

NOTES ON INISM FOR ANGLOPHONES

by DAVID W. SEAMAN

When Gabriel-Aldo Bertozzi was asked, «Why the name Inism?» the founder of the movement answered, «It comes from the acronym INI, formed by the initials of International (from necessity more than from choice), Novatrice (of course because it is a revolutionary movement) and Infinitesimal. This last word is, without doubt, the most characteristic of our movement. It is even the most complex one, difficult to explain because it has many different meanings. The most important ones are:

- 1) An Argentinian type, which starts from the infinitesimal to express the infinite.
- 2) A mathematical type, based mainly on the study of the extremely small.
- 3) An atomic type. This is the most known example which everyone repeats: «As in physics atom fission has taken place, so Inists have aimed to split the elements which form words».
- 4) A mystic type of meaning, based on a consideration almost ignored by the artists of the past and which, until yesterday, belonged to science alone; this meaning takes account of the fact that the Earth has existed for millions of years.
- 5) A communicative type of meaning. This puts the utilization of the international phonetic system on the same level as photoinipoetry because both – the first by its orality, the second by its images – aim to be a universal form of communication.
- 6) There is also an ethical/aesthetic meaning which considers inists as promoters of the dynamics of going beyond: they think that even if the products of our creation are overtaken by others, they will have contributed to that phase of evolution/emancipation, and will thus be responsible for future works».

Inism was founded at the Café de Flore in Paris on January 3, 1980, by Gabriel-Aldo Bertozzi accompanied by Laura Aga-Rossi and Jean-paul Curtay, and in the presence of Isidore Isou, who was interested in the event. Once they had returned to Italy, Bertozzi and Aga-Rossi were joined by Giulio Tamburrini, Angelo Merante, Moreno Marchi, and Antonino Russo. The first manifesto was published in Paris and Rome in September of 1980, and the first exhibition of ini works was the same month in Paris, at the Salon de la Lettre et du Signe. This salon is a lettrist show, which suggests the ini relationship to the French movement at that time. In fact, the first manifesto would declare: «INI was foreseen by Futurism, by Dada, and announced by Lettrisme». INI has now shown that it survives all of its predecessors.

The second manifesto, called *Apollinaria Signa*, was created in the town of S. Apollinare, and alludes purposely to Guillaume Apollinaire, whose *L'esprit nouveau et les poètes* holds great importance for the inists. Among the declarations in the second manifesto are calls for emancipation of the poet and the reader, and it lists the following among its formal advances:

- Poetry is not necessarily a written page

- Poetry can also be seen or heard
- Poetry is also scent and gesture
- A sonnet can be hypergraphic and rhyme with a drawing...
- A poet can use at his whim the pen or the brush, computer or mallet, tape or film...
- Every word, even the oldest, will be heard for the first time.

Inist painting was immediately established through the works of its founder and the first members of the movement.

Ini theater began in 1984 with the involvement of actor and director Giorgio Mattioli. Other areas were soon developed, such as abstract phonetic poetry, which grew out of the theatrical experiments, followed by sound collages by Bertozzi, film scenarios by Pietro Ferrua, and the hypergraphic and atemporal (beyond time) novel by Bertozzi and Merante.

Photography has been developed and expanded by Inism, and translation has been developed creatively. Eventually even interactive computer-based collaborative works were added to the inists' opus.

For an in-depth understanding of the evolution of poetic (and also pictorial) creative material, one must read the *Manifesto della critica inista*: "In the beginning of the modern era there were the **protoromantics** and through the off-spring disseminated by Rousseau a Utopia grew up. Then the **romantics** became aware of the new words. The growth phase of writing reached the limits of the possible. With Baudelaire began the phase of concentration and also the descent that leads to the infinitesimal. An author concentraed on a single passage or poem (which includes every short piece of writing). But his Petits poèmes en prose, even if they are superior to the inoffensive Fleurs du mal, end up being too wishy-washy, still too attached to the growth phase. **Verlaine** almost by accident and **Mallarmé** lucidly descended into the Maelstrom of concentration, toward the infinitesimal, to the verse or line of poetry. Then **Rimbaud** destroyed the written line to arrive at the letter and foretold the phoneme and forms of aphonism (then was afraid of it and changed registers). The **Futurists** reached the infinitesimal, at the end of the phase of concentration (after Dada, nothingness), but more out of esthetic intuition than critical awareness.

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Inism, on the one hand returns to the growth phase, retracing all the pathways with new perspectives, while on the other hand it takes its place in concentration, in the infinitesimal itself through the intense focus brought to every written element, whether

**a single word
or pause or
phoneme
or inia."**

Bertozzi's apartment in Rome is like a museum of visual poetry and the history of INI. Near the entry are photographs that show Bertozzi with proponents of three movements that gave him inspiration: *Inism and Futurism*, with Primo Conti in 1977; *Inism and Surrealism*, with Philippe Soupault in 1981; *Inism and Lettrisme*, with Isidore Isou in 1982. At the same time, there is a need to distinguish Inism from the others. Bertozzi has always expounded the great difference between Inism and Lettrism. This is clarified in an article published in an important Italian journal in 1989 under the title, *Inismo non è Lettrismo*

A glimpse at some examples of the range of inista works will suggest the nature of their project: the **inia** is the most obvious element of inism: these pictorial or written signs aim to be an orchestration of feelings and thoughts, the multiple and global vision that brings them to life.

These signature works result in visually stunning compositions. They are used in prints, paintings, and works signed by Bertozzi and others (among the first: Laura Aga-Rossi and Angelo Merante).

The **inika sonorika** is a sound poetry composition, which Merante has sometimes called «abstract poetry». The sounds are scored with the international phonetic alphabet, an inista innovation in sound poetry. When I met with Merante in a cafe near Rome's via del Babuino, Merante improvised an inika sonorika to greet me, which he called *Un saluto per Davide*. We were also afforded an opportunity to see what the reception of inismo is, when someone at a neighboring table asked «What are these strange sounds?» Merante explained that this abstract poetry is like listening to a song in a language you don't know – you can still understand the expression. Merante explained that he makes several vocal passes that he records over each other, producing finally a polyphonic work.

The feeling of polyphony is present also in **fotografia inista**. Bertozzi has made a distinction between this form, which is entirely photographic, and the **fotoinigrafia**, where images that include written signs are combined with the photograph. These photographs combine layers of photographic imagery to produce rich designs that combine two or more images – each with its own reading, to result in a third or fourth or multiple more complex readings.

The **librogetto** or object-book is a further example of the inist's desire to produce works that provoke multiple responses through the association of evocative stimuli. In Bertozzi's apartment museum, the Roman amphorae displayed on the walls give a first hint of the almost archeological layering of meaning in the works. Bertozzi's interest in antique writing instruments leads to some works that play on the theme of writing, and written communication: In one composition there are Japanese ink, ink grinding plates, and brushes, and in another we see a Venetian glass pen and ink well. There is even a collection of *Inist Incunabulae*. This focus on the instrument that makes the sign is at the heart of inist poetics.

Inism already celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2005, with a major convention and

exhibition in Pescara, Italy, followed by a celebration at the Café de Flore in Paris, where it was first conceived. The movement has a convenient vehicle for its theories in the journal, *Bérénice, Rivista Quadrimestrale di Studi Comparati e Ricerche sulle Avanguardie*, edited by Bertozzi. Further, the 2014-2015 exhibition at the Mairie du 6^e in Paris affirms the international presence of this vibrant movement.