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VINCENZO AGNETTI AND THE POETICS OF ZEROING

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Introduction¹

The Italian semiotician and philosopher Umberto Eco asked in 1962: Why did the term “alienation” become so popular at the beginning of the 1960s, so long after its first appearance? [...]

[The term] implies that something that is acting upon us, and on which we depend, is something totally extraneous to us, a hostile power that has nothing to do with us, an evil will that has subjugated us despite all our efforts and that someday we may be able to destroy, or at least reject, since we are ourselves and it is an “other,” substantially different from what we are.²

The question of widespread alienation in modern life also deeply preoccupied the Milanese artist Vincenzo Agnetti [1926-1981], who was particularly concerned with how overwhelming sensorial stimuli cause perceptual habits to become mechanical, thereby estranging perceptions and emotions. As a countermeasure, Agnetti produced a body of work aimed at upsetting the expectations of the viewer about how both language and technology function. Through the modification of machines, the use of paradoxes, tautologies and contradictions, and the alteration of artistic techniques, Agnetti revealed not only how machines are constructed to routinize behavior, but also how disciplines and institutions shape and interfere with genuine experiences and actual life conditions.

In what follows, I analyze how two works by Agnetti, *La macchina drogata* (1968) and *NEG* (1970), illustrate his anxiety about alienation by interrupting the regular functioning of technology. I also examine how this strategy questions the ideological bases of industrial design, and I elaborate on the relation between Agnetti's concern with alienation, and the analyses of estrangement by Eco and the Italian critic Gillo Dorfles. While I am not suggesting that Agnetti “materialized” or “illustrated” the theories of Eco and Dorfles, whose work he most certainly knew but never explicitly quoted, striking coincidences exist between their thought and Agnetti's diagnosis of contemporary alienation. Such similarities testify to a common disquiet in the Milanese artistic and intellectual milieu of the 1960s and 1970s, revealing increasing skepticism about unbridled industrial development.

Interrupted Processes: *La macchina drogata* and *NEG*

Agnetti utilized what he called “zeroing” strategies to rethink his approach to language, science, technology, and art in order first to recover what he considered to be their basic elements and, second, to obstruct viewers' habitual automatic responses to both technology and art. Agnetti's zeroing techniques included the application of randomness and unpredictability in the regular operations of a mechanism; the use of paradoxical or contradictory language; and the translation of a given discourse from one code to another. The Italian critic Achille Bonito Oliva described Agnetti's zeroing techniques as “interrupted processes” when he wrote:

The artist, using the strategy of *interrupted processes*, de-alienates the medium (...) exploits it and thus truly penetrates the formative process, determining an information gap with regards of the use of technology which only art is capable of. The artist has understood that only when the identification with the medium is replaced with its dialectical use is it possible to de-alienate art, and make it engage in an unprecedented relationship with technology, in which the latter is only a tool of knowledge, while art is conscious and deliberate knowledge.³

Agnetti first used his “zeroing” techniques in *La macchina drogata*, exhibited in Milan in 1968. He altered an Olivetti Divisumma 14 calculator so that letters, rather than numbers, printed when the visitors pressed its buttons. Agnetti exhibited a text explaining the purpose of *La macchina drogata* in a very narrow corridor, leading to a cubicle (surrounded by a black cloth) where spectators could use the machine. The sheets printed of the machine's work were then collected and hung on the wall, documenting the production of art by the artist, the viewer, and the machine.⁴ For not only did viewers participate in operating the machine, but the machine also became a mechanical creator, producing new works of art. Rendered inoperable as a calculator by Agnetti, the appliance acquired a new role as a collaborator in the production of art. The contradiction between the designated purpose of the device and its actual results

deconstructed, as it simultaneously reconstructed, the idea of efficient machines. Agnetti's intervention in the workings of the machine compromised its primary function: the production of numerical operations. First commercialized in 1945 and already out of date when Agnetti used it as a work of art, this particular model of the Olivetti calculator was the first machine to provide a quick way to perform four basic arithmetic operations. Seeing letters where numbers were expected stunned viewers and made them question their assumptions about how, and with what purpose, a calculator operates.

In *NEG, Rivelatore di Pause, or Pausofono*, Agnetti altered a Brionvega stereophonic record player so that it allowed the public to listen to the pauses in music. When sounds were played, the machine inhibited the signal and nothing was heard. When there was silence, however, *NEG* emitted white noise such that spectators could listen to "negative of music," namely the intervals between sound and sound. Thus, like *La macchina drogata*, *NEG* questioned the common belief that machines always act as the user expects them to do. *NEG* also criticized capitalist commercialization of ideas, as the actual object was only the materialization of a process-based work. Before exhibiting *NEG*, Agnetti presented the patent for a machine that would detect silences in Milan's Chamber of Commerce, and Paolo Consolandi, the noted art collector who bought the piece, notarized it. The bureaucratic procedure of registering a patent for such an object constituted the real artwork, as the altered gramophone produced "a mental work documented by an objectual work."⁵ Agnetti exhibited *NEG* next to its patent, another artwork titled *Il brevetto*, which testified to the intellectual process that led to its ideation.

As Agnetti commented in his unpublished notes: With this work I tried to recreate a poetic of invention, or better, the drama of an inventor when he is finally able to register his invention. *Il brevetto* is a purely documental work that clearly overturns how performances operate. Indeed, with *Il brevetto* we already have the document, and then, maybe, the action, which is the object [*NEG*]. On the contrary, in performances the action takes place first, and then the document registers [the action].⁶

Agnetti showed that the malfunctioning of objects could become a fertile moment for learning because in daily life to know how to use a medium properly entails predicting its functioning in a deterministic manner. By upsetting how machines, disciplines, and practices normally function, Agnetti underscored their constructed nature. The medium is therefore not concealed as a fetish commodity but brought to the foreground, defamiliarizing the production and meaning of objects and, thereby, intervening in their passive reception and usage in consumer culture.

"Azzeramento" (Zeroing)⁷

During the 1950s, Agnetti was an *art informel* painter. However, he quickly became disenchanted with this artistic language, destroying all his works, and he

turned to writing art criticism. During this time, Agnetti associated with the artists Piero Manzoni and Enrico Castellani, and helped edit their journal *Azimuth*, which was published in only two issues in 1959 and 1960.⁸ *Azimuth* was an idiosyncratic publication on experimental art in Italy, and it was instrumental in putting Italian artists in communication with avant-garde art in the rest of Europe and the United States.⁹ The magazine (and the gallery attached to it) also offered a space for discussion to artists disaffected with *informel*. However, Agnetti left Italy in 1962, traveling and living for the next five years in Australia, Saudi Arabia, and Argentina, where he often worked in the electronic automation sector, experiences that would serve him well in his later artistic production of *La macchina drogata* and *NEG*.

During these years of artistic silence Agnetti continued to write fervently. These texts became the material for several of his artworks and literary writings of the late 1960s and 1970s. In addition, as soon as he returned to Italy in 1967, Agnetti published an avant-garde novel, *Obsoleto (Obsoleto)*, whose frontispiece Castellani designed. In this text, Agnetti used normal language in experimental ways, breaking syntax, logic, grammar, punctuation and narrative. He also altered readers' expectations of the normative content and form of a book: some pages of *Obsoleto* have letters that form drawings; others distribute words unevenly on the page; and Agnetti made reading difficult by having filed the printing plate so that the letters are almost invisible. *Obsoleto* established a central feature of Agnetti's artworks, which always includes an interior interruption. The hiatus operates between the functioning of the artwork and the regular functioning of the things that make up the artwork (books, machines, texts).

Azzeramento or "zeroing out" is the category through which Agnetti conceptualized his recurring practice of interrupting the regular functioning of language, communication, and technology. To clarify such notion, Agnetti referred to his piece *Frammenti di una tavola di Dario tradotta in tutte le lingue* [Fragments of a tablet of Darius translated in all languages] (1973). This work includes a photographic reproduction of one of the Persepolis Elamite tablets, the economic records of the reign of Darius the Great. Agnetti added typewritten sequences of numbers, his fictional translation of the cuneiform writing on the tablets. In Agnetti's words, "the cuneiform words are zeroed out by depriving them of meaning and replacing them with numbers." He continued:

And in so far as the meanings of the words disappear, the numbers become nothing more than the possibility of intonation. The visual part of the work is necessary if the work is to have impact upon the spectator, but at the same time it comports no illusionism.¹⁰

The translation from one code to another, especially to a numeric code, uncharged by emotions and existential meanings, evinces the conventional nature of linguistic practices. Contemporary society, according to Agnetti's reading, is committed to enthrall consumers with

comfort: products are easy to understand and use, so few question their existence or functioning. But by interrupting the transmission of a message through “zeroing,” viewers are obliged to pay attention to the workings of language and communication. For Agnetti the feeling of “not being at home” in society – triggered when viewers realize that things can work in unexpected ways – is the basis for every possible critical thought.

Language is the chief tool for Agnetti’s practice of zeroing, and he used it to provide an extensive explanation of each piece, preventing viewers from being so surprised by the disruption to their expectations that they become intellectually paralyzed. Agnetti achieved his demystification of communication through the critical use of the means of communication itself; in Agnetti’s words, “a demystification with the weapons of mystification itself.”¹¹ Agnetti’s critique is not directed at language in general, but at language as an instrument of power. His practice of defining the intention of the artwork, as part of the artwork itself, evokes conceptual art.

Well informed about the development of international conceptualism, Agnetti was hesitant to consider himself a part of it. In 1974, however, he wrote a very detailed article on the work of the British Art and Language group and other conceptual artists, including himself among those whose work criticized the discourse of art through the use of other disciplines.¹² Indeed, Agnetti’s work at the time included aspects congruent with the conceptual approach of Joseph Kosuth, Hans Haacke, and Art and Language, as Agnetti used philosophical and analysis to challenge the operations of ordinary language, especially the unquestioned assumptions of the art system. He also employed paradox and irony to visualize the limits and constructed conditions of art and its institutions.

However, Agnetti also underlined the differences between his practice and that of other conceptualists. Of paramount importance to him was that while he voraciously read philosophical treatises, in his work he used only his own texts, not quotes from other writers.¹³ In this way, Agnetti’s thought-process and his own analysis of philosophical concepts became the work of art. Furthermore, contrarily to other conceptualists, Agnetti eschewed tautology and hermeticism, and avoided producing solipsistic artworks by constantly connecting the practice of art with other social events. In this way, Agnetti criticized not only the internal logic of language, but also how the organization of disciplines and institutions impacts on human psychology and emotional life.

Gillo Dorfles and Umberto Eco: Estrangement and Consumer Culture

Historical factors certainly forced discussions on the price of industrial development to center stage in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s. While Italy had achieved a remarkable economic boom in the years after the end of World War II, by the mid-1960s several sectors of the population – notably students and workers – were unsatisfied with the excessive expansion of consumer society, the lack of power and economic representation

of the workforce, and the absence of political change. Discontent was manifested in strikes, very often violently repressed by the police. The 1960s also saw the resurgence of neo-Fascist groups and terrorist attacks, aimed at destroying democratic institutions and establishing an authoritarian regime.

The correlation between the triumph of consumerism and widespread political violence, the two central features of this period, played out in the cultural arena as well. Hence, intellectuals such as Gillo Dorfles and Umberto Eco attempted to elucidate the sentiment of alienation by clarifying the concept of “estrangement” and proposing solutions to it. For instance, Eco applauded the use of dislocated grammar in avant-garde literature as a way to distance the reader from the mystifications of language and to encourage an active engagement in its critical assessment. For his part, Dorfles claimed that all artists should practice what he called a “diastematic art” to de-familiarize the viewers from their incessant flux of perceptions, and encourage the critical questioning of existing conditions of life.¹⁴

Eco, Dorfles and Agnetti were very active in Milan, and members of its intelligentsia. Since 1963, Eco and Dorfles collaborated with the avant-garde magazine *Marcatré*, and Dorfles belonged to the intellectual circle revolving around Manzoni, Castellani, Agnetti and *Azimuth*, in which Dorfles published articles. Furthermore, and more importantly for our present context, during the 1950s and 1960s Eco and Dorfles participated in an intense debate on the value of industrial design with other critics such as Giulio Carlo Argan, Tomás Maldonado, and Filiberto Menna.¹⁵ This debate took place mostly in Milan because, then as now, Milan is where important design companies are headquartered and renowned designers have studios. Moreover, Italian design and architectural magazines, as well as the Triennale Exhibition of Design, are based in Milan.¹⁶

While coming from different theoretical backgrounds – the Russian formalists on one side, the Hegelian tradition on the other – Dorfles and Eco mostly agreed on their diagnosis of contemporary culture, and their interpretations of estrangement complemented each other. Both approached alienation dialectically, with a negative and a positive meaning, concluding that industrial society is responsible for the estrangement of contemporary life, but, paradoxically, through the technique of estrangement artists can also recuperate a more authentic experience. Their analyses offer further insight into the intellectual milieu in which Agnetti’s work developed, and also the theoretical sophistication of his own exploration of estrangement.

Dorfles’ theoretical reference was to the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, whose work, *ostranenie* (“making strange”) refers to such literary strategies as using unusual or foreign terms; breaking of narrative order; and rupturing syntax. Such techniques surprise readers, throwing into question their expectations about how a poem, a story, or a novel is organized and creates meaning. Against such predictable perceptions, which for Shklovsky represented a form of enslavement, *ostranenie* made it possible to

attend to cognitive processes and, thus, to revolutionize the interaction between the subject and the world.¹⁷ Dorfles revised Shklovsky's theory, and in his analysis *ostranenie* becomes a fundamental anthropological necessity.¹⁸ For Dorfles the intervals, breaks and pauses are crucial elements of human experience, as perceptual and mental structure necessitates intermissions between experiences, events, and things in order to comprehend and classify them. However, he argued, perceptual experiences in contemporary society are over-burdened by stimuli, with no time to process and analyze them.

For Dorfles the answer to the uninterrupted flux of information and perception in contemporary society is to introduce interfering strategies that distance the viewers from their own alienated experiences.¹⁹ Art becomes the realm where perception can be re-trained to pay attention to stimuli, instead of processing them unreflectively. Dorfles mentions the introduction of extra-artistic elements, the assemblage of dissimilar fragments, or the rupture of linearity and narrative as the diastematic spatial techniques, which disconcert the viewer by obliging her to pause and perhaps reconsider her perceptual habits. Another group of estranging techniques, which relate not to the structure of the artwork but to its relation to its setting, involve the presence of art in an unexpected context, or the alteration of the usual interaction between viewer and work of art. All these strategies require the spectator to notice the difference between the artwork and normal consumer goods in the attempt to rescue art from its dissolution in normative events and perceptions. Agnetti's work employed these two classes of diastematic techniques, usually activating them in the same artwork by recurrently evoking an element of surprise through the use of non-sense, contradictions, paradoxes, or alteration of machines. These techniques, in turn, emphasize the distinction between artworks and normal objects, for even when Agnetti's point of departure is a regular book, calculator, or gramophone, after his intervention the object is no longer usable for its normal purpose.

Along the same lines, Umberto Eco evoked G.W. F. Hegel and Karl Marx's notions of alienation to analyze contemporary forms of discourse. As noted at the beginning of this essay, Eco published "Form as Social Commitment" in 1962, and in it analyzed the task of the artist, who, he argued, is alienated by capitalistic consumer society. Following Hegel, Eco read alienation as an inevitable relation between humanity and its products, such that things always outpace the producer, making it difficult to identify one's own product. Yet Eco agreed with Marx that the pathological aspects of estrangement from machines, acceptance of the domination of the industry over humanity, and difficulty in establishing meaningful relationships, are more pronounced in capitalism.

Confronted with this situation, Eco observed that artists, writers, and musicians generally adopt one of two attitudes: like "beautiful souls," they choose complete isolation from the world of commodities, refusing to participate in relationships with things and human beings; or they pretend that there is still harmony between humanity, nature, and things. Resisting either position, Eco

called for the artist to communicate in a comprehensible language, interacting with others while simultaneously distancing from language and denouncing the dominating effects of modern channels of communication. "To understand the world, avant-garde art delves into it and assumes its critical condition from within, adopting, to describe it, the same alienated language in which it expresses itself," Eco wrote. Then he added: "But by giving this language a descriptive function and laying it bare as a narrative form, avant-garde art also strips it of its alienating aspects and allows us to demystify it [...] the artist tries to dislocate language from within, in order to escape from the situation and judge it from the outside."²⁰ Rather than become isolated from society, artists must accept the fact that while communication that is bereft of ideology and manipulation is an illusion, it may be deployed critically. Altering the forms of communication, Eco insisted, art "eludes the situation and controls it."²¹ Thus, like Agnetti and Dorfles, Eco embraced aesthetic estrangement as a tool to denounce the oppressive effects of capitalistic ideology.

Eco's article had a lasting influence on Italian art of the 1960s and 1970s, so much so that the Italian critic and curator Germano Celant took up Eco's ideas in his famous 1967 manifesto "Arte Povera. Notes for a Guerrilla War." Celant denounced the contemporary art system for the ways in which it alienates artists, so that even when artists reject the values of consumer society they have to produce for the art market if they want to survive.²² Similarly, Agnetti aligned himself with the Art Povera, agreeing that the task of the artist is to denounce alienated consumer society through the use of unconventional means.²³ However, according to Celant – and it is open to discussion whether his analysis adequately described the practice of Art Povera artists – "[Arte Povera] is a moment that tends towards deculturization, regression, primitiveness and repression, towards the pre-logical and pre-iconographic stage, towards elementary and spontaneous politics, a tendency towards the basic element in nature [...] and in life [...] and in behavior [...] to decrease intellectual control over experience."²⁴ On the contrary, Agnetti aimed to criticize his epoch while being part of it, through a non-alienated usage of its language, technology, and practices, thus thematizing what the critic Maurizio Calvesi has described as "the reasonable panic of technology and mass culture, experienced from within."²⁵

By hindering the normal working of appliances, Agnetti questioned the apparently harmonic relationship between machines and users, a fundamental aspect of industrial capitalism that intensely concerned Eco and Dorfles, especially as the Milanese design industry of the 1960s rendered the machine as functional and attractive as possible. But in their different but complementary work, Dorfles, Eco and Agnetti underscored how, through design, the machine's power over society is hidden. As a result of beauty and comfort, workers forget that they produce these objects in an alienating factory system. By having relatively low prices, this well-designed furniture, household goods, and electrical appliances have the effect of encouraging conspicuous consumption, and

promoting the expansion of the mass market. As Eco explained, "industrial power, by rendering our relationship to things and the world more pleasant, makes us forget that in fact we remain slaves."²⁶ Denouncing this situation, Eco explained: A paradoxical alternative project would be to devise instruments that would make our work as irksome as possible, so that we would never for a second forget that what we are producing is never going to be ours. Such an alternative, however, sounds more like the dream of a madman than like a viable solution.²⁷

Six years after Eco's article, Agnetti put this suggestion in practice, modifying the very desirable machines produced by Olivetti and Brionvega, products that became icons of 1960s Italian design.

The Poetics of Zeroing

Through the zeroing of practices and disciplines, Agnetti interrupted the process of transmission of a message, obliging viewers to attend to the workings of language and machines, stating:

Feeding your neighbour with products made to measure for the hand, the wall, the tired mind means to continue the psychological blackmail, totemic blackmail of the mass tasting. Nothing else. To alter instead the consumer goods, or better yet to degenerate something that has contributed to the fixing of a language, of an agreement by now discontinued, associated, exploited, means something quite different. At least it makes it easier to think it over, the hesitation in the face of the mystifying process.²⁸

For Agnetti, hesitation, insecurity, and uncertainty were indispensable to become an autonomous, critically thinking subject. Interruption and hiatuses not only made viewers attend to their perceptions, but also assisted them in questioning current practices and in developing abilities to imagine alternatives.

Furthermore, Agnetti's emphasis on gaps, breaks, and interruptions enabled him to distance himself from the poetics of the *Azimuth* group, for example the extremely meticulous and precise work of Castellani, as well as from the romanticism of Arte Povera, but, moreover, to align himself with the aims and practices of conceptual art.²⁹ Agnetti stressed how systems and programs operate, and he pushed machines to a breaking point to display how organization and order are not naturally given, but an ideological construction. By showing familiar objects functioning in unfamiliar ways, Agnetti's artistic practice prevents blind confidence in the regular workings of systems and promotes critical active thinking. "Zeroing" erases those mechanisms that weight down creative, perhaps even revolutionary, thought. Agnetti's conceptual machines necessitated selection and reflection. Charles Harrison, the English art historian and member of Art and Language, would write in 2001 that bourgeois art is that "which masked the material conditions of its production behind the seeming immaculateness and instantaneousness of its surface."³⁰ On the contrary, Agnetti's altered machines – ordinary appliances that he disrupted

and made inefficient— make visible their ideological and productive context. If industrial design aestheticizes the relationship between machine and humanity, and thus anesthetizes the latter to the latent injustice of the economic system, Agnetti's interrupted machines display the intrinsic violence of industrial alienation and are a step in the process of change.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ An extended, but quite different version of this essay, was published as "Enthymema. Rivista internazionale di critica, teoria e filosofia della letteratura, no.7, 2012, 543-558. I am extremely grateful to Germana Agnetti and Bruna Soletti for sharing with me their unpublished material and memories of Vincenzo Agnetti in the summers of 2011 and 2012. I thank Professor Kristine Stiles for her invaluable comments on this manuscript.
- ² Umberto Eco, "Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà," *Il Menabò*, n. 5, 1962, pp. 198-237, published in the second edition of *Opera aperta: forma e indeterminazione nelle poetiche contemporanee* (Milan: Bompiani, 1967). English translation: "Form as Social Commitment," *The open work* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 124-157; 123-124.
- ³ Achille Bonito Oliva, "Procedimento Interrotto." *Passo dello strabismo: sulle arti*. (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978), 136-140; 137-138.
- ⁴ Agnetti later turned many of these texts into other works of art: *Aritmetica* (1969), *Oltre il linguaggio* (1969), *Cometa* (1969), *Semiosi* (1970), and *Apocalisse* (1970).
- ⁵ Achille Bonito Oliva, and Giorgio Verzotti. *Vincenzo Agnetti* (Milano: Skira, 2008), 162.
- ⁶ Vincenzo Agnetti, "Titolo: Il brevetto," unclassified notebook. Archivio Vincenzo Agnetti. Courtesy Bruna Soletti and Germana Agnetti.
- ⁷ While this use of the term is not common in English, in what follows I use "poetics" to refer to the "programmatic projects of creation" of a specific artist, the "operative criteria which presided over [the artistic product's] moment of inception," following Umberto Eco's terminology in "The Open Work," *The Open Work*, p. 22. Eco opposes "poetics" to "aesthetics," which "reveals the latent possibilities of a certain type of experience in every artistic product, independently of the poetics" (*Ibid.*, 22).
- ⁸ Interview of the author with Bruna Soletti.
- ⁹ For a facsimile copy of the magazine, see Marco Meneguzzo, ed. *Azimuth & Azimut: 1959: Castellani, Manzoni* (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1984).
- ¹⁰ Vincenzo Agnetti, *Image of an exhibition* (New York: Ronald Feldman Fine Arts- Milano: L'uomo e l'arte, 1974), no page number. English in the original
- ¹¹ Vincenzo Agnetti, *Vincenzo Agnetti: tradotto, azzerato, presentato*, trans. Eve Rockert (Bergamo: Ed. L'Uomo e l'Arte, 1974), 18.
- ¹² In addition to himself, Agnetti cited Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Daniel Buren, and Arakawa Vincenzo Agnetti, "Da: in allegato vi trasmetto un audiotape dalla durata di 40 minuti," *Data. Pratica e teoria delle arti* 4:11 (Spring 1974), 24-31.
- ¹³ "[Kosuth and Weiner] limit themselves to do simple indicative actions, presenting texts written by others, usually linguists and structuralists. On the contrary, I only use my thoughts, I present works that make text on their own, that, like Adorno says, stimulate the dilatation of a concept," Mario Perazzi, "Il 'Concettuale' Agnetti cerca di spiegarsi: Non dipingo i miei quadri," *Corriere della Sera*, Milano, February 20th, 1972. Author's translation.
- ¹⁴ To my knowledge Dorflès' books on this topic have not been published in English: Gillo Dorflès, *Le oscillazioni del gusto e l'arte moderna* ([Rome]: Lerici, 1958); Gillo Dorflès, *Artificio e natura* (Torino: Einaudi, 1968).
- ¹⁵ Gillo Dorflès, *Il disegno industriale e la sua estetica* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1965) and *Le oscillazioni del gusto* (Milano: Lerici, 1958); Umberto Eco, *Appunti per una semiologia delle comunicazioni visive* (Milano: Bompiani, 1967); Giulio Carlo Argan, *Progetto e destino* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1965); Argan's numerous articles and presentations on industrial design have been republished in *Progetto e oggetto. Scritti sul design* (Claudio Gamba, ed., Milano: Medusa, 2003); all of Filiberto Menna's articles on industrial design of the 1960s have been published in *La regola e il caso* (Roma: Ennesse Editrice, 1970). In 1954, on the occasion of the X Triennale of Milan, an international symposium of industrial design was organized. Several philosophers, art critics and artists participated, such as Luciano Anceschi, Giulio Carlo Argan, Gillo Dorflès, Lucio Fontana, Asger Jorn, Tomás Maldonado, Enzo Paci, Walter D. Teague, Jacques Viénot, Konrad Wachsmann. The conference proceedings were published only recently in *La memoria e il futuro. I Congresso Internazionale di Industrial Design. Triennale di Milan, 1954* (Milano: "Biblioteca di Architettura" – Skira, 2001).
- ¹⁶ For the history of Italian design in the 1950s and 1960s, see Enrico Castelnuovo, *Storia del disegno industriale 1919-1990* (Milan: Electa, 1991); Renato De Fusco, *Storia del design* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1985); Andrea Branzi, *Il Design italiano 1964-1990* (Milano: Electa, 1996); Renzo Fossati, *Il Design in Italia 1945-1972*, (Torino: Einaudi Editore, 1972); Penny Sparke, *Design in Italy: 1870 to the present* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988); Giampiero Bosoni, *Il modo italiano: Italian design and avant-garde in the 20th century* (Montréal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2006).
- ¹⁷ Viktor Shklovsky. "Art as Technique." *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Ed & trans by Lee T. Lemon & Marion J. Reis. 1st ed. 1917. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965): 3-24. Simon Watney, "Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror," in *Thinking Photography*, ed. by Victor Burgin (London: Macmillan, 1982).
- ¹⁸ Dorflès's initial engagement with the notion of aesthetic estrangement appeared in his 1958 book *Le oscillazioni del gusto e l'arte moderna*, but he developed this concept in *Artificio e natura* (1968) and finally completed his theory in *L'intervallo perduto* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1980).
- ¹⁹ Dorflès, *L'intervallo perduto*, 77.
- ²⁰ Eco, "Form as Social Commitment," 141.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² Germano Celant. "Arte Povera: Appunti Per Una Guerriglia." *FlashArt* 5 (1967): 3. English translation, with no translator indicated: *Arte Povera*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), 35.
- ²³ Agnetti was a personal friend of Arte Povera artists Mario and Marisa Merz, and Alighiero Boetti. He also exhibited with them in the exhibitions "Vitalità del negativo nell'arte italiana 1960-1970" (Roma, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 1970) and "Contemporanea" (Roma, Parcheggio di Villa Borghese, 1973).
- ²⁴ Celant, *Art Povera*, 230.
- ²⁵ Maurizio Calvesi. "Arte e critica dopo l'avanguardia." *Avanguardia di massa* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978), 185.
- ²⁶ Eco, "Form as Social Commitment," 128.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*: 127-128.
- ²⁸ Agnetti, *Tradotto*, 18.
- ²⁹ Castellani created repetitive patterns and used laborious incisions to realize relief paintings that activated a field of light and shade on the surface of the canvas.
- ³⁰ Charles Harrison. *Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 11.