



IDEOLOGY AND MEMORY IN FABIO MAURI'S PERFORMANCES AND WRITINGS FROM 1970S: AN EXAMPLE OF INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses a set of performances and installations created by the Italian artist Fabio Mauri (1926-2009) in connection with his theoretical writings and anchors them to the international artistic concern of the time: institutional critique. Eight of Mauri's performances from the 1970s are documented. This study centres on the first three chronologically – *Che cosa è il fascismo*, *Esercizi spirituali* and *Ebrea*, all dated 1971 – which better exemplify the theme on which Mauri focused throughout this period. As theoretical texts, photographs and objects reveal, these eight performances and installations all involve the critique of ideology as institution. This practice shares many similarities with institutional critique, that is, the international and systematic inquiry that aims at subverting the roles of the art market and artistic institutions. This paper offers a novel interpretation of Mauri's work as an example of institutional critique in Italy.

KEYWORDS

Ideology | Institutional critique | Mauri | Memory | Performance.

INTRODUCTION

It is no simple task to reflect on performances that took place during the 1970s, both because of the ephemeral character of the medium, an essential characteristic of its emotional impact on the public, and the specificity of the historical and artistic context. To accomplish this goal, reflection should be based on documents – photographs of the events, the artist's texts and instructions and any included objects – the particular historical conjuncture of the time and an intertwined narrativity. Relying on this material, we must consider all possible clues, starting with the biography of the artist, which in this case seems particularly relevant.

The personality and artistic interests of Fabio Mauri (1926-2009) have their foundations in the familiar and historical contexts in which he lived.¹ His father, Umberto, was a theatrical impresario, and his mother, Maria Luisa Bompiani, was the sister of Valentino Bompiani, who in 1929 founded the publishing house that bears his name. In that same year, after he became commercial director of the Mondadori publishing house, Umberto Mauri moved his family to Milan, where Fabio Mauri first came into contact with contemporary art. Around 1938, accompanied by Michele Ranchetti, he visited the art gallery Barbaroux, located on via della Spiga, where he became acquainted with the works of Carlo Carrà, Giorgio De Chirico, Fiorenzo Tomea, Arturo Tosi and Alberto Savinio. This experience was decisive for his future artistic career.

In 1931, the Mauri family moved to Bologna, where Umberto served as the director of the Italian Messaggerie – a distributor of newspapers, books and magazines. At the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (GIL) of Bologna – a circle where young people with literary interests encountered one another on Saturdays² – Fabio Mauri met Pier Paolo Pasolini, who was a few years his elder and who had a decisive impact on his intellectual development.³ Another constitutive figure from this cultural circle was Decio Cinti – the personal secretary of the Futurist poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti – who introduced Mauri to the works of the futuristic avant-garde, which in their turn also had a considerable impact on Mauri's artistic research from 1968 on.

In 1938, an intellectual competition for the Italian youth was organised in Florence during a visit by Adolf Hitler. The GIL of Bologna participated and won. From this experience, Mauri drew inspiration for the performance *Che cosa è il fascismo*, performed decades later in 1971. In 1942, the GIL wished to publish a magazine to distribute the writings of the circle. To this end, Pasolini and Fabio Mauri co-founded *Il Setaccio*, with Pasolini as editor-in-chief. However, Pasolini came soon into conflict with the director, Giovanni Falzone, who was loyal to the regime and its rhetoric, and the magazine ceased publication after only six issues.⁴ The final issue of *Il Setaccio* includes Pasolini's article *Ultimo discorso sugli intellettuali*, which contains an indictment against

1 Fabio Mauri was one of the protagonists of the Italian avant-garde in the second post-war period. He was born in Rome in 1926 and lived in both Bologna and Milan until 1957, when he returned to Rome. For 20 years, he taught aesthetics of experimentation at the Academy of Fine Arts in L'Aquila. He participated in the Venice Art Biennale in 1974, 1978, 1993, 2003 and 2015 [Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (ASAC), Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia, inventory 301112, 7940 and 27781]. For an exhaustive synopsis of Fabio Mauri's biography, see Mauri, 1994 and Christov-Bakargiev, 1994, from which the biographical notes mentioned in this paper are taken.

2 The Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (GIL) was the youth organisation of the National Fascist Party (PNF) of Italy, established on 27 October 1937 and dissolved on 25 July 1943. From 1937 on, young boys and girls were under the control of two different kinds of organisations: the Gruppi Universitari Fascisti (GUF), for those who attended university; and the GIL, for all the others. These organisations aimed to indoctrinate young people according to the ideals of the regime. More specifically, they were designed to accomplish three goals: (1) to instil the myths of the regime in the minds of the youth, such as the cult of the Duce, national and racial sentiments and an acceptance of war and violence; (2) to counter powerful traditional institutions, such as the family and the Church, with alternative ways of socialisation; and (3) to provide physical and paramilitary training, sometimes disguised as sport. To promote loyalty to the party and forge a single national consciousness, the Fascist regime organised, through the GIL and the GUF, regional and national mass meetings, bringing together youths from all over the country (De Grand, 2004: 42, 81-83; Koon, 1985: 173-183).

3 Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) was one of the most important Italian intellectuals of the 20th century. With exceptional cultural versatility, he distinguished himself as a poet, novelist, dramatist, linguist, journalist and filmmaker. An alert observer of the transformation of society from the second post-war period until the mid-seventies, he often aroused strong controversy and heated debates due to the radical nature of his judgements, being very critical of both bourgeois habits and nascent Italian consumerism, as well as the protests of 1968 and their protagonists (Siciliano, 1982).

4 The editions of the magazine *Il Setaccio* are as follows: November, December 1942; January, February, March, May 1943.

propaganda that manipulates culture and therefore critiques the Fascist regime.

Working at *Il Setaccio*, Pasolini gained important experience as an organiser, thanks to which he understood the sclerotic and provincial nature of Fascism. As a consequence, Pasolini adopted an anti-Fascist ideology, which was also solidified by his reading of the works of Marcel Proust and Arthur

Rimbaud (Naldini, 1999: LXII). In this context, Mauri too, in close contact with Pasolini, created the basis for an anti-Fascist discourse, which he developed more decisively during the 1970s. The reconstruction of these experiences seems crucial to understanding the factors that guided Mauri's artistic research, particularly from 1971, when he started working on his first performances and installations.

ART AND IDEOLOGY

Italy between the late 1960s and early 1970s was moving from post-war reconstruction to a phase of advanced capitalism, with a major population shift from the agricultural South to the industrialised North.⁵ The protests that exploded in various parts of the industrialised world in 1968 defined the beginning of the 1970s. The social and political turmoil of this period is reflected artistically in the passage from representation to communication. Artists felt the need to reconstruct reality from different points of view, that is, social, musical, artistic, cinematographic and theatrical. This resulted in the rediscovery of the body, militancy, anti-authoritarianism, global protest, counter-information and anti-fascism.

The 1970s can be considered the decade in which the non-objective idea of art, already active in the 1960s, became radicalised. The Dadaist movement is the point of reference for the majority of the theoretical and practical trends, ideas and actions that took shape in these years. The new generation of artists that emerged from this context aimed to undermine the artistic establishment in different ways: (1) eluding the figure of the critic and writing (mainly programmatic) texts; (2) looking for new spaces and display solutions to replace the canonical art galleries and their dynamics; (3) wondering about the meaning and creation of art. As a result, actions and performances took precedence over the traditional object; the message was particularly critical and questioned all accredited artworks; and art moved closer and closer to society.

Happenings, environmental art, Minimalism, Land art, Conceptual art, Body art, the work of Joseph Beuys in

Germany and the Arte Povera movement in Italy all reflect the ideology of 1968. The artists associated with these artistic movements and trends rejected the idea of art as an object and a commodity. Italian examples in this sense are, among others: Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'Artista* (1961); Pino Pascali's *Armi series* (1965-1966); and Jannis Kounellis' exhibition (1969) at the Galleria L'Attico in Rome, where, instead of exhibiting paintings, he transformed the gallery into a stable, introducing twelve living horses (Fig. 01). All the above artists denied the very concept of the work of art as an exchange value and nullified, most of the time, the dichotomy between art and life.



Fig. 01. Jannis Kounellis, *Untitled (Cavalli)*, 1969 (© Jannis Kounellis).

In this artistic and historical context, Fabio Mauri began to create performances as a form of art through which he could cause the public to re-live history.⁶ In doing so, Mauri distanced himself from the performance as

⁵ For the historical, social and artistic contexts of the 1970s, see Strano, 2005.

⁶ Fabio Mauri's artistic research before 1971 (that is, when he started to focus on performance) can be divided into five main categories: (1) drawings and paintings dated from 1954 with reference to German Expressionism; (2) drawings and collages dated between 1957 and 1960 close to neo-dada, proto-pop and proto-conceptual research; (3) the series of monochromatic paintings called *Schermi*, dated between 1957 and 1994; (4) the series of sculptures called *Pile a luce solida* and *Cinema a luce solida*, dated 1968; and (5) the installations, such as *Luna*, also created in 1968 (Christov-Bakargiev and Cossu, 1994: 54-112).

it was conceived at that time, giving shape to his own idea of performance. During the 1970s, he created eight performances and art installations: *Che cosa è il fascismo* (1971), *Esercizi spirituali* (1971), *Ebrea* (1971), *Il televisore che piange* (1972), *Ideologia e Natura* (1973), *Oscuramento* (1975), *Dramophone* (1976) and *Europa bombardata* (1978). Mauri integrated this practice with writing, containing aesthetic, philosophical and historical-political reflections that should be read in connection with his artistic research.

His theoretical texts include *Nel 1940 ebbe la guerra* (1970), supported by photographs; *Note tecniche, comunque disorganiche, sull'azione "Che cosa è il fascismo"* (1971); *Esercizi spirituali* (1971); *Ebrea* (1971); *Con/senza – ideologia e natura* (1973); *Oscuramento* (1975); *Dramophone* (1976); *Saggio senza parole* (1978); and *Muro d'Europa* (1979). These texts often have the same title as the performances and installations to which they refer. Some theoretical writings were distributed on the occasion of the exhibitions of the works to complement the performance or installation. This helped visitors better understand the works and allow for more than merely contemplative participation. This, for instance, was the case of *Note tecniche, comunque disorganiche, sull'azione "Che cosa è il fascismo"*, *Ebrea* and *Muro d'Europa*. Often they include autobiographical notes linked to public events. The themes essentially concern the vicissitudes Mauri encountered during his first 18 years of life: the Second World-War, his religious conversion, his psychological issues, the drama of the disappearance of his Jewish friends and his discovery of the dangers of Fascism.

Without a historical survey of the 20 years of Fascism, it is impossible to fully understand the fundamental themes that run through Mauri's research, both theoretical and practical, in the 1970s. The first half of the twentieth century was dominated by violence on a global scale. The development of military technology contributed to this situation, which led to millions of war victims and to the extermination – in the name of race, political ideology and religion – of groups of

people or entire populations (Calvesi and Ginsburg, 2000). Violence was the essence of the Italian Fascist regime. It suppressed civil liberties, destroyed the free press and any real opposition, attempted to regulate daily life and prepared for war. The Fascist government was a racist regime in both its colonial policy and its anti-Semitism (racial laws were passed in 1938 by the Italian government, with the consequent forced displacement of the Jewish population). Italy re-emerged from the war bombed, defeated and humiliated. Perhaps there is no better example of the representation of these terrible historical events than the artistic and theoretical works that Fabio Mauri created in the 1970s. His performances and installations are an exceptional testimony to a very dark period of Italian history.

The 1964 edition of the Venice Art Biennale – which celebrated American Pop Art – represented for Mauri an occasion to reflect upon and investigate the perverse mechanism of the Fascist system. It is in this precise moment that Mauri began to meditate on the specificity of European culture and to understand that it was different from that of the United States, identifying the characteristic ideological focus of Europe and the anxious object that distinguishes America.⁷ "Around 1964, certainly for me, certainly for others, began the reflection in which ideology was understood as such. I saw ideology as the equivalent element of the emblematic American 'anxious' object. It was what was sold and bought in Europe. It was what occupied the foundations of the exchange. An intricate ideology, neither disposed of nor reflected from the beginning, but operating in its contradiction, as history has shown, at all levels of social activity and, under it, in the dark or in the shadow of simple group reflections".⁸ According to Mauri, Europe is a great producer and consumer of ideologies. The theme of ideology is at the base of Mauri's research from the early 1960s through the 1970s and beyond. It is the impulse that drove him to experiment with new forms of art, such as performance, books, videos and projections, as he himself states: "This was my ideological or conscious practice....A suggestive and

⁷ Mauri borrowed the concept of anxious object from Rosenberg, 1964.

⁸ Mauri, 1984: 6: "Proprio attorno al 1964, di sicuro per me, certo per altri, iniziò la riflessione in cui l'ideologia era compresa come tale. Vidi presentarsi l'ideologia come l'elemento equivalente dell'emblematico oggetto 'ansioso' americano. Era ciò che si vendeva e si comprava in Europa. Ciò che occupava le fondazioni dello scambio. Un'ideologia intricata, non smaltita, né riflettuta da capo, ma operante nella sua conflittualità, come la storia ha poi dimostrato, in tutti i livelli dell'attività sociale e, sotto di essa, nel buio o all'ombra delle semplici riflessioni di gruppo". Unless noted otherwise, subsequent translations are my own.

critical representation of ideology as an active and operative object, even a deadly one".⁹

Mauri's reflection on the invasive role of ideology in Europe takes the form of a series of performances and installations in which the work of art becomes a presentation of history in a way that the spectator can recognise a particular ideology as false and harmful. The ideology that Mauri refers is not only that of the past, in the Fascist case, but also that of the present, inasmuch as in the years in which Mauri has worked, ideology has still been on the agenda. Mauri describes this aspect in *Cosa è, se è, l'ideologia nell'arte* (1984): "In the 1960s, ideology is the subsequent theme, as mathematicians say. The Europe of '68 is entirely contained in it. It is a necessary place to decipher the 'subsequent' '70s".¹⁰ Therefore, borrowing the term "subsequent" ("elastic lag" in English) from mechanics, Mauri reflects on the echo of past ideologies in the contemporary period due to the deforming character of ideology.¹¹

Mauri proposes his own definition of ideology: "An ineradicable interpretation of the world, by the poetic conscience *tout court*".¹² Then, he explains his method of art-making: "A witness, a patient rather than an actor, decides to react poetically, using the 'distance' of history. By way of irrefutable memory, he remounts an archival event, combining it, in rethinking it as 'true', with the present...The past is translated into the present".¹³ Therefore, for Mauri, art is a way to re-live history in the present, a way to train memory as a therapy to solve personal psychological questions – created by an intrusive ideology – that have remained unsolved.

Focusing on ideology and its effects on history and people, Mauri's attention is about time, inasmuch as his performances render the viewer a witness of events that occur before his eyes, but he or she is aware that in reality these facts happened during another period in time. In doing so, Mauri forces the

beholder to experience a period and place that no longer exist, for example the Fascist period, in which the relationship between the ambiguity of language and the manipulation of conscience prevailed. From 1971 on, Mauri's aim has been precisely to denounce this relationship together with Fascist language, capable of being seductive even in its most dangerous ideological forms.

As is evident in his works, with Mauri everything becomes artistic material – public and personal history, ideology, politics, philosophy, science – with an exhibited rebellion against the institutional canons and practices of art-making. Data, historical artefacts, photographs and performances reproduce with great meticulousness singular and emblematic events of a prior period, Nazism, and present the languages and rites that distinguished it. The aesthetic space becomes a place for events, and the observer is not only a participant, but also part of the work itself. The peculiarity of Mauri's performances seems to lie exactly in the capacity to transform the visitor into an actor, in forcing him or her enter an event, or better yet, a space in which to re-live memories. In this way, Mauri presents reality instead of representing it, by exhibiting the body, object, word, screen and public.

9 Mauri, 1989: 227: "Questa è stata la mia pratica ideologica o di coscienza ... Una rappresentazione suggestiva e critica dell'ideologia, come oggetto attivo e operante, persino mortale".

10 Mauri, 1984: 6: "Degli anni sessanta, l'ideologia è il tema susseguente, come dicono i matematici. Vi è contenuta per intero l'Europa del '68. Luogo necessario per decifrare i 'susseguenti' anni '70".

11 In mechanics, "subsequent" refers to "elastic lag", which is the phenomenon by which, when the deforming action of an elastic body ceases, the deformation does not disappear instantly, but persists for a long time. Therefore, this metaphor seems to work perfectly to exemplify the concept to which Mauri refers, that is, the sign of the cultural and social deformation effected by ideology remains even after the ideology itself has been cast aside.

12 Mauri, 1984: 31: "Un'ineliminabile interpretazione del mondo, da parte della coscienza poetica *tout court*".

13 Mauri, 1984: 31: "Un testimone, più paziente che attore, decide di reagire poeticamente, utilizzando la 'distanza' della storia. A forza di inconfutabile memoria, egli rimonta un evento d'archivio, raccostandolo, nel ripensarlo come 'vero', al presente ... Si traduce il passato in presente".

CHE COSA È IL FASCISMO AND THE ART OF MEMORY

Performance as a form of art became an accepted practice in the 1970s (Goldberg, 2001: 7-9, 152-154; Goldberg, 2004; Frieling and Groys, 2008). It is the response to a particular social condition, determined by the interference of the economy in different forms of reality. For this reason, the international artistic research of the 1960s and 1970s is interested in the interaction between art and life, bringing attention to art as process rather than art as object.¹⁴

The performance *Che cosa è il fascismo* (Fig. 02), which is linked to the text *Note tecniche, comunque disorganiche, sull'azione "Che cosa è il fascismo"*, is the first work on ideology that Mauri conceived, calling it a "complex action" (Mauri, 1971a: 21). He set it in the locales wherein the triumphs of the Roman cinema of the regime took place, the Cinematographic Studios *Safa Palatino* of Rome, on 2 April 1971. In this performance, Mauri reconstructed the rally held in Florence in 1939 by the GIL and the *Hitlerjugend*, in which he himself participated together with Pasolini, in a series of terrible *tableaux* that illustrate the situation of a generation alienated by the rhetoric of the regime.

Che cosa è il fascismo addresses the collective removal of recent history through the reproduction, with rigorous philological attention, of a ceremony of *ludi juveniles* of the Fascist era. The performance begins with the commands, given from atop of the podium, for the distribution of young people in uniform – performing gymnastics, fencing, skating, waving, singing hymns, and conducting debates and individual interventions on the mystique of the regime. The action takes place in the presence of the wax mannequin of General Ernst Von Hussel, the Eritrean Consul, played by an actor, and the public arranged in six black tribunes divided by corporations (authority, personality, academics, magistrates, villagers, Italian press, foreign press, etc.). At the centre is a large rectangular carpet bearing the Nazi swastika, symbolising the location where the entire ceremony takes place. Behind the podium is a white screen on which is written "The End" (Fig. 03) in vintage characters; on the opposite side are other two tribunes, narrower than the previous ones, bearing the star of David and reserved for Jewish men and women, respectively. Behind them is a three-metre-high metal scaffolding from which a documentary



Fig. 02. Fabio Mauri, *Che cosa è il fascismo*, 1971 (© Studio Fabio Mauri).

¹⁴ Emblematic in this sense is the exhibition curated by Harald Szeeman in 1969 at the Kunsthalle Bern, *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* (Szeeman, 1969).

of the Istituto Luce is projected.¹⁵ Different songs, including *Giovinezza* and *Fuoco di Vesta*, accompany the performance.¹⁶

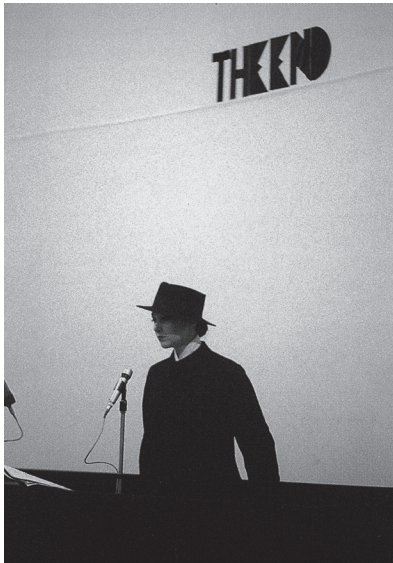


Fig. 03. Fabio Mauri, *Che cosa è il fascismo (The End)*, 1971 (© Studio Fabio Mauri).

As Mauri states, the contrast between the apparent normality of the events, such as the pacific juxtaposition of Jews and fascists, and the presence of negative signals, such as “The End” on the white screen, generates a sense of disquiet in the mind of the viewer. The sound of the bombardment does nothing but increase the sense of anguish and final collapse: “A thread of irony, obtained by elementary combinations, runs through the programme. It is one of the ‘negative signs’ that, in the performance, communicates to the viewer the critical event. Other ‘negative signs’ are ‘The End’ on the white screen where the documentary by Luce is projected; the indications on the tribunes and the German general, in honour of whom the feast is celebrated, now and forever ‘of wax’. Signs that cannot be equivocated in their meaning, indispensable

to anchor, in the public’s eyes, the critical point of view from which to look at the aberrant elements exhibited in such a serene form”.¹⁷

In *Che cosa è il fascismo*, Mauri records and documents, like a historian, attitudes, idioms and behaviours of Fascist demonstrations. He investigates the processes of memory and imagination, “To free this image in real form, albeit lasting an hour”.¹⁸ Through an exercise of memory, Mauri transforms history into a work of art, a history that includes Nazism and the environment of a bourgeoisie that is increasingly represented by objects.

This process to deconstruct the mechanisms of manipulation of thought leads Mauri to conclude that war consists not only of cannons and crematoriums, but also of language and communication. The mass media were used significantly by the Fascist regime in parallel with the development of the film industry and radio. The screen and the projection present in the performance are symbols of the manipulation of political consensus, the instruments of the most refined and pervasive ideological seduction: “Here one experiences in a short time the false ideology, the abyss of institutionalised superficiality, the tautology of absolute power, the intimate malignancy of the lie hidden in the order, the shame of cultural confusion, the irresponsibility of those who hold for themselves the freedom of collective judgement, the deception of youth that brings grace and faith to act as a prelude to every massacre. Error ties in with anything else, especially with truth and beauty. The nonsense of innocent nature is a naive accomplice of every evil. The seductive nothingness of when, seeming to finally solve the complexity of reality in a simple datum, the void finds space and takes shape in the mind and bodies, mimicking the serious, the true and the profound”.¹⁹

15 The Istituto Luce, or “L’Unione Cinematografica Educativa” (in English “The Educational Film Union”), was an Italian corporation established in Rome in 1924 during the Fascist era. The Institute was created to produce and distribute films and documentaries, thus functioning as a propaganda tool of the Fascist regime (Laura, 2000).

16 *Giovinezza* was the official hymn of the Italian National Fascist Party, regime and army from 1943 to 1945. But it was very popular between 1924 and 1943 as the unofficial national anthem of Italy. The lyrics were authored by Nino Oxilia in 1909, but it was re-written by Marcello Manni in 1919 and Salvator Gotta in 1924 according to Fascist ideology, whereas the original music was written by Giuseppe Blanc in 1909. *Fuoco di Vesta* was the anonymous anthem of the young Fascists (Savona and Straniero, 1979: 205-207).

17 Mauri, 1971a: 24: “Un filo d’ironia, ottenuto per accostamenti elementari, corre lungo il programma. È uno dei ‘segni negativi’ che, nello spettacolo, comunicano allo spettatore l’istanza critica. Altri ‘segni negativi’ sono ‘The end’ sullo schermo bianco dove si proietta il documentario LUCE; le indicazioni sulle Tribune e il generale tedesco, in onore di cui si fa la festa, già e per sempre ‘di cera’. Segnali che non possono essere equivocati nel loro senso, indispensabili per ancorare, agli occhi del pubblico, il punto di vista critico da cui guardare gli elementi aberranti esibiti in forma tanto serena”.

18 Mauri, 1971a: 21: “Liberare quest’immagine in una forma reale. Sia pure della durata di un’ora”.

19 Mauri, 1971a: 22: “Qui si sperimenta in poco tempo l’Ideologia falsa, l’abisso della Superficialità istituzionalizzata, la Tautologia del Potere assoluto, la malignità intima della Bugia nascosta nell’Ordine, la vergogna della confusione culturale, l’irresponsabilità di chi avoca a sé la libertà di giudizio collettivo, l’inganno della giovinezza che porta grazia e fiducia a fare da prelude a ogni proprio massacro. L’errore lega con qualsiasi altra cosa, soprattutto con la verità e la bellezza. La sciocchezza della natura innocente è

One of Mauri's contributions to art is complex action, as opposed to a performance of a few minutes, in which only a single person or a few individuals are involved: "*Che cosa è il fascismo* is a complex action. I think it distinguishes itself from the 'gesture' of the movement that in painting is indicated with this name, for a deliberately programmed part of it. Or if it is equal to the gesture even in the prefiguration of the results, my style of active composition directly welcomes some aspects of theatricality. It includes them in an articulated whole, the definitive form of which remains unknown".²⁰

Mauri's decision to opt for performance rather than painting is indicative. Painting *represents*, whereas performance *presents*. Mauri offers a fundamental element to understand this logic when he states that "A type of experimental theatre, begun in the eighteenth century, can provide a practical indication for this event. I refer to 'spiritual exercises'. To feed

the horror of hell, one focuses on its evils, physically experiencing the searing flames for a few moments".²¹ Mauri's theatrical experience, begun with *Il Benessere* (1958) and *L'isola* (1960) and continuing with *Lezione di Inglese* (1970), must play a certain role in *Che cosa è il fascismo*. In this regard, Mauri says that "My personal experience as a playwright, here, of course, somewhere, is employed, but it is secondary".²²

According to Mauri, "*Che cosa è il fascismo* is for me first of all an image, a physical, sonorous form, where a certain number of opposing meanings balance the image with its critical meaning, as a backbone".²³ Therefore, we can advance the hypothesis that Mauri intended *Che cosa è il fascismo* as a painting, one made not by painting on canvas, but with real people. This seems to be confirmed by the artist in 1994: "I 'painted' many vintage nudes, exhibiting vintage nudes".²⁴ This statement also demonstrates that the link between action and image is central to Mauri.

ESERCIZI SPIRITUALI AND THE EXPERIENCE OF IDEOLOGY

Similar to *Note tecniche, comunque disorganiche, sull'azione "Che cosa è il fascismo"* is a contemporary script, *Esercizi spirituali*, that refers to an action in which a series of texts, written by different authors during the Fascist period, are read, and a series of Fascist musical compositions are played. The title of the performance refers to the method of spirituality (or spiritual exercises) specific to the Society of Jesus.²⁵ This performance, enacted by the students of Jesuit colleges, consists of a physical involvement of the staging of pain and punishment. In this way, the action becomes a spiritual exercise rather than a mere theatrical representation. Thus, the performers experience (religious and political) ideology through

pain, and so does the observer-participant, who, after having participated in the action, is emotionally changed: "Reliving the same (or similar) event twice finds the observer more changed than the event itself. The observer cannot be reconstructed, not even by approximation, like the event. The cultural space in which he has continued to live, against any resistance of his will to understand, makes him a participant in profound modifications. In a certain way, time reasons for him".²⁶ This passage shows, once again, the principal aim of Mauri's work: to force his public to re-live a dark period of European history, one under Fascism, in order to avoid its return and make sure that humans no longer repeat the same mistakes.

complice ingenua di ogni male. Il nulla seducente di quando, sembrando di risolvere finalmente la complessità del reale in un dato semplice, il vuoto trova spazio e prende forma nella mente e nei corpi, mimando il serio, il vero e la profondità".

20 Mauri, 1971a: 21: "*Che cosa è il fascismo* è un'azione complessa. Penso si distingua dal 'gesto' della corrente che in pittura viene indicata con questo nome, per una sua parte deliberatamente programmata. O se è uguale al gesto persino nella prefigurazione dei risultati, il mio tipo di composizione attiva accoglie direttamente alcuni ritmi della teatralità. Li include in un insieme articolato la cui forma definitiva resta incognita".

21 Mauri, 1971a: 21-22: "Un tipo di teatro sperimentale, iniziato nel Settecento, può fornire un'indicazione pratica di questo evento. Alludo agli 'esercizi spirituali'. Per nutrire orrore dell'inferno, ci si concentra sui suoi mali, sperimentando fisicamente per qualche attimo l'ustione del fuoco".

22 Mauri, 1971a: 24: "L'esperienza personale di scrittore teatrale, qui, certo, da qualche parte, è usata, ma è secondaria".

23 Mauri, 1971a: 24: "*Che cosa è il fascismo* è in me innanzi tutto un'immagine, una forma fisica, sonora, dove un certo numero di significati contrapposti tengono in equilibrio l'immagine stessa con il suo significato critico, come spina dorsale".

24 Mauri, 1994: 247: "Ho 'dipinto' molti nudi d'epoca, esibendo nudi d'epoca".

25 Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the religious order of the Society of Jesus, wrote the treatise *Spiritual Exercises*, in which he explains his spiritual method (Loyola, 1548).

26 Mauri, 1971b: 31: "Rivivere due volte lo stesso (o quasi) evento trova più modificato l'osservatore che l'evento stesso. L'osservatore non può essere ricostruito, nemmeno per approssimazione, come l'evento. Lo spazio culturale in cui ha proseguito a vivere, contro ogni resistenza della sua volontà di capire, lo fa partecipare di profonde modificazioni. In un certo modo il tempo ragiona per lui".

EBREA AND ART AS THERAPY



Fig. 04. Fabio Mauri, *Ebrea*, 1971 (© Studio Fabio Mauri).

Ebrea (Fig. 04) is the third performance that Mauri staged in 1971; it is connected to the text that bears the same title. The disturbing installation was presented for the first time at the Galleria Barozzi in Venice on 1 October 1971. With this work, Mauri transformed the gallery into a hypothetical museum of concentration camps. The result is a space inhabited by objects-sculptures, harmless furnishings of everyday life with titles, on the contrary, that depict their disquieting and macabre nature by referring to a human origin. In a passage, Mauri clarifies the intention of this work: "In *Ebrea* the operation is cold and indelicately cultural. I patiently recompose the experience of the vile with my hands. I explore its mental possibilities. Extending the act, I invent new objects *made of new men*".²⁷ In *Ebrea*, Mauri composes objects as if he were a Nazi, recreating the terrible environments of the concentration camps.

The installation-performance presents a young naked woman in front of a *Cabinet (Armadietto)* with a mirror, in the act of cutting her hair and gluing it to the mirror in the shape of the Star of David – the mark of racial discrimination. The same star appears on the performer's chest, next to a number. Around the performance are terrible sculptures. Starting from the centre of the room, there is a dressed horse titled *Finimenti in pelle ebrea, Alta scuola militare Oberklandertan – Wien* (Fig. 05), which utilises the

horse in reference to the exercises against obesity promoted by the Fascist ideology. Close to the horse are the woman's high boots on roller skates, *Veri pattini di Anna Cittreich di Varsavia, eseguiti da lei stessa*, which also allude to the exercises to maintain the perfect physical shape that the myth of the superiority of the Aryan breed insists upon. In random order in the room, the human presence returns with the *Gioiello-Laiback*, made with the teeth of Jews who died in the Nazi death camps; the series titled *Saponi, vera cera ebrea* (Fig. 06), which alludes to the soaps made with the fat of Jewish bodies, on which the names of the extermination camps can be read; and two long wooden skis with an unmistakable title: *Pelli da sci eseguite con Oswald e Mirta Rohn catturati a Davos-Brzezinka Ospedale Maggiore*.



Fig. 05. Fabio Mauri, *Ebrea (Finimenti in pelle ebrea, Alta scuola militare Oberklandertan – Wien)*, 1971 (© Studio Fabio Mauri).

27 Mauri, 1971c: 27: "In *Ebrea* l'operazione è fredda. E indelicatamente culturale. Ricompio con pazienza, con le mani, l'esperienza del turpe. Ne esploro le possibilità mentali. Estendendone l'atto, invento nuovi oggetti fatti di nuovi uomini".



Fig. 06. Fabio Mauri, *Ebra (Saponi, vera cera ebra)*, 1971 (© Studio Fabio Mauri).

Other objects, a total of 17, complete the installation, including a pale pink baby carriage called *Carrozzina ebra eseguita con la famiglia Modigliani 1940*; a machine for cutting hair, gauze and a pair of scissors titled *Haarschneidermaschine*; a suitcase called *Valigia Ebra*, which alludes to an identity in danger; some brushes made from human hair titled *Pennelli di capelli*; a console that, instead of a mirror, presents a monochromatic black painting, signifying the refusal of reflection and image and titled *Famiglia Ebra* (Fig. 07). Finally, on the walls, three great stars of David surround a sentence in Hebrew by Isaiah: "A cry was heard in Rama, of great weeping and lamentation. It is Rachel who mourns her children, and does not want to be comforted, because they are gone".²⁸



Fig. 07. Fabio Mauri, *Ebra (Famiglia Ebra)*, 1971 (© Studio Fabio Mauri).

In *Ebra*, Mauri proposes a journey into evil, a journey in which the objects are presented as if they were witnesses to a world in which Nazism has won, thereby provoking deep disgust in the beholder: "I act as if that (historical) reality had not had its final condemnations, but still added data up to now. Elsewhere, it is reasonable to suspect, in different ways, the operation seems to me to continue".²⁹ Fascism, with its cult of harmony and symmetry, beauty and youth, simplicity and order, assumes in Mauri not only the character of a big lie, but also the highest degree of evil that presents itself as good and the maximum degree of manipulation of thought and loss of freedom. In this sense, Mauri's installation can be read as a representation of the banality of evil, in the sense described by Hannah Arendt (1963), staged through a macabre collection of objects.

According to Mauri, art-making is a therapy against evil, or inner pain, which he has experimented with himself: "*Ebra* can be a debt paid today to a period that has ended. Maybe. When in 1945 I too found myself facing the historical total of an intellectual operation founded on an elaborate system of 'fakes'".³⁰ These words encompass the autobiographical component of Mauri's work. However, it is worth clarifying that Mauri, who is not Jewish, was never subject to racial persecution during the Fascist period and has never been in a concentration camp. Mauri saw the concentration camps only in photographs: "Also for *Ebra* (Auschwitz), the first photos published in a magazine of that time constituted the first impact with consequences, at least biographical, not tenuous. I have experienced the violence represented in those images, or of these ones about the preparation of a tragic action, in a country dawn, a little wet. Of the similarity between those and these and other images known from life. Scenes that cannot be fully assimilated, because they are too real, only completely unforgettable. Their meaning coincides with a habitual nonsense of the world. The brazen view of evil remains secret. A non-evolutionary figure is preserved, a photo, in the indelible context of fixed thoughts".³¹

28 "Un grido si è udito in Rama, di grande pianto e lamento. È Rachele che piange i suoi figli, e non vuole essere consolata, perché essi non ci sono più".

29 Mauri, 1971c: 29: "Mi comporto come se quella realtà (storica) non avesse avuto i suoi finali di condanna, ma ancora sommasse dati fino a oggi. Altrove, è lecito sospettare, in modi diversi, l'operazione mi pare prosegua".

30 Mauri, 1971c: 27: "*Ebra* può essere un debito pagato oggi a un tempo oggi chiuso. Può darsi. Quando nel 1945 anch'io mi trovai di fronte al totale storico di un'operazione intellettuale fondata su un elaborato sistema di 'falsi'".

31 Mauri, 1996: 103: "Anche per *Ebra* (Auschwitz) le prime foto pubblicate da una rivista dell'epoca costituiscono il primo impatto con

The experience observing these images, together with having lived through the years of dictatorship and war, profoundly marked him. As a consequence, in the post-war period Mauri suffered from a disease that forced him to be hospitalised repeatedly in a psychiatric clinic. He writes: "I provide some answers to the cultural contents of the epoch (in the century) in which I live, a sociological notion above all, within an autobiographical period that has, in me, a consistent psychological reality".³² From these psychological experiences arise the horrors on which to meditate: human skin, teeth, hair, fat and ashes. All are things that Nazis capitalised upon in the extermination camps, following their racist beliefs: "In Europe, from 1930 to 1940, racism has a scientific matrix: it states that there are races, and that some of them are superior: two notions that I have recognised as false, although the former is still popularly proper".³³

Another topic addressed in *Ebrea* is the ideological function of the media, which reflects the intellectual debate of the early seventies. In this period, for instance, Louis Althusser (1970: 135-141) discusses the function of the plurality of "the ideological State apparatuses", such as the family, religion, school and communications (radio, press, publishing, television). Althusser (1970), followed by Mauri, endorses the

thesis of the material existence of the "thingness" of ideology, evident in the practices of "the ideological State apparatuses". In *Ebrea*, Mauri expresses the concept of the "thingness" of ideology in the star of David, composed by the girl with her own hair, to signify that the star is not an abstract sign. On the contrary, it is as physical and material as the hair of which it is composed. In other words, the star represents the "thingness" of intolerance and the suppression of individual identity. Together with Althusser, the theories of the author and poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1974) greatly impacted Mauri's way of thinking. Like Mauri, Enzensberger, with whom Mauri was personally in contact, denounced the repressive and ideological use of the media.

Mauri's performances, objects and theoretical writings investigate the ways ideology manifests itself and manipulates people. In doing so, Mauri shows a method of how to deconstruct ideology as an institution, opening the way to a new interpretation of his work. Mauri's approach can be read in connection with the artistic tendency known as institutional critique, an European and North American phenomenon that can also be identified in Italy. This reading will be attempted in the next section.

AN ITALIAN EXAMPLE OF INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE?

The artistic experimentation that from the end of the sixties has called into question the institutionalisation of the art system, as well as the production of and responses to works of art, is classified as institutional critique. This systematic inquiry focuses on the deconstruction of institutions, such as museums or art galleries, showing the structures and logic underlying them (Buren et al., 1971; Alberro, 1997; Alberro and Stimson, 2009; Foster et al., 2011: 584-592, 668-673). More specifically, the method used in this practice consists of: (1) subverting the traditional functions of museums and art galleries; (2) questioning the long-established formalist art criticism; and (3) transgressing the rules of the common configuration of

both works of art and collections. In periods of cultural ferment, it is considered necessary to dismantle and criticise the institution, showing its limitations, inconsistencies and contradictions. Linked to the theories of post-structuralist philosophy, institutional critique emerges from minimalist experiences and is considered an offshoot of conceptual art, with which it shares the attention to language and the investigation of the phenomena of appropriation, consumption and identity (Buchloh, 1990).

Two generations of artists can be identified who belong to the school of institutional critique. The first emerged in the late sixties and included Marcel Broodthaers,

conseguenze, almeno biografiche, non tenui. Ho esperienza della violenza ricevuta da quelle immagini, o da queste di preparazione a un'azione tragica, in un'alba di campagna, un po' umida. Della somiglianza tra quelle e queste e altre immagini conosciute dal vivo. Scene non assimilabili per intero, perché troppo reali, solo del tutto indimenticabili. Il loro senso coincide con un abituale non senso del mondo. La vista sfacciata del male resta segreta. Se ne conserva una figura non evolutiva, una foto, nel contesto indelebile dei pensieri fissi".

32 Mauri, 1971c: 29: "Do talune risposte a contenuti culturali dell'epoca (al secolo) in cui vivo, nozione più sociologica che altro, all'interno di un tempo autobiografico che ha, in me, una realtà psicologica non inconsistente".

33 Mauri, 1971c: 27: "In Europa, dal 1930 al 1940, il razzismo ha matrice scientifica: afferma che esistano razze, e alcune superiori. Due nozioni che ho riconosciuto false, sebbene la prima sia ancora volgarmente propria".

Daniel Buren and Hans Haacke in Europe, and Michael Asher, Mary Kelly and Louise Lawler in the USA. The second took shape in the 1980s and 1990s and had among its exponents the Americans Andrea Fraser, Renée Green and Fred Wilson. In their works they often adopt the same language as the institutions under indictment. However, they do so by overturning the meaning of the practices of these institutions. Everything is subjected to an inversion of sense with strong critical and ironic connotations. Their pieces often reflect on the supposed neutrality of a work of art and the role of the museum as a place that institutionalises art and cultivates the public's taste. Moreover, institutional critique makes visible the mechanisms that regulate economic ties, often hidden, both between institutions and external actors and between public and private interests.³⁴

There is a distinction between the first appearance of the practice that criticises artistic institutions and the emergence of the term to which it refers. The expression "institutional critique" finds its first vague formulation only in 1974, in Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde*, in which he states that the Dada movement presents a radical critique of "art as an institution" (*Institution Kunst*), referring to its intolerance towards the institutional apparatus (Bürger, 1984: 22). But it is in the following year that the name "institutional critique" appears for the first time, in Mel Ramsden's *On Practice* (1975).³⁵ From this moment on, the expression "institutional critique" has become part of the artistic lexicon, although the custom of using the term, as indicated by Andrea Fraser (2005: 410), took place in the discussions that arose within the School of Visual Arts and the Whitney Independent Study Program in the mid-eighties. The seminars held by Benjamin Buchloh and Craig Owens and joined by Hans Haacke and Martha Rosler were attended by artists and critics such as Gregg Bordowitz, Joshua Decker, Mark Dion and Andrea Fraser. Then the expression "institutional critique" spread rapidly in the non-English speaking world.

The delineation of the main features of this artistic trend allows us to observe some similarities between the method of inquiry proper to the artists associated with institutional critique and Mauri's concept of art. As we see from Mauri's performances analysed above, all staged in 1971, three key elements characterise

his artistic research: (1) the critique of ideology, accomplished with a systematic deconstruction of the language used by European ideologies, (2) the redefinition of both the aesthetic space and the role of the beholder, and (3) the ephemerality and non-marketability of works of art.

In the same period, Michael Asher and Hans Haacke, for example, were involved in a similar deconstructionist enterprise. In 1970, Asher presented his site-specific installation at the Pomona College Art Gallery in Claremont, California (Asher, 1983: 31-42; Kraus, 2011). In this work, as Rosalind Kraus (2011: 585) comments, "Asher's critique was directed simultaneously against the (Minimalist) production of objects open to commodification and consumption and against the institutional apparatus of the museum as the space constituted to endow such activity with cultural legitimacy". In the same year, Haacke presented his installation *MoMA Pool* (Fig. 08) at the exhibition *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Haacke, 1975: 9-11). It consisted of asking visitors to express their opinions about a current socio-political issue. His question was, "Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced president Nixon's Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?" The fact that Haacke's query concerned a major donor and MoMA board member, Nelson Rockefeller, at that time governor of New York state, defines this installation as an early example of institutional critique. Haacke applied the same approach in two other works: *Shapolski et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings and Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings* (both 1971). They were presented on the occasion of his retrospective exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1971, which was then cancelled by the director because the works, in his own words, "violate the supreme neutrality of the work of art and therefore no longer merit the protection of the museum" (Buchloh, 2011: 590). In these two pieces, Haacke traced the interrelationships between some families active in real estate in Manhattan, revealing the hidden structure of their shady empires (Deutsche, 1986; Buchloh, 2011).

34 An example of this kind of critique is the research conducted by Hans Haacke (Wallis, 1986).

35 See also Alberro, 2009: 8.

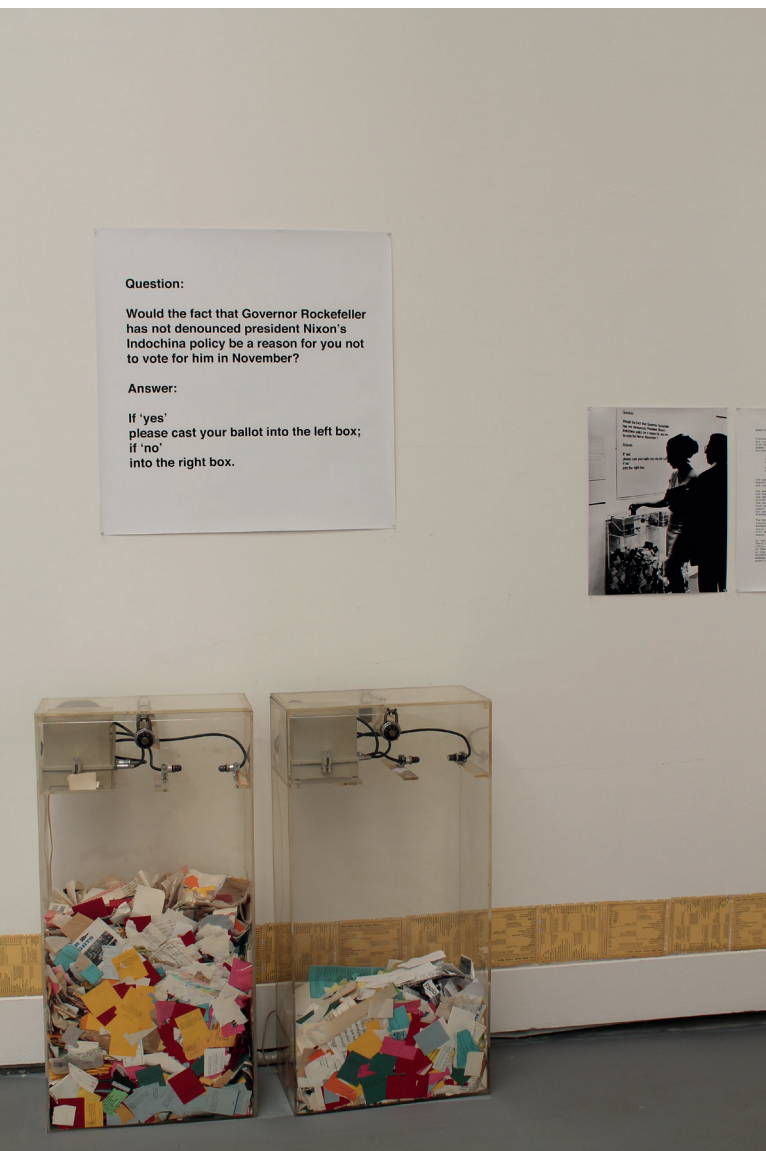


Fig. 08. Hans Haacke, *MoMA Pool*, 1970 (photo by the author).

Considering the Italian milieu of the period between the 1960s and 1970s, it is possible to identify artistic practices that can be considered examples of institutional critique. However, as Maria Grazia Messina (2009) pointed out, institutional critique in Italy had different objectives than the museum or gallery. In Italy, instances of institutional critique emerged from different situations, which can be classified in five main categories: (1) the non-canonical interventions in some private galleries; (2) the opening of art galleries by artists; (3) the organisation of open-space exhibitions in the city-centre of a number of cities; (4) the organisation of exhibitions in alternative spaces; and (5) certain editions of the Venice Art Biennale.

(1) From the 1950s until the 1970s, the Italian public art system was identified mainly with the Galleria

Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome, which was attentive to contemporary research into international art. The alternative to the Galleria Nazionale, for artists who wanted to present their experimental research, was a network of private galleries. Between the 1960s and 1970s, art dealers made themselves and their spaces available, promoting the work of performance-oriented artists. In February 1968, for instance, Fabio Sargentini hosted the personal exhibition of Michelangelo Pistoletto at the Galleria L'Attico in Rome (Argan, 1968). Pistoletto presented a series of objects – equipment and costumes borrowed from a theatre – turning the gallery into a theatre and thus renouncing the authorial identity of the artist. The exhibition *Ginnastica mentale*, curated in 1968 at the Galleria L'Attico, was another example of an intervention in which the institution of the art gallery was demystified by its owner (Sargentini, 1968). In May of the same year Plinio De Martiis echoed Sargentini with *Il teatro delle Mostre* (Fig. 09), held at La Tartaruga in Rome, a series of 20 events organised over the course of 20 evenings (Calvesi and Bonito Oliva, 1968).

(2) On other occasions artists opened exhibition spaces themselves. This was the case of Piero Manzoni and Enrico Castellani, who founded the Galleria Azimut in Milan, which hosted exhibitions between 1959 and 1960. Another example was the space opened in Padua by the *Gruppo N*, which organised the exhibition *Mostra chiusa. Nessuno è invitato a intervenire*, purposely closed during the entire period of the exhibition: December 1960 (Meloni, 2009). The purpose of this exhibition was to affirm a different conception of art as opposed to the traditional one, that is, outside of the art market.

(3) Another important phenomenon of institutional critique in Italy is the series of open-space exhibitions that took place in different cities. In 1962, for example, Giovanni Carandente (1992) organised in Spoleto the exhibition *Sculture nella Città*, which intended to re-qualify the external spaces of the city. Fifty-two sculptors from all over the world participated, with a total of 400 sculptures that transformed Spoleto into an open-air museum of modern sculpture. In January 1969, Luciano Caramel organised *Campo urbano* (Fig. 10), a series of artists' works displayed in the streets of Como that lasted one day (Caramel et al., 1969). In 1973, Enrico Crispolti (1974) curated *Volterra '73*, a series of pieces of environmental art on

an urban scale. All these events intended to establish more accessible platforms than the usual exhibition circuits, to open an unprecedented channel between art and society.

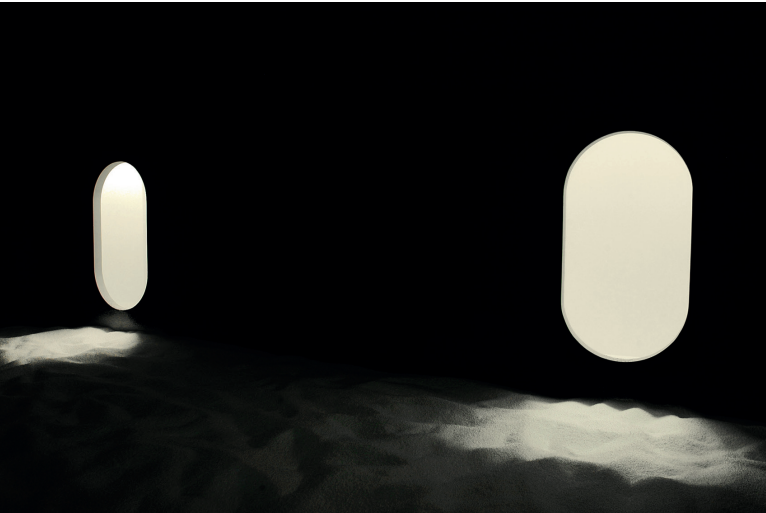


Fig. 09. Fabio Mauri, *Luna*, 1968 (© Studio Fabio Mauri).



Fig. 10. Bruno Munari, *Visualizzazione dell'Aria di Piazza Duomo, Como*, 1969 (© Ugo Mulas).

(4) The organisation of exhibitions in alternative spaces had similar aims. Emblematic in this sense is *Lo spazio dell'Immagine* (Fig. 11), a series of environments, each set up by an artist, which took place in Foligno, at Palazzo Trinci, in 1967 (Apollonio et al., 1967). This event, which can be read as an indictment of the commodification of art, had a corresponding exhibition in New York, at the MoMA, at the end of December

1969: *Spaces* (Licht, 1969). In Turin between 1967 and 1969, Marcello Levi, Gian Enzo Sperone and Piero Gilardi established the association *Deposito d'arte presente*, the fulcrum of the Arte Povera, in a former garage. In December 1967, the exhibitions of Mario Schifano and Michelangelo Pistoletto in the *Piper* disco, in Rome and Turin, respectively, marked the shift from art as object to art as ephemeral event (Kries, 2018). With a similar spirit, in 1968 Germano Celant (1969) organised *Arte povera più azioni povere*, curated at the Antichi Arsenali della Repubblica in Amalfi.

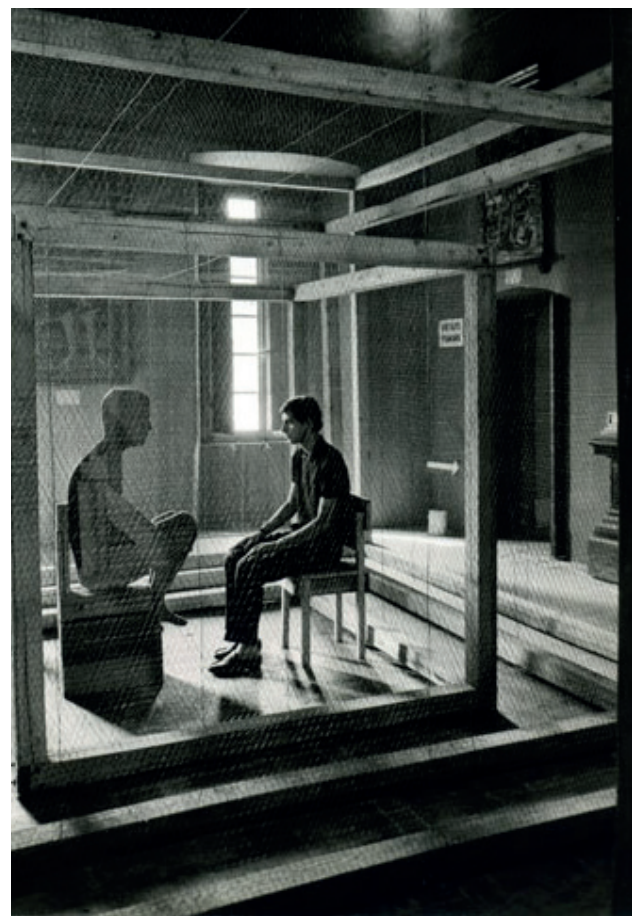


Fig. 11. Mario Ceroli, *Centouccelli*, 1967 (© Mario Ceroli).

(5) That the majority of the art interventions that involved either the canonical galleries or alternative spaces in Italy between the 1960s and 1970s can be interpreted as acts of institutional critique seems to find confirmation in Germano Celant (1976: 5). In the introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition *Ambiente/Arte, dal futurismo alla Body Art*, curated at the Venice Art Biennale, he describes art that occupies the entire (social) environment, an enterprise that hinders any mercantile involvement, given the contingency of the work.

This, in broad terms, was the situation of institutional critique in Italy between the 1960s and 1970s, to which should be added the artistic research that Fabio Mauri accomplished in the same period, when he began his theoretical reflection related to the performative activity that mimics the practice of the system that he intended to uncover. At this point, the convergence between the methodological approach of some European and American artists associated with the institutional critique and Mauri's research becomes clearer. Although the goal of Mauri's critique was not the museum or art gallery, or the network of power relations that governs these institutions, the deconstructive method he used is the same as that adopted by institutional critique. This is demonstrated by works such as *Che cosa è il fascismo*, *Esercizi spirituali* and *Ebrea*, inasmuch as they critique ideology as an institution and the very structures that ensure its operation.

Mauri's critique of ideology as a general theory – including political, moral and religious ideology – works thus: he mimics the practices of the ideological system that he intends to deconstruct, as in the case of the Fascist ideology. By deconstructing the system of Fascist ideology, Mauri analyses the mechanisms that constitute it and its functioning. He does so by revealing how it manifests itself and, above all, the falseness that characterises it. In this sense, Mauri seems to proceed in a similar way as French post-structuralists and deconstructivists like Jacques Derrida (1967), Michel Foucault (1969) and Louis Althusser (1970).³⁶ Mauri, with his deconstructionist work, shows that ideology is not an autonomous entity, but it is strictly related to sociology and politics, personal and collective history. Analysing the language that ideology adopts, he unveils the hierarchical relationships inherent in ideological discourse. Mauri investigates ideology to find a way to avoid the manipulation of power, and to maintain the mental lucidity necessary for individual freedom and decision-making.

Mauri's performances and installations also contributed to rethinking the aesthetic space, with direct consequences for the role of the observer, who is no longer a spectator but a participant and part of the work itself. As a consequence, the discrepancy between art and life is minimised to the extreme.

Furthermore, Mauri's theoretical writings can be considered artistic practice. Seen in this light, they occupy a space that is not the canonical one of the visual arts, but the space of literature, that is, the blank page. With the practice of writing, the work of art disappears in its form and emerges alone as a concept. This is because Mauri deals with meanings and never with forms alone. With writing, Mauri uses the space of ideological definition as an exercise of institutional critique, the critique of the institution of ideology. A direct source for the writing as an artistic practice can be identified in Marcel Duchamp, to whom Mauri, in the course of his career, appears to often pay tribute. In fact, as Achille Bonito Oliva (2005) pointed out, Duchamp's theoretical writings (1973) are to be read not as mere reflective pauses to artistic activity, but as an artistic activity in the strictest sense.

Performances, installations and objects of everyday life do not adhere to the canons of institutional art, such as that sold in galleries or exhibited in museums. Since Mauri's works are not conceived as commodities, but are ephemeral and dematerialised, we can consider his interventions a critique of the market as an institution.³⁷ The reasons for the ephemerality of this production should be connected to the specific historical and geographic context in which Mauri operated, meaning Italy soon after the protests of 1968. In major Italian cities during this period, as mentioned above, artists started to work with performances and art installations in unconventional spaces.

Art is often homologated to the art market, and the work of art is identified as a commodity. One reaction to this condition was already established with Duchamp's ready-made series, in which the objects the artist chose question the commercial system of art. This reaction had, in the 1960s, its counterpart in the affirmation of performance, a practice that opposes the objectification of art put into practice by the market. The actions promoted by the performance were aimed at the destabilisation of those mechanisms that fuel elitist modes of production and uses of art, reversing their tendency towards a widespread and non-exclusive art form. In this sense, when Fabio Mauri declares "my technique is the world", as if to challenge the purely mercantile value of artistic production, he refers to the media he chose for his works of art, that

36 Derrida, Foucault and Althusser have been associated, in turn, with institutional critique (Buchloh, 2011: 591-592; Foster, 2011: 671).

37 For the concept of dematerialisation of art in the period here under examination, see Lippard, 1973.

is, performances, installations, objects and writings.³⁸ Therefore, Mauri's artistic production of the 1970s should also be read as a reaction to the mechanisms

that make the artistic object a means of representing power, emptying artistic research of the ability to promote critical debate.

CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed the performative productions of Fabio Mauri in 1971, as exemplary of his research of the 1970s and as a logical consequence of his works staged in the previous decade, which include collages, screens, installations and theatrical productions. In doing so, this investigation considered the interdependence between his theoretical writings and his performances and installations. The main topic that emerges from his works is the critique of ideology as institution, with particular attention to the deconstructive analysis of Fascist ideology. From this inquiry, other aspects emerge, that is, the relationship between personal and collective history and the attention to individual and public memory. The artistic approach Mauri adopted, we argued, seems to share more than a similarity with the international artistic trend known as institutional critique. In fact, if the artists associated with institutional critique, particularly in the USA, adopted the same language as the establishment they criticised, Mauri similarly used the same means in which ideology manifests itself – remaking political demonstrations or ideologically oriented rallies and subverting their meanings. In this way, he showed the falsity of ideology, the perverse mechanisms behind it and the terrible consequences

for the general populace, such as the loss of freedom, identity and personality.

Through ideology, Mauri reflects on the concept of history, particularly the history of Europe and the emergence of many ideologies: Catholic, socialist, liberal, Marxist and so on. This, according to Mauri, is the peculiarity of Europe, the "thing" that distinguishes it, not only in the 1970s, from the United States. In this sense, Mauri's performances, installations and writings are the objectification of an epoch, an epoch represented by a series of ideologies.

Mauri's critique does not include only the institution of ideology. For example, Mauri's works are characterised by a dematerialisation of the work of art as object, with consequent critique of the commodification of art as conceived by institutions. Furthermore, this way to conceive the work of art has a direct consequence on both the aesthetic space and the role of the beholder, inasmuch as the space of the work is, to Mauri, the same as that of the observer, who becomes a participant, thus subverting institutional curatorship, which separates the observer and the (hanging) work in two distinct spaces.

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