just an assumption, since nothing says they necessarily will; their presence is an acting of intelligence in the game of fiction. But it is the mystery that activates all elements, that keeps the dance in motion.

## POLITICS

Francesca Pasini  
and Giorgio Galli

IMAGINATION BECOMES PUBLIC  
AND MAKES POLITICS  
Francesca Pasini

The work of Alberto Garutti often tends to shift the horizon of individual imagination into the sphere of collective perception. Like a “picklock,” it releases the ranked order between author and audience, bringing *dialogue* to the fore: with the citizens to whom the work is dedicated—who are the foundation from which the work itself springs—and with those who will encounter it on their own.

The resulting figure is found in the caption, which for the artist is the device that activates the work, the key to its interpretation, the trigger that makes imagination spread beyond individual boundaries.

Not intervention that softens or emphasizes the aesthetic quality of a place, but a “*method* of critical and aesthetic production which, as a whole, constitutes the work itself.” According to Garutti, “ethical and political awareness of the role and function of art in a society in transformation” is decisive for the encounter between work and community, but for this to happen “the artist has to come down from the eulogistic pedestal of the art system.”<sup>1</sup>

With both feet on the ground, emotions, affections and experiences are conveyed from the social reality to the individual reality of the artist, not to conduct an experiment in direct democracy in contrast with the elitism of museums or delegated places, but to attempt an encounter between the political value of art, its natural elitist stance, and the positive or negative transformations in progress.

Populism tends to standardize, while art thrives on a multiplicity of intuitions and visions. The more there are, the more they can connect the threads of private and public existence; the more they challenge the static condition of ideas or relationships, the more they can interact politically. This happens every time a link is made between the intuition that has taken form in the work and that of the person who observes it. It is true for all works, and depends on the psychic and cultural structures of each: from Leonardo da Vinci (*painting as a question of mind*) to Dan Graham, Yayoi Kusama, William Kentridge, Monica Bonvicini, Marina Abramović, who expand the places of art by introducing a

performative dimension that is spatial, or narrative, all the way to the latest generations that question the relationship between culture and the historical-political context, like Rossella Biscotti and Paola Anziché.

Garutti, coming down off the pedestal, wants to show his distance from public artwork that consoles or irritates on the basis of anomaly. Instead, he raises his eyes to intercept the “truths” of anonymous perceptions, encounters outside the compound, the reciprocity between those who create and those who observe, between those who want the aesthetic condition to engage social structures, the landscape, the environment, the city, and those who have not yet thought about it. Every artist operates in these emotional, economic and experiential junctions. Those who realize it become allies with the thought, the passions, the new developments the work suggests. If awareness spreads in the *polis* it becomes a political legacy that belongs to all the citizens, no matter who is the effective economic owner.

What emerges in this to and fro is the *subject-subject* dynamic. It happens in all creative expressions, but in visual art there is a physical-carnal assonance that makes this type of encounter with an autonomous, emotionally moving and mutable subject more immediate; even if it is not biologically generated, it is nevertheless brought into the world by men and women. Art is the only possibility we have to experience an intersubjective relationship that does not have to do only with physical persons. Every work has a life of its own, but it is open to assuming other “characteristics”. This is easy to counter-check: every time we find ourselves faced by the same image, novel or film, we perceive different things, because in the meantime we change, and therefore our gaze changes, as do discourses and imaginaries, thus also altering the “characteristics” of the work. Doesn’t this also happen with flesh-and-blood subjects? Isn’t this the specific trait of the eternally contemporary nature of art? Hypothesizing a *subject-subject* relationship mediated by art lets us open up the classic dualism (subject-object, man-woman, true-false) and introduce a third factor (the *work-subject*) which proposes a variation that does not depend on chance, but on the creative faculties everyone possesses, though only a few know how to give them a form. This then becomes the dialogue Garutti

1. From the writings of the artist.

ti needs to interact with the audience, and everyone needs in order to come down off the pedestal and to make their truths interact with those of others.

This political function is more necessary than ever, today, to recover a collective dimension that knows how to use art not just as a value of heritage or aesthetics, but also as a “picklock” to break up the oppositions between those who are free and those who are not; between the 1% that own almost everything and the 99% that have to divvy up the rest; between those who can dream of beauty in their own homes and those who live clandestinely in the houses of others.

Art per se does not have the ability to change the world, but if it can trigger, on a widespread level, awareness of the link between intuition and expressive choice, it provides a tool to analyze, criticize and discuss reality. The most “classic” example is *Guernica* by Picasso, or the “Black Paintings” of Goya. This does not have to do, however, only with particular short circuits; it also crosses the very meaning of aesthetic perception, at times more easily connected to public events, at times to subjective, personal dimensions. What we might call the *political* function lies precisely in suggesting to each person the free authorization to build a bridge their own perceptions and those they see (learn?) in the work.

Alberto Garutti almost pedagogically puts this *subject-subject* relationship at the center of the work; as he states, he makes it the *method* that sustains the work itself. The political revolution thus envisioned has to do with the possibility of all to speak and to act in like manner, in the personal sphere and therefore the collective sphere as well.

Back in the 1970s the feminist movements asserted that *starting with the self* was the picklock to undo the patriarchal dimension of social and personal relationships, precisely because personal events are at the root of life and therefore interact, for better or worse, in collective and political constructs.

If we use this style of interpretation not in a deductive but in a *personal* way (in the sense of the term outlined above), everyone can probably identify, in many artworks of all eras, this element of contact between intuition and repercussions in the public structure. The revolutionary thing has to do with the personal responsibility of the viewer who draws his own conclusions from the

work. It is undoubtedly an arbitrary process, but what makes the difference is being conscious of and recognizing the fact that the interpretation is possible because the art has made it visible or, as Alighiero Boetti put it, “brought it into the world.”

An example: *The Sacrifice of Isaac* by Caravaggio. Through the astonished gaze of the son, the devastating discovery of an unconceivable gesture on the part of the father is unveiled. For us the work no longer corresponds to an iconographic composition, but to the suffering of a father who can do nothing for his son, because he is overpowered by forces beyond his will. Then it was God, today it is the loss of a job, the awareness of the risk of no longer being able to guarantee life and future for one’s children, with all the associated symbolic impact. Perhaps it is stretching the point to see all this in that incomparable light in the eyes of Isaac, but this is the transgression of art that expands its political analysis. This too is a dialogue with the *work-subject*, and once again, in this case, imagination becomes public and political.

Alberto Garutti acts powerfully on the imagination, precisely because he touches on questions that concern all of us: birth, falling in love, affection for pets. The *subject* that brings his work into the world seems almost like a “relative” with whom to dialogue and discuss, or someone who invites us over to his place and shows us his way of living. In this balance of community and individual citizens, the *subject* that acts in the work of Garutti alerts us that to change the relationships in the *polis* we need to break the secrets, the conspiracy of silence, looking towards the sky and grasping its physical-scientific enigma, its visionary force. The construction of an imaginary is something that requires the complicity of the spectator; and the artist feeds on this dangerous, subtle relationship of complicity, nurturing the political-relational dynamics of his work.

A new version of the “power to the imagination” proclaimed in May 1968? Maybe. Today, culture and art need to make a “great leap forward,” another slogan adopted by the movements of the Sixties and Seventies, borrowed from Chairman Mao. The same themes resurface today, though with effective differences, in the forms of “occupation” from New York to Madrid. A great leap forward is needed because there are

2. Fondazione Pier Luigi e Natalina Remotti was opened in 2008 in Camogli (Ge) and is an example of the dialogue between art and architectural restoration. Several artists have reconstructed the space of this former church, working on the symbolic zones of artistic intervention. The façade (Michelangelo Pistoletto), the floor (Gilberto Zorio), the altar (Alberto Garutti), the ceiling (Tobias Rehberger), the balcony and the churchyard (Gruppo A12). Garutti's intervention has given specific form to the space. He has imagined a cavedium between the first and second floors, bordered by a back wall that rises from the zone where the altar once stood, creating at its sides the spaces for the stairs and the elevator, which remain hidden. The reinforced concrete wall does not touch the ceiling of the second floor, but stops short a few meters below it: one has the sense that it is suspended, functioning more as an interval than as a division. The memory of the church is completely transformed. The client, and the need to create a new space, were the reasons behind this solution. The fact that the first version of the *Storms* project also happened here corresponds to the intention to underscore the public value of art and, a posteriori, we can connect this stylistic and theoretical choice with the analogical theory of light of Dionysius the Areopagite, which lies at the basis of a church that is a symbol in the Paleo-Christian-Byzantine architectural renewal: the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople, which was the model for St. Mark's Basilica in Venice at the start of the year 1000, symbol of a city and of political power.

new developments that, as Alighiero Boetti would have said, force us to bring “a world into the world,” a conflictual one: full of fantastic things and horrible wars, fascinating dialogues and aggression against women, ever-burgeoning wealth and constantly increasing poverty, splendid scientific inventions and news that never makes it through the filters of the media.

Garutti has brought into the world the dialogue with the community, the context, power, affections, institutions. The message does not highlight the stereotype of harmony, separated from what happens in cities and territories; it presents a critique of the monumental vision of the relationship between art and community.

We learn, instead, how to raise our eyes to the heavens, as he did in 2008 at Fondazione Pier Luigi e Natalina Remotti, with the first version of the project *Storms*, whose caption that opened the gates of vision read: **Inside this building, which was the Church of the Gianelline, the lights will vibrate when a lightning bolt appears during storms. This work is dedicated to all those who in passing here will think about the sky.**<sup>2</sup>

To look up, to invent, to resolve, to interrupt habits. A storm is metaphysical, but also personal and political. The force of the sky is simultaneously sublime and fearsome.

Among the unfulfilled projects of the artist—whose oeuvre often constitutes an archive of information and suggestions that intertwine with a network of political-social relations—there is also a proposal conceived for the interior of the Milan Courthouse, reprising and revising the idea of *Storms* inside a context of a different character and urban presence.

This was not the repetition of an idea, because for Garutti the limits of the client and of the spaces themselves in which he operates have a central function in the generation of an idea. This too is a relationship that in history has been approached by artists and architects, through some outstanding examples, from Michelangelo (Palazzo Farnese in Rome, the Cappella Medicea in Florence) to Le Corbusier (Unité d'habitation) or Calatrava, with the bridges in London or Venice.

The difference of Garutti, however, lies in his public declaration of his relationship with the clients, with the citizens and with the public spaces involved, from hospitals to theaters, museums to the landscape itself (the squares of Bergamo and Ghent, and the bridge on

the Bosphorus, for *To Those Born Today*, the museums of Villa Manin, Museion, MAXXI, Fondazione Sandretto, Moscow Museum of Modern Art, the Tiscali headquarters in Cagliari, or Trivero, where the sculptures of the dogs of some of the inhabitants are an integral part of benches scattered around the town, or the Malpensa Airport near Milan). When the *Storms* project is connected to the activity of the Courthouse, the imagination vibrates with thoughts of positive and dreadful events.

The Tribunal is the symbol of the community, that has chosen to organize itself by sharing rules and rights, connected in turn to social and political transformations that have influenced the Law and History. Its walls bear the invisible but vividly imagined signs of crimes, sentences, miscarriages of justice, acquittals. These are the experiences lived in that architectural building, and that social and political edifice of the construction of laws, rights and penalties.

How can art interact with the icons of justice? Obviously the Court is a secular “temple.” But the traditional iconography of a goddess/virtue with a scale and a sword, in any update, has little chance of acting inside the *subject-subject* dynamic.

Alberto Garutti, translating the discharge of the lightning bolt into visual energy, indicates instead the link with nature and with the eternal advance of human thought. With light, he creates a bridge of meanings and inventions that can be crossed with the mind and the eyes. This is where the critical leap and the dialogic dimension happen. The light that appears is not the light that was manifested by historical painting as an autonomous material, in the works of Lucio Fontana, Dan Flavin, Bruce Nauman, Mario Merz, James Turrell; it is the bio-physical light we all experience every day, and therefore it symbolically transports us into both the scientific enigma of the Universe and into the everyday perception of existence.

**In the large entrance hall of this Courthouse the lights will vibrate when a lightning bolt strikes during storms in Italy. This work is dedicated to all those who in passing here will think about the sky.** Once this caption has been read, the dialogue is triggered with the city and its inhabitants, and the artist's request that they become the commissioning clients themselves, precisely through interaction with the work.

Thus the metaphorical and symbolic image of light illuminates Order, while that of the storm endangers it, and a synthetic, precise representation of the conflict/law dialectic is opened up.

But beyond this metaphorical and symbolic value, the critical-aesthetic shift that places the work of Garutti in the public and collective context exists in the physical imaginary even before the work has been made. The light set in motion by the lightning bolt conveys the fear of the law, the invoking of rights, defense against injustice, penalties: not just juridical and social concepts, but everyday experiences of those who work in the Courthouse.

The light imagined by Garutti thus becomes an element of sharing between those who operate inside, and those who from the outside see the building light up. It is an unexpected, also complicated vision, but one that does not exclude: the caption gives everyone the key to intervene, creating their own metaphors and judgments. And the fact that it happens in an unpredictable way, based on the timing and rules of nature, implies an effort.

This effort makes it possible to get beyond the populist relationship. While it is true that art speaks to everyone, this does not mean it is neutral; its perception relies on the efforts required to understand even what is not yet clear. The link with the sky that varies is immediate and powerful. Society also varies. As quickly as light? Not really. But the fact that this sky over a Courthouse lights up according to the rules of nature and not those of the powers that be is a hope, an intuition of change that art offers to politics, because—as Gertrude Stein wrote in her portrait of Picasso—“A creator is not in advance of his generation but he is the first of his contemporaries to be conscious of what is happening to his generation.”<sup>3</sup>

## AGAINST INDIVIDUALISM, FOR THE TERRITORY

Giorgio Galli

In this Italy devastated by media culture some areas of excellence do still exist. Alberto Garutti occupies one of them, as a forerunner, for having underlined the public role of art and the artist. And an adjoining area of excellence, as we will see, is the one occupied by Luigi Ferrari, economist and psychotherapist, who teaches labor psychology and psychology of financial conduct at the Università degli Studi of Milan-Bicocca, author of one of the most important books of the last few years: *Lascesa dell'individualismo economico* (Vicolo del Pavone, Piacenza, 2010). The areas are adjoining in this sense: Garutti underlines the importance of art to activate public applications, while the individualism studied by Ferrari, in greater depth than other observers, in its origins and development, seems to be at the apex of its triumph. Garutti is a forerunner, because this apex has now been reached and perhaps the crisis in progress marks the beginning of the decline of the individualism that began in the modern era, a decline that could lead to a rebound of public values.

We are only looking at the first signs of a fall that will take place over the longer term. Ferrari, developing a concept of Vilfredo Pareto, demonstrates that mentalities and behaviors that have reached a phase of weakening leave behind “residues” that can also last for centuries. But I believe that the long face-off between individualism and the private sphere, on the one hand, and the public sphere, on the other, is entering a new phase. The artistic commitment of Alberto Garutti appears as a harbinger of that new phase.

In his artistic invention, the installations connected with meteorology are enlightening, both in their own right and in a figurative sense. On their own, thanks to the lights that turn on during the progress of storms; and in a figurative sense, due to their placement in the public sphere, taking on overtones of a political program that lights up the Italian panorama, in a moment of great gloom from this point of view.

The President of the Council of Ministers and Confindustria describe Italy as being in a situation similar to the period after the (lost) war: media devastation is joined by the material wreckage of a tormented territory. Rain and storms prompt fears of floods and

3. Gertrude Stein, *Picasso*, (1938), English edition Dover Publications (September 1, 1984).

cloudbursts that periodically cause autumn mayhem, in the wake of the forest fires that destroy woodlands and damage the terrain. The safeguarding of the territory we stubbornly continue to boast of as the “Bel Paese” is a project that could mobilize Italian citizens, just as the project of reconstruction mobilized them after another lost war, transforming the ruins of 1945 into the “economic miracle” of the 1950s. Today it would be possible to rehabilitate the “Italy murdered by newspapers and concrete,” as in the song *Viva l’Italia* by De Gregori.

The experts provide the statistics: Italy is the country most subject to landslides in Europe, with half a million recorded as of 2007; it is the country most subject to the hydrogeological damage of coastal erosion, in two thirds of the territory (also due to invasive interventions in the environment); it has a high level of seismic risk, as proved by about 150 earthquakes over the last 100 years, with 1,600 municipalities damaged and at least 250,000 deaths, with a high percentage of cultural buildings at risk. Following every “adversity, blamed on evil destiny—as Salvatore Settis writes—come solemn declarations. Then nothing. Until the next landslide.”

Finally finding a way to fix all this is a project that could meet with the enthusiasm of our fellow citizens, who are now disoriented and to some extent resigned, though I believe they are still willing to redeem this Italy, which the same song describes as “half brothel, half jail,” concluding “long live Italy, the whole of Italy.” If we can keep it whole, that is, blocking the landslides, the floods and the erosion of the coasts.

The latest artistic proposal of Garutti has great symbolic force, with a commitment in the public sphere that once again evokes a political context: this is the proposal for a “meteorological” installation that lights up when lightning strikes during storms, for the Courthouse of Milan, a place from which, twenty years ago, a storm broke loose that seemed as if it might be able to purify Italy. A place where the portraits of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino have been displayed for many years, two warriors, one with a background in the culture of the left, the other from the right, victims of their courage and of the fact that that storm was followed by a calm presided over by organized crime. But as we have seen, Alberto Garutti is a forerunner, and his flashes of light may

be able to offer glimpses of a new and more effective storm to come, which seems indispensable if Italy is ever to reawaken, aroused by the thunder and lightning.