

## Two Accounts of Collective Poetics

### On Collettivo di Pronto Intervento Poetico “Altri Luoghi”

This narrative account aims to describe the ten active years of the Collettivo di Pronto Intervento Poetico “Altri Luoghi” (Collective for immediate poetic intervention “other places”), describing in brief the schemata of its collective public interventions. Its components, the artificers, perverse gamers of authorities, individuals folded together as one plural, are Marco Berisso, Piero Cademartori, Guido Caserza, Massimo Drago, Marcello Frixione, and Paolo Gentiluomo.

Prior to the group performances, *Altri Luoghi* was the name of a journal begun in 1989 consisting of bound photocopies arranged in a folded cover sheet; it focused on art at the margins, literature as well as music and theater, though the work included was not limited to a single outlook on poetics. In search of a broader horizon of collaboration, the group participated in the formation and work of Gruppo 93, a group of poets from the early 90s that set forth, primarily through the publication of little magazines, to create forums for dialogue between variously ranging languages, personalities, and traditions, all with the common desire to rekindle critical and contemporary writing.

The collective works of *Altri Luoghi* are disturbative and displacing: they drive—especially when confronting issues of a political and religious nature—toward desecration, toward derision, toward intrigue; they provoke contrasts, ruptures, corrosions; and they typically redirect the situation of a text used elsewhere (an “altro luogo,” that is) in a *détournement* that draws from the physical locations of the readings. These “collective interventions,” as they are called, have been staged in theaters, nightclubs, museums, desecrated churches, libraries, cloisters, courtyards, cafes, beaches, open spaces, social centers and hotels, plazas, galleries, concert halls, *palazzi*, public housing, clubs, auditoriums, former slaughterhouses. Their scripts were concocted ad hoc, in situ; their forthcoming print volume *Made to Measure* is



*Mamma*: Marco Berisso, Piero Cademartori, Paolo Gentiluomo.  
August 7, 1991, Nervi, Marilyn Piano Bar and Bath House.

therefore secondhand, misleading, impertinent, inappropriate. In the Marilyn Piano Bar and Bath House, near Genoa, the team sang an altered version of the beach-blanket hit *Mamma*. The *Poema Stalin* (Stalin poem) is meant to be performed in a church. In *Cannibalàus*, the text's rhythm initially feels like a prayer, a chant, a metrical form familiar to the convent where it is set; and yet eventually this holy aura devolves into the profane, treating the Eucharist as a crude act of cannibalism.

Beyond its contexts, however, the disturbative character of Altri Luoghi's writing can also be found within, in its themes and imagery. Among these, the *altro luogo* par excellence, i.e., death itself, occurs in almost all of their writings. It starts with the individual authors, collectively killed (and occasionally resurrected), from which the texts, through their writing or staging as chorus, are destroyed, modified, rewritten, and ex-authorized. Altri Luoghi also perform recontextualization, often morbid critiques of prior works. The otherworldly journey of the *Divine Comedy* is ridiculed in the operatic *Hotel Gran Paradiso*. The supernatural, metaphysical contents are grounded on physical, geographical coordinates. The heavens are reached by aircraft, with updates on changes in temperature and astronomical features. Life

after death in the afterworld is stark, materialized, amalgamated, shoddy: i.e., incarnate. The geography of the otherworldly kingdom is cemented into a five-star hotel, where Peter is the bellhop, Mary the concierge, the heavenly choirs entertain tourists, Dante's questions to the blessed are quiz shows on the in-room television, and Beatrice is taken into Paradise not by divine intercession but because of her shapeliness. Abstract religious representations are returned to earth, translated into physiological laws; here, as in so many other of their works, the mysteries of the Catholic faith are subjected to relentless mockery.

Beyond the leitmotifs of religion and death, the definitive disturbing elements can be heard in the works concerning politics, power. *Poema Stalin*, for example, advocates the furthest extremes to remedy the purges of the Stalinist era. It condemns with names:

we've scrutinized how  
they suffered these woes,  
the worst of those  
through death and bleak mourning  
from Gavi and Andreotti  
those goddamn Forlani,  
Amilcari Fanfani  
Cossiga and Ughi 'ntini,  
Lamalfé and Spadolini.  
Might all their high breeding  
erupt into bleeding  
and not leave a trace  
on each cocksucking face.

In the end, it voices a desire for the emptiness of permanent exile, not just from city or politics, but from life itself, as the voices dig into the afterlife of the underground.

The group unlocks contrasts by experimentation with the relationship between form/theme and performance locations. Metrical structures rooted in literary tradition accumulate with forms of oral tradition, including monologue, prayer, song, spoken dialect, and television advertising slogan. The past is interpolated into the present, the traditionally highbrow text with the popular. So in the theatrical-dramatic structure of *Maria lavava Giuseppe* (Mary washed Joseph),

**PAOLO GENTILUOMO**

**VOCE II**

(\*) A OGNI NUMERO UN ATTECO (Cioè un SEGNAL DA UN PIANO) DEL DIRETTORE!

1  
TACET  
INIZIA SOLO IL "MIXER"  
COME POTREBBE

2  
IN UN ISTESSO PUNTO COMPRESO LA FORMA CHE MI PUNSE

3  
RENDERELA IN UN PUNTO ALLA MEMORIA? PER CUI MI FINGO

4  
OTTICO E FISILOGO SE LA VIRTÙ S'ADDOPPIA E TENTA IL NERV

5  
ATTACCO DEL DIRETTORE  
D'UN FISILOGICO SETE NON VE-DO, GUARDO LA FI-GU-RA

6  
TACET  
INDIPENDETE 18"  
IL ENTRI NEI MIEI FISSO 1

Page of Paolo Gentiluomo's part from score by Francesco Denini, *La musica contaminata* (Contaminated music), from the *Traiettorie sonore XII*, Lake Como, December 9, 1995.

The marginal note at top reads: (\*) at each number a cue (i.e. hand signal) from the director! The score itself reads: how could an unextended point comprehend the form that pricks me rendering it one point to the memory? for which I play optician and physiologist if virtù doubles and challenges the nerve of a physiological thirst / if I do not see you, I look at your shape.

the refrain of biblical verses describing the Nativity alternates with various nursery rhymes; an excerpt of an advertisement sung by the Italian pop star Lorenzo Jovanotti is joined to a famous passage of Leopardi. In *Illustrazione del dogma della trinità* (Illustration of the dogma of the Trinity) we find the precise, structured repetition of themes in identical order contrasted by the regularized, explicit incompleteness in the text's tripartite structure. This tripartite structure is completed in hendecasyllables at the end of the following piece, *Definizioni di una rivista* (Definitions of a magazine), leaving behind the theme of the Trinity. In *Hotel Gran Paradiso*, Dante's *terza rima* is largely tossed aside, yet becomes fodder for parody in the section titled *Metrica del Paradiso* (Paradise metrics), where the terminology of academic literary criticism is evacuated and sent up: "Abi-a abi-a. // A'bbi abbì, àbbi abbì // Bi / a / bi, / bi / a / bi... // Biabbabà biabbi abbì, bidibou bidi bà!" This is also the finale: it is the firing squad of texts, ready to send you off to another world, with a maniacal laugh in the face of death.

Sergio Garau



*Oratorio*: Piero Cademartori, Guido Caserza, Massimo Drago, Paolo Gentiluomo.  
November 1996, Teatro di Sant'Agostino, Genoa.

## On bib(h)icante

The “collective writing workshop bib(h)icante” was formed at the turn of the millennium by Donald Datti, Gabriele Pipia, Gianluca Seimandi, and Fabrizio Venerandi, and continued its work—with some defections—for most of the first decade of this century. The poets were united by their interest in alternative writing modes (which each undertakes on his own apart from the group); by similar age (all born in the first half of the 1970s); and by their base of operations, Genoa. These four paths converged in a shared experiment based on the model of the Collettivo di Pronto Intervento Poetico “Altri Luoghi” and a common cultural background.

Bib(h)icante followed the gestures of their predecessors with peremptorily similar modes of operation. But while Altri Luoghi always accompanied their group performance work and group writing with a robust theoretical apparatus,<sup>1</sup> bib(h)icante drafted only an internal startup document, which followed undrafted and unpublished discussions.<sup>2</sup> There is thus a certain modesty involved in their group poetics, as well as a desire to prioritize *poesis*: to bring the texts into various places and see firsthand the effect achieved. The collective practice of bib(h)icante was largely to write for the collective macrotext, rather than perform readings of preexisting individual texts assembled for group performance. Where Altri Luoghi welcomed writers into its ad hoc performances—poets, novelists, critics, including the likes of

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1/ See *Gruppo 93. Le tendenze attuali della poesia e della narrativa—antologia di testi teorici e letterari* (Gruppo 93: Current trends in poetry and prose—an anthology of theoretical and literary texts; San Cesario di Lecce: Manni Editori, 1993).

2/ After 2004, with their collective cut in half, Datti and Venerandi pursued a theoretical discourse recapitulating their “changing histories,” though these exercises were never formalized. See [bibhicante.splinder.com](http://bibhicante.splinder.com) and [storiehecambiano.blogspot.com](http://storiehecambiano.blogspot.com).

Francesco Forlani, Rossana Campo, Angel Calvisi, and Franco Vazzoler—bib(h)icante always had a fixed number of performers. Its final act after a decade of public activity, its denouement into retirement, was the publication of a book. The preface reads: “This is a book that concludes a work-in-progress.... The workshop has dematerialized over the years, the appearance of collective closed, turning instead into a hub of texts and common projects carried out by individual authors” (from bib(h)icante, *Lavori di Bocca* [Labors of the mouth; Parma: Biblioteca Clandestina Errabonda, 2009]).

Consider some examples, drawn largely from the corpus of their ongoing libretto collected in *Lavori di Bocca. Il gioco del bastone* (Nightstick game, 1999) was written and performed in an area of Genoa’s historical center favored by anti-immigrant enforcement patrols. The idea was to introduce a dissonant voice into a hostile situation. The text has an almost theatrical feel; it is divided into three parts (“Prologue,” “Nightstick Match,” “Final Litany”) and a fractured ensemble of voices: a chorus and a counterchorus, the knight, the victim, the public. An insistence on the figure of repetition in the execution of reading aloud (especially by multiple voices) becomes an effective and flexible communication tool offering various options (choruses, vocal doubling, shouted emphases, sound passages structured by rhythmic repetition, a sort of aural punctuation, a calibration of tempo much like the bass and drums in a band):

Clamp down their bags clamp  
up their mouths clamp down on stores  
clamp in those flies clamp on  
their eyes clamped on the ranks  
clamp over the lights clamped in  
the circle clamped tight those shit  
holes clamped up those clamped old hands

The division of voices typically happens during the writing phase, then undergoes calibration during performance by balancing the individual voices. Various solutions might be adopted during on-stage performance, but the text maintains an essentially precise structure; there are instances of more substantial intervention in adapting text to the performance locale, as in the case of *La liturgia della cosa* (The liturgy of the thing), a text that has undergone multiple revisions,

ending with a hypothetical final version dated 2005. This is a staging of the cult of the poem-commodity (poetry as commodity without market): the text is structured by the rhythms of a Roman Catholic mass into which are slotted the parables of the dog and the star, archetypal tales of postmodern consumer alienation. For a performance at the Quotapoesia festival, bib(h)icante sampled the voice of a watch retailer from television, mixing their own voices with sound effects to create a third computer voice used during the live performance to match the posture of the duo, kneeling and lying in prayer.

The language of bib(h)icante is a hybrid brand of crisp yet coarse remnants of literary diction, modes of expression characterized by samples of everything from crude barroom chatter to the police report, from Italian mass media programs to keywords from the Catholic liturgy. Writing inclined toward the oratical as a compositional project works to dismantle the worn-out processes of both written and spoken language: through utterance the gross fraud of language is revealed, often to grotesque effect.

At a later stage the group's characteristic potentiality of timbre and register of voice, chorus, and counterchorus, declines somewhat, partly due to a rejiggering of the lineup into a mere two components, and partly because some of its collective projects were designed mainly for reading on paper. In the latter mode, one might consider *11 fotogrammi della caduta* (11 still frames of the fall, 2006), which was published in an original version and a reading version (2007), the former conceived for a group reading in support of demolishing a firm known for its abusive real estate speculation (a demolition which took place later in 2009). The reading never took place, but the following year the text was reformulated as part of a multimedia program with images by Matteo Galiano/Eliart.<sup>3</sup> The first theme of the text, the fall, is indexed by the physical fact of a building collapsing, which, frame by frame, is formed into a body and then decomposes, in parallel to the collapse of language and images of the poetic soundtrack. In the second text—the “reading” text—the language material is recycled with added force: #2, which opens the first version is found in the second version in several clusters; initially it appears only up to a certain time, but then it is restarted so that a bit more text is added

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3/ Available on [icity-periferiche.com](http://icity-periferiche.com).



in stages, until the entirety of the passage is recovered at the end. The collapse is treated almost as a mirrored recording of the event we saw previously, first the ruins of the text and then a recomposition in its reverse staging.

Over a decade of activity, bib(h)icante produced other highly performative texts that were more spontaneous, and gave rise to more elaborate stagings than the typical group formation—standing in a line as if awaiting the firing squad of the audience, with limited physical movement, with the main focus on chorus-counterchorus, sound distortion, and various vocalized affectations. One of the most vividly staged interventions of bib(h)icante is one of its most notorious: *Strip poesia* (Strip poetry). Datti and Venerandi took stage in full dress, Seimandi came up wearing only a transparent raincoat, and Pipia was covered with balloons—during the reading, the poems were stripped of verses while Datti derobed, Venerandi cut off his clothes one piece at a time, and Pipia burst the balloons. Seimandi, naturally, turns out to be the designated prophylactic.

Paolo Gentiluomo

*Translated by Joel Calahan*