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### Circularity and Visibility in Italian Art Periodicals (1968-1978)

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# Circularity and Visibility in Italian Art Periodicals (1968-1978)

Denis Viva

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## Abstract

During the 1970s, at the apex of “dematerialized art”, the art magazines contributed a great deal to turn *visibility* (the photographic circulation of artworks, news on the artists, etc.) into an economic value. In a country like Italy, where *museum validation* was still lacking, neo-avantgarde periodicals such as *Flash Art* or *Data* introduced new communicative strategies (community building, indirect advertising, etc.) in order to provide a trans-national audience for Italian art. This study tries to enlighten the impact of advertising on art magazines’ preferences and their criteria of newsworthiness by analyzing some quantitative data.

## Riassunto

Negli anni settanta, all’apice dell’“arte dematerializzata”, le riviste d’arte contribuirono a convertire la *visibilità* (la circolazione fotografica delle opere, le notizie sugli artisti, ecc.) in un valore economico. In un paese come l’Italia, privo di *museum validation*, le riviste di neo-avanguardia come *Flash Art* o *Data* introdussero nuove strategie comunicative (community building, pubblicità indiretta, ecc.) col fine di creare un pubblico trans-nazionale per l’arte italiana. Questo studio prova a chiarire l’impatto della pubblicità sulle preferenze e sui criteri di notiziabilità delle riviste d’arte, analizzando alcuni dati quantitativi.

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In the 1970s it was commonly acknowledged by art critics and artists that “one reproduction in an art magazine is worth two one-man shows.”<sup>1</sup> This adage blatantly expressed the importance held by photographic reproducibility and the distribution of art periodicals for the circulation of an artwork. In years during which the relationship with mass media was perceived as both utopic and problematic, such a maxim sounded pragmatic and mocking at the same time. To artists and critics who had long debated Walter Benjamin’s definition of *aura* and *exhibition value* (*exposability*)<sup>2</sup>, the photographic circulation of an artwork revealed its pseudo-democratic effects instead: in contemporary art, where even multiple copies (often coming in limited edition) were only affordable for a few owners, the public visibility of an artwork was certainly a way to widen its audience, but it also ended up increasing its value. What Benjamin considered to be a democratic feature of technology – namely the end of the work of art’s *aura* and of its *cult value* through seriality – was actually producing a new form of exclusive value. As philosopher Byung-Chul Han observed in a recent reinterpretation of Benjamin, the *exhibition value* has thus been converted into an actual economic factor – which I would rather define as *visibility*: “value accrues only insofar as objects are seen.”<sup>3</sup> *Visibility* – which is the restoration of *aura* also by means of *exposability*<sup>4</sup> – produces a capital of *interests*, conceived in the double meaning of the term: on the one hand, it attributes an economic value to the work of art according to the degree of its circulation, and on

the other hand, it provides the work with one of the most valuable commodities of our information society: the audience’s attention.

If observed today, the history of art magazines after 1960 stands out as another episode within the wider process which affected first mass media, and then social media: that is to say, the need of planning content for an audience, according to the principles of *agenda-setting*<sup>5</sup>, and the emergence of the Attention Economy<sup>6</sup>, aimed at inducing a greater cognitive focus in its consumers.

These communicative mechanisms emerged slowly within art magazines and became stronger – paradoxically – after 1968 with the so-called “dematerialization of art.”<sup>7</sup> At a time when art became more and more immaterial and multipliable, photographic circulation among magazines was a good way to reactivate some sort of fetishization of the work of art and to compensate somewhat for its material inconsistency: its circulation guaranteed a capital of *interest*, also developed through various ostensive mediations (from the exhibitions to articles in magazines).

In Italy, for example, during the 1970s magazines replaced institutions: lacking a form of *museum validation* comparable to that offered by Germany<sup>8</sup> (contemporary museums first opened in Italy only in the 1980s)<sup>9</sup>, magazines were one of the few tools of internationalization for Italian art. They contributed a great deal to the reputation of artists, regulating their *visibility*. Starting with periodicals such as

<sup>1</sup> John A. Walker, “Periodicals since 1945,” in *The Art Press. Two Centuries of Art Magazines*, ed. Trevor Fawcett, Clive Phillpot (London: The Art Book Company, 1976), 51; Clive Phillpot, “Arts Magazines and Magazine Art,” *Artforum*, February 1980, 53.

<sup>2</sup> According to Benjamin, in the age of mechanical reproduction the uniqueness of the artworks will be replaced by their circulation. *Exposability* “is the dialectical pair of *aura*, with the declared historical decay of art’s *aura* directly related to increased *exposability*” [Lucy Steed, “Exposability: On the Taking-Place in Future of Art,” in *Theater, Garden, Bestiary: A Materialist History of Exhibitions*, ed. Tristan Garcia and Vincent Normand (Berlin, Lausanne: ECAL, Sternberg Press, 2019), 75]. On this notion, see Walter Benjamin, “Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility (Third Version),” in *Selected Writings: 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge [MA], London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 257-58. On this notion in relation to the World’s Fairs, see Andrea Pinotti, “Esposizione, esponibilità, disponibilità: Walter Benjamin e la dialettica dell’Expo,” *Nuova Corrente* 154, 2 (2014): 49-72. For repurposing this concept today in Art Theory: Steed, “Exposability: On the Taking-Place in Future of Art,” 75-84.

<sup>3</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 9.

<sup>4</sup> To a certain extent, *visibility* is the reconciliation between what Benjamin conceived as opposite: *aura* and *exposability*.

<sup>5</sup> *Agenda-setting* is the capacity of the mass-media to give salience to a news and to turn into a public topic. On this notion see Maxwell E. McCombs, *Setting the Agenda. The Mass Media and Public Opinion* (Cambridge [MA]: Polity Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Attention Economy is focused on human attention as a marketing problem to solve. Perhaps it is not by chance that a theorist of Attention Economy dealt with Marcel Duchamp’s oeuvre: Richard H. Lahnam, *The Economics of Attention. Style and Substance in the Age of Information* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 42-54.

<sup>7</sup> This definition came from a well-known book, where Post-minimalist art after 1966 is described as a “process of dematerialization, or a deemphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)”: Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 5.

<sup>8</sup> On the relevance of German art system, see Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, “The German Century? How a Geopolitical Approach Could Transform the History of Modernism,” in *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, ed. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 183-201.

<sup>9</sup> The Museum of Contemporary Art at the Castello di Rivoli has opened in 1984, while the Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea “Luigi Pecci”, in Prato, in 1988. Alessia Zorloni, “Structure of Contemporary Art Market and the Profile of Italian Artists,” *International Journal of Arts Management*, 1 (2005): 61-71.

*Metro*<sup>10</sup>, which promoted New Dada and Pop Art in Italy and Europe, and which was founded by Bruno Alfieri<sup>11</sup>, who was in contact with the powerful Italian-American gallerist, Leo Castelli<sup>12</sup>, a decisive metamorphosis took place: art magazines ceased being arenas for the debate among critics, and started instead to ground their mediation upon the selectivity implicit in their topics, with the result of generating indicators of the prestige of given artists, such as the significance of the spaces dedicated to them. In this way, magazines actively contributed to the public recognition of an artwork and prompted previsual evaluations of its possible commercial worth or future musealization. Magazines not only validated the work of art on the market, but they could also increase its value through *visibility*.

### Italian Art Periodicals (1968–1978)

After 1960, the history of Italian magazines can be reconstructed upon the progressive consciousness they achieved about these new communicative strategies: starting with *Metro*, and going through the attempts of refusing the interference of advertisements perpetrated by magazines such as *Bit* and *NAC* in 1968, up to the ability of exploiting such mechanisms by *Flash Art* with the advent of Trans-avanguardia in 1979<sup>13</sup>.

Following their communicative and marketing strategies, so, we can divide the Italian art reviews, during the 1960s and 1970s, into three kinds: the

first kind was the self-promoted and experimental review, which aims at realizing an artistic and high intellectual product (a good example of this sort was *La città di Riga*, published between 1976 and 1977, with the contributions of several neo-avantgardist critics and artists); the second kind was the “advisor” review, which mainly tried to guide the taste of its readers and bourgeois collectors, while expanding its audience among the art public (*D’ars agency*, since 1960, and *Bolaffi Arte*, since 1970, have been the most popular in Italy, by giving many information about auctions, quotations, etc.); and, finally, the third one, which was the combination of the previous two, by offering a militant and neo-avantgardist approach to art and an attempt to create an international community of readers – this essay will only deal with this kind of art reviews, described in the following table 1.

In order to fully understand the reputational influence of these art magazines and their circulation, it is worth considering two aspects: first of all, in the post-war period, despite the huge development of mass media, information on contemporary art was monopolized by specialized magazines; and secondly, specialized magazines had no interest in widening their distribution too much, because it proved more effective to address an international art community, rather than a mass audience<sup>14</sup>. Italian magazines, especially those belonging to the neo-avantgarde, show very well this networking approach: while their circulation only reached about 5,000 copies<sup>15</sup>, distribution reached the most strategic Western countries, soon requiring English translations<sup>16</sup>. The high price of international shipping, however, impacted the cost of these already expensive magazines, which prided themselves for their exclusive graphic design and high standard of reproductions. Until the arrival of

<sup>10</sup> On the visual strategies of the magazine, see Giada Centazzo, “Piacevole a leggersi e anche a vedersi. Fotografie nella prima serie della rivista *Metro* (1960-68) di Bruno Alfieri,” *Palinsesti. Contemporary Italian Art On-line Journal*, 6 (2017): 19-37. <http://www.palinsesti.net/index.php/Palinsesti/article/view/62/97>

<sup>11</sup> Giada Centazzo, *Bruno Alfieri, un profilo. Critica ed editoria d’arte tra Venezia e Milano, 1948-1960* (post-MA Thesis, Università degli Studi di Udine, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Based in New York, Leo Castelli was one of the most successful gallerists of the XXth Century, promoting Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art and Minimal Art, among others. On Castelli’s relationship with *Metro*: Dorothy J. McKetta, *The Leo Castelli Gallery in Metro Magazine: American Approach to postabstract figuration in an Italian Contest*, (MA Thesis, University of Texas, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> On the history of these magazines: Maria Teresa Roberto, “‘Bit’, ‘Flash Art’, ‘Data’ e la situazione artistica in Italia tra anni sessanta e settanta,” in *Riviste d’arte fra Ottocento ed Età contemporanea. Forme, modelli, funzioni*, ed. Gianni Carlo Sciolla (Skira: Milano, 2003), 299-305; Gianni Contessi, “‘NAC’, un caso italiano,” in *ibid.*, 307-310; Giulia Polizzotti, “‘Bit. Arte oggi in Italia. La rivista della ‘nuova avanguardia,’” *L’uomo nero*, 7-8 (2011): 125-145; Giuliano Sergio, “Forma rivista. Critica e rappresentazione della neo-avanguardia in Italia (*Flash Art*, *Pallone*, *Cartabianca*, *Senzamargine*, *Data*),” *Palinsesti. Contemporary Italian Art On-line Journal*, 1 (2011): 83-100. <http://www.palinsesti.net/index.php/Palinsesti/article/view/21/26>; Denis Viva, “‘Bit Generation,’” in *Intermedia. Archivio di Nuova Scrittura*, ed. Nicoletta Boschiero, Duccio Dogheria and Letizia Ragaglia (Bolzano-Rovereto: Museion, MART, 2020), 158-169.

<sup>14</sup> On these aspects of art magazines, see Walker, “Periodicals since 1945.”

<sup>15</sup> For instance, this was the average of copies for *NAC* (Contessi, “‘Nac’, un caso italiano,”) and *Data* (my interview with Tommaso Trini, the director of the review, Milan, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019). An exceptional case was the circulation of 30000 copies announced by Giancarlo Politi for his *Flash Art* on the occasion of *Documenta 5*: Giancarlo Politi, letter to Leo Castelli, Milan, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1972, Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Leo Castelli Gallery Records, Correspondence, Box 9, Folder B9.31, Washington.

<sup>16</sup> According to their editors *Bit* was distributed in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, United Kingdom, United States; *Metro* in Argentina, Brasil, Canada, Chile, France, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Japan, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela; and *Data* in France, Germany, Italy, United States.

Review	Years	Issues	Director  and city	Brief description	Available at
<i>Metro</i>	1960–1970	15	Bruno Alfieri, Milan-Venice	The review enhanced the relationship between U.S. and Italy by promoting especially New Dada and Pop Art. It was characterized by monographic articles and good quality reproductions.	<a href="http://www.capti.it/index.php?ParamCatID=1&amp;id=35&amp;lang=IT">http://www.capti.it/index.php?ParamCatID=1&amp;id=35&amp;lang=IT</a>
<i>Bit</i>	1967–1968	10	Daniela Palazzoli, Milan	The review supported Fluxus, Arte Povera and hippie’s culture in Italy. It was also characterized by its experimental and psychedelic graphic design.	
<i>Flash Art</i>	1967–ongoing	ongoing	Giancarlo Politi, Rome-Milan-New York	Born as a news bulletin for arts, the review turned itself into an influent vehicle for self-presentation of artists and for monographic articles, following many neo-avantgardes of that time, from Arte Povera to Transavanguardia.	
<i>NAC</i>	1968–1974	81	Francesco Vincitorio, Milan-Rome	Conceived as a platform for debating, the review tries to promote the discussion around some controversial topics without supporting any particular movements or tendency.	<a href="http://www.notiziarioartecontemporanea.it/index.php">http://www.notiziarioartecontemporanea.it/index.php</a>
<i>Data</i>	1971–1978	28	Tommaso Trini, Milan	Very selective and based on extensive monographic articles, the review mainly supported Arte Povera and Conceptual Art, and it contributed to the early surveys on women artists in Italy.	<a href="http://www.capti.it/index.php?ParamCatID=1&amp;id=43&amp;lang=IT">http://www.capti.it/index.php?ParamCatID=1&amp;id=43&amp;lang=IT</a>

**Table 1.** Main neo-avantgardist art reviews in Italy between 1968 and 1978

Idea Book, an international wholesaler and distributor founded in 1976 and specialized in art related publications, the international distribution of art magazines, such as *Data* or *Flash Art* remained expensive and limited to a global elite<sup>17</sup>.

To sustain expenses, magazines resorted mainly to advertising sales (since increasing their cover price would have especially penalized foreign readers, who were already paying a higher price). In this respect, Italian reviews were peculiar, because they mainly relied on the support of private art galleries, and almost no luxury industry or museum institutions (fig. 1). As highlighted by Alexander Alberro in his book on Conceptual Art and publicity, at that time in the United States some multinational

companies had started investing in contemporary art, finding a “symbolical ally” in it, in the name of a common spirit of innovation<sup>18</sup>. In Italy, on the contrary, the luxury industry didn’t support art periodicals and, so, these magazines should resort to private gallery advertising even more. Aware of this problem, some independent and neo-avantgardist reviews, for instance, had unsuccessfully tried to free themselves from advertising: *Bit* – a rebel magazine with a hippie design – had to capitulate after a few issues in order to “enrich the number of pages and reproductions”<sup>19</sup>, and sober magazines such as *NAC*, after years without advertisements, finally trusted a single private sponsor<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> On the advent of Idea Books, see the advertisement on *Data*, October–November 1976, 81. Idea Books distributed also *Artforum* and *Studio International* in Europe

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge [MA]: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> *Bit*, November 1967, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Since January 1970 *NAC* has only been sponsored by the company Koh.I.Noor.

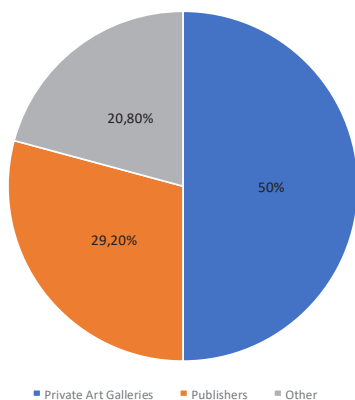


Figure 1a. Types of advertisers on *Bit* (tot. 24).

However, apart from the types of sponsor, the prevalence of advertising as a form of support seemed to be an international problem, typical of magazines with neo-avantgardist ambitions: *Artforum*, for example, dedicated 40% of its printed pages to advertisement in 1979<sup>21</sup>. The more general issue was that magazines operated within a circle that was equally virtuous and defective: if, on the one hand, magazines could boast an international reputation, the support they received from private actors, such as art galleries in particular, could be a form of interference on their critical independence. In face of the economic realities, periodical had to maintain a delicate balance between their selective reliability and the demand for *visibility* they received from private galleries. Art reviews had inevitably to negotiate between critical autonomy and economic interests, resorting to the tools at their disposal: their ability to generate circulation and to produce *visibility*.

### Circularity and community building

How was it possible to balance authority and profit? What were the strategies to build reader loyalty without following the logic of the culture industry? Within an elitist and global community such as that of contemporary art, neither the appeal of ostentatious luxury nor the resonance of mass media would prove effective. At the beginning of the 1970s, for

<sup>21</sup> In 1979 *Artforum* published 10 issues. The average of advertisers was between 85 (January) and 100 (October). Including the covers, 872 pages were printed in 1979 and 361 were dedicated to advertising (41,40%).

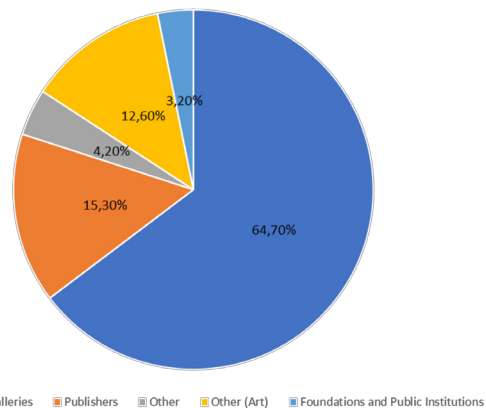


Figure 1b. Types of advertisers on *Data* (tot. 190).

example, German critic Willi Bongard started highlighting the peculiarities of the contemporary art market: his *Kunstkompass* was an annual ranking of the artists based not only on their quotations<sup>22</sup>, but also upon reputational criteria (such as the artist's presence in "international exhibitions; the most important museums; the most qualified literature"<sup>23</sup>). For the first time, Bongard pointed out the economic value of *visibility*, relating it to circulation in a precise way, as the result of the points given by experts to each institution, exhibition or publication. Obviously, not every exhibition or magazine contributed to the increase of the artist's reputation. *Kunstkompass* rather showed how circulation needed to look more like a form of *circularity* to convert itself into *visibility*. As a matter of fact, its ranking produced a self-consolidating judgement: the ranking of the artists also validated the artists' results in the eyes of those experts involved in the ranking to various degrees. Indeed, circulation was not itself a positive value in contemporary art, which aimed at distinguishing itself from the culture industry. Such an environment rather needed *circularity*, that is, a circulation filtered by selective and self-consolidating criteria. Only in this way could *circularity* further evolve into *visibility*, which combines the prominence and relevance given to an artwork (or an artist), its geocultural distribution, its "auratic" appeal and the capital of *interests*

<sup>22</sup> Since 1970, the *Kunstkompass* has been published on the German economic magazine *Capital* and on his own art magazine *Art Aktuell*.

<sup>23</sup> Bongard's criteria of ranking were also known in Italy: "I magnifici cento," *Flash Art*, January 1973, 17.

(Byung Chul-Han) that it can produce (and which Bongard empirically helped us to estimate).

Therefore, magazines played a fundamental role in transforming circulation into *circularity* and Italian art periodicals (especially the neo-avanguardist ones) contributed in various ways to transform the flow of information into a form of validation of the art they dealt with. One early example was the refined strategy of community building adopted by *Metro* or *Flash Art*: art reviews, indeed, had to create their audience with the help of gallerists, who were not only their advertisers, but who sometimes held a role in the distribution of the same magazines<sup>24</sup>. When consulting the archive belonging to Leo Castelli at the Smithsonian in Washington, this phenomenon can be clearly observed together with its geopolitical effects. Bruno Alfieri, director of *Metro*, maintained a long correspondence with the gallerist during the 1960s, promoting his artists in Europe and trying to provide exhibitions for Italian artists in return<sup>25</sup>. And more: in 1972-73, *Flash Art* director, Giancarlo Politi, suggested to Castelli the idea of a magazine based solely on a few Western advertisers: Castelli himself, and the gallerists Sperone, Fischer, Sonnabend, Lambert, L'Attico and a few others<sup>26</sup>.

Politi, however, was able to introduce more updated forms of community building. In 1975, he launched two enterprises: *Art Diary*, a guide to more than 3000 addresses of contemporary art's world insiders, complete with advice on "typical or particularly cheap" restaurants<sup>27</sup>, and an official t-shirt line designed by Fiorucci<sup>28</sup>. Politi thus offered connections that mixed a professional attitude with a more informal management of social relations: that same year, *Flash Art* published a two-page column dedicated to portraits of artists, critics, and gallerists,

photographed at social events or at work<sup>29</sup>. In this case, the aim was that of cooptation: a few issues later, these portraits also appeared on subscription coupon<sup>30</sup>. In this way, the magazine fulfilled a function that was parallel to that of its network, contributing to the designation of a qualified community of operators which one could access thanks to the visibility on its pages: *Flash Art* contributed to creating cohesion among an international group of actors who found there a means of synergy and mutual acknowledgement.

### **Direct and Indirect Saliency**

The building of an audience by the art reviews generated a further form of *circularity*, so to speak. In such a selective community, there was a risk that the few advertisers – the private gallerists – could strongly influence the criteria of *newsworthiness* (which is to say, the possibility of an event or an information to become a public news<sup>31</sup>) adopted by the magazine they were partly financing, thus risking to undermine its impartiality and reputation. However, this hypothesis is more complex than it appears at first glance. In fact, a statistical test, partly inspired by Bongard's method, reveals some unexpected facts. First of all, it is necessary to understand that *visibility* started to show a quantitative relation with the saliency given to a message, a name or an artwork. Indeed, in the case of art magazines and gallerists, this saliency could be distinguished between a *direct* and an *indirect* form of *saliency*: the former corresponds to all the news explicitly alluding to the activities of a gallery (exhibition reviews, notes on the openings, etc.); the latter is based instead on the visual and textual relevance given to artists exhibited by the galleries (size and quality of photographic reproductions, critical essays on their works, etc.). Once a score has been given to each element, it will be possible to relate it to the advertising investment of

<sup>24</sup> Magazines such as *Bit* and *NAC* were distributed in the bookshops and art galleries according to their own announcements. It is also possible that the habit of providing a great number of copies to the advertisers (namely the art galleries) was already used at that time.

<sup>25</sup> Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Leo Castelli Gallery Records, Correspondence, Box 1, Folders 15-17, Washington.

<sup>26</sup> Giancarlo Politi, letter to Leo Castelli, Milan, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1972, Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Leo Castelli Gallery Records, Correspondence, Box 9, Folder B9.31, Washington.

<sup>27</sup> *Flash Art*, February-March 1975, 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>29</sup> *Flash Art*, June-July 1975, 16-17.

<sup>30</sup> The coupon was attached to *Flash Art*, October-November 1975.

<sup>31</sup> The notion of *newsworthiness* derived from the theory of mass-media and journalism: Vincent Campbell, *Information Age Journalism: Journalism in an International Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 117-123.

Data: first 10 advertisers

ADVERTISER	«COINS»
Editori Jabik e Colophon, Milan	6880
Galleria Multipli/Persano, Turin	5735
Framart Studio, Naples	4400
Galleria del Naviglio, Milan-Venice	3930
Studio Marconi, Milan	3480
Galleria Sperone, Turin-Rome-New York	3310
Salone Annunciata, Milan	3120
Galleria Toselli, Milan	2850
Galleria Morone, Milan	2420
Galleria Peccolo, Livorno	1740

«Coins» are a fictitious unit of measurement calculated by adding the sizes (and the fares) of each advertising paid by an advertiser: backcover= 250 coins; 1 page = 200 c.; ½ page = 110 c.; ¼ page = 60 c.

Data: first 10 advertisers for direct salience

ADVERTISER	SCORE
Galleria Sperone, Turin-Rome-New York	181
Studio Marconi, Milan	115
Galleria Toselli, Milan	69
Salone Annunciata, Milan	63
Framart Studio, Naples	54
Galleria Stein, Turin (930 c.)	53
Galleria Multipli/Persano, Turin	49
Galleria Lambert, Milan (720 c.)	49
Galleria Martano, Turin (990 c.)	32
Galleria del Naviglio, Milan – Venice	31

The points of the score are based on the prominence of each article dedicated to the gallery: interviews or articles regarding the gallery or the gallerist = 10 points; reviews to the gallery exhibitions = 5 p.; brief news on the gallery= 3 p.; gallery mentioned in an article = 2 p.; gallery mentioned in the captions and courtesy = 1 p.

Figure 2. Data: the ten main gallery advertisers compared by direct salience.

a gallery: advertising fares were easy to calculate, mainly based upon the size of the space (1 page, ½ page, etc.) and on the position (back cover, internal page, etc.). In Leo Castelli’s Archive there are many examples of advertisement rate table which can allow us to establish some kind of parameters: if a back cover cost 250, then a page of advertising would cost 200, ½ page 110, ¼ page 60, and so on<sup>32</sup>.

We can apply this analysis to *Data*, a magazine whose authority could be considered high (it was the only Italian review included in the *Kunstkompass* in 1977<sup>33</sup>) and whose director, Tommaso Trini, was an internationally acclaimed critic, who has associated his name mainly with the rise of Arte Povera. The results give a good example of the relationship between *visibility* and advertisement (Fig. 2). The table here illustrates the range created

between the two well-established advertisers in the magazine, art gallery Sperone and art gallery Il Naviglio<sup>34</sup>, showing a similar advertising investment. The advertising space being equal, the displacement in favour of Sperone becomes even more evident when considering *indirect salience* (Fig. 3). This demonstrates the delicate attempt of *Data* to combine critical autonomy and advertising funding. Trini was in fact a critic who showed evident predilections for Arte Povera, which partly explains the displacement of these tables, where the galleries that exhibited Arte Povera (such as Sperone, Toselli, Lambert and Stein)<sup>35</sup> received more *salience* in comparison to their investment in advertising (Fig. 4).

<sup>32</sup> These rates came from a letter written by Politi to Castelli (Giancarlo Politi, letter to Leo Castelli, Milan, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1973, Archive of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Leo Castelli Gallery Records, Correspondence, Box 9, Folder B9.31, Washington) but they basically represented the average of other international art reviews.

<sup>33</sup> Ciacia Nicastro, “Kunstkompass: italiani non buoni, non fare punti, non avere bolini,” *Data*, October-December 1977, 86.

<sup>34</sup> Both galleries were renown in Italy and abroad. Sperone has started his career by building a network with the gallerists Ileana Sonnabend and Leo Castelli, promoting first Pop Art and Minimalism, and then Arte Povera and Conceptual Art. Il Naviglio had a prestigious family tradition: founded in 1942 by Carlo Cardazzo, in Venice, the gallery promoted avant-gardes and prominent figures such as Lucio Fontana. During the 1960s and the 1970s, the gallery – which was also opened in Milan – was directed by Renato, Gabriella and Paolo Cardazzo, but its activity was not identifiable with any particular art movement by mixing, for example, *informel* and videotape artists in its programmation.

<sup>35</sup> Franco Toselli was a gallerist who mainly organized exhibition of Arte Povera, Minimalist and Conceptual Art in Milan, as well as François and Yvon Lambert did in their galleries in Milan and Paris, and Christian Stein in Turin.



ADVERTISER	«COINS»	ADVERTISER	SCORE
Galleria del Naviglio, Milan-Venice	3930	Galleria Sperone, Turin-Rome-New York	147
Studio Marconi, Milan	3480	Studio Marconi, Milan	69
Galleria Sperone, Turin-Rome-New York	3310	Salone Annunciata, Milan	42
Salone Annunciata, Milan	3120	Galleria del Naviglio, Milan-Venice	15

See fig. 2

See fig. 4 and the criteria adopted for artists' salience. The score considers at least a range of three years: one year before and one year after the exhibition of an artist in each gallery. For example: if Andy Warhol had a show at Galleria Sperone only once, in 1976, the score will be calculated for the range 1975-1977.

Figure 3. Data: the four main gallery advertisers compared by indirect salience.

First 10 artists for salience on Data

ARTIST	SCORE
→ Giulio Paolini	59
Giuseppe Chiari	48
→ Michelangelo Pistoletto	46
→ Mario Merz	43
→ Luciano Fabro	41
→ Alighiero Boetti	38
Vettor Pisani	36
Daniel Buren	36
Michele Zaza	36
Antonio Trotta	33

Points are calculated in this way: reproduction of her/his artwork on the cover = 5 p.; article of more than 2 pages dedicated to her/him= 3 p.; brief article or only photos and self-presentation of 2 pages = 1 p.; photographic reproduction of her/his artwork= 1 p.

Data: first 10 advertisers for direct salience

ADVERTISER	SCORE
→ Galleria Sperone, Turin-Rome-New York	181
Studio Marconi, Milan	115
→ Galleria Toselli, Milan	69
Salone Annunciata, Milan	63
Framart Studio, Naples	54
→ Galleria Stein, Turin (930 c.)	53
Galleria Multipli/Persano, Turin	49
→ Galleria Lambert, Milan (720 c.)	49
Galleria Martano, Turin (990 c.)	32
Galleria del Naviglio, Milan – Venice	31

See fig. 2

The arrows show the artists and gallerist related to Arte Povera

Figure 4. Data: comparison between most prominent artists and gallery advertisers.

This neat critical attitude, which seems very usual for an art magazine, still holds a relationship with advertisement: not a rigid or univocal relationship, but a flexible one. These tables indeed show that the “aesthetic policy” of a magazine was not so straightly induced by economic demand or by advertisers’ pressure, but rather by the match between the two, which could be a formidable conjuncture in order to compensate some Italian promotional gaps

(its institutional weakness, its lack of contemporary museums, etc.). The confirmation of this factor is clearly visible when gallery advertising was absent from a review, as in the case of *NAC*, where the salience of artists inevitably flattened: an artist very prolific and active in Italy, such as Valeriano Trubiani, was granted the same space as Giulio Paolini, who boasted an international career and was very prominent in magazines such as *Data* (Fig. 5).

ARTIST	SCORE ON NAC	SCORE ON <i>Data</i>
Valeriano Trubbiani	14	0
Giulio Paolini	12	19
Eduardo Arroyo	8	0
Alighiero Boetti	7	27

NAC had a different way of giving prominence to artists. So, for *Data*, see fig. 4, while for NAC the points are calculated as follows: reviews of an exhibition/a book about the artist = 3 p.; interview with the artist = 3 p.; brief news on her/his initiatives = 1 p.; photographic reproduction of her/his artwork = 1 p.

Figure 5. *Salience* of some artists by comparing NAC (from 1971, nn. 8–9 to 1974, n. 12) and *Data* (from 1971, no. 1; to 1974, n. 14).

We can infer how, for a gallerist, the most effective strategy was not to invest massively in advertising promotion, but rather to engage with a community of similar, possibly international, actors, through the choice of artists to represent and places to be present. Since not every gallery could converge on Arte Povera, this strategy required a certain degree of flexibility: *Data*, for example, adopted a strong turnover policy for the advertisers in order to get funding (approximately one-third of the advertisers purchased only one advertisement, typically around the time they had a review, but then stopped investing in such a strongly oriented information channel, especially when they realized it would not systematically bring more reviews<sup>36</sup>).

This meant something else too: the authority of a magazine did not depend on its ability to host debates or inflame polemics, but on its implicit assertiveness. Magazines that proved to be too pluralistic, such as *NAC*, soon failed before the ability of *Data* or *Flash Art* to filter the *visibility* of art galleries, favoring the audience's selective recognition of the artists and orienting the taste of the community.

All the above implied a third aspect of this *circularity*. Often, gallerists did not aim at widening the circle of their collectors by means of advertisements but aimed at consolidating their own reputation with an already existing audience, which was thus reassured by the gallery's *salience* and by its

advertising initiative. Before being an act of persuasion, one gallery's advertising was an act of participation, a way to be professionally acknowledged within a community through an act of economic and intellectual complicity.

This mechanism also favored communicative strategies that were subliminal. During the 1960s, for example, Leo Castelli wisely exploited the birth of the *environments* and installations to promote his brand, by spreading his name in the credit lines of Italian magazines: the caption of photographic pictures became a vehicle to show not only the art environment but also to represent the gallery's space as a physical and recognizable place, a refined and modern venue, which can ascribe an *auratic* appeal to its content<sup>37</sup>.

Moreover, there were other methods of dissimulating the act of advertising that were specifically introduced by Conceptual Art<sup>38</sup>. Looking at Seth Siegelaub's way of promoting art<sup>39</sup>, in Italy this attitude was introduced by gallerists like Franco Toselli, who intended publicity as a conceptual act in cooperation with the artists. In 1971, for instance, Toselli bought a blank page on *Data*, simply announcing that the "space was reserved" for his gallery<sup>40</sup>; and in 1972 he proposed the following text to promote Ian Wilson's show: "On the 20<sup>th</sup> of

<sup>37</sup> Denis Viva, "L'immagine dello spazio. Dal 1967 a ritroso: fotografie di ambienti e installazioni sulle riviste d'arte italiane," *Annali della Scuola Normale di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia* 5, 8 (2016): 567-587; 799-800.

<sup>38</sup> Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*.

<sup>39</sup> Seth Siegelaub strongly supported many American Conceptual artists at their beginnings, by introducing unconventional strategies of promotion. See also Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*.

<sup>40</sup> *Data*, September 1971, 8.

<sup>36</sup> From 1971 to 1978, 32,6% of advertisers paid only one advertising in the review, 34,8% between 2 and 3 times, and 32,6% 4 or more times.

July of 1972, there was a discussion between Franco Toselli and Ian Wilson, and on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 1972, Franco Toselli purchased the discussion. The discussion, but for this statement, is not recorded.”<sup>41</sup> The text seems to be the pure antithesis of persuasion: the act of buying a fully dematerialized piece of art was presented as the anti-economic choice *par excellence*, meaning the acquisition of an artwork as a symbol for solidarity (or complicity) rather than as a capital estate.

Gian Enzo Sperone, a gallerist with headquarters in Turin, Rome, and New York, also used advertisements to commemorate members of the ideal community of contemporary art, such as Gerry Schum<sup>42</sup>, or to mock the table-tennis diplomacy of conservative Nixon, with the implicit accord of his readers: “Sperone Gallery in Turin” – he announced in 1972 – “organizes international ping-pong tournaments.”<sup>43</sup>

The act of advertising thus became a gesture of intellectual complicity, belonging to a community which considers any attempt at persuasion vulgar: first of all, because advertising came from the techniques of culture industry, whereas the contemporary art audience considered itself to be immune to them; secondly, because it would have been pleonastic to do so to a reader who, by buying a selective and activist magazine, had already manifested a precise will of social distinction.

These strategies of *circularity* and *visibility*, thus, warded off the danger of visual oversaturation which is implied by circulation in a highly interconnected and mediatized society such as ours. A work of art cannot be promoted with the same prosaic insistence used with goods. Preferably a good artist would not need commercials, just the aesthetic validation of critics, magazines, and institutions. In order not to publicly affect the reputation of these “validators”, a gallerist had to invest in *indirect salience*, showing off its disinterested and liberal support to such organs of validation. When,

eventually, its selection of artists came to represent a solid canon within a given community, also built thanks to magazines, then power relations could be inverted, leading galleries to the acquisition of an autonomous validating power.

As the economist Leslie P. Singer pointed out in the 1980s, by the time when Conceptual Art was replaced by Neo-Geo, contemporary art represented a special market where it was in the interest of everybody (producers, intermediators, and buyers) to narrow and control competition, making the supply of the goods inelastic<sup>44</sup>. To a certain extent, this phenomenon has become more evident when mechanical reproduction seemed to threaten the craftsmanship status (and economic, inelastic, value) of the artwork. In that moment, the art magazines started to play a pivotal role in order to re-establish the valuable, *auratic*, dimension of works of art, by converting *exposability* from a supposed means of democratization into a new means of distinction. In national contexts, as the Italian one, which lacked of a *museum validation*, this role of art magazines seems to be even more emphasized than in other Western countries, becoming one of the few way to reach a trans-national audience. All the strategies adopted by these reviews (*indirect salience*, community building, etc.) ended up by reinforcing the control of competition, the *aura* of artworks and the reputation of artists: in a word, they transformed circulation into *circularity*, and they finally produced that capital of *interests* that is at the core of *visibility*.

Translated by Anna Guardini

<sup>41</sup> *Data*, Summer 1972, 5. For Toselli see footnote 35. Ian Wilson was one of the most prominent Conceptual artists.

<sup>42</sup> Sperone dedicated a whole page “to Gerry Schum” on *Data*, Summer 1973, 7. Gerry Schum was a filmmaker who directed some pioneering documentaries on Arte Povera, Conceptual, Land artists.

<sup>43</sup> *Data*, February 1972, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Leslie P. Singer, “Phenomenology and Economics of Art Market: an Art Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 1 (1988): 27-40.