

## INISMO: A NEW VISUAL AVANT-GARDE

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**Abstract:** *Inismo is a new international artistic movement, defined as ‘avant-garde’. The link between Inismo and the avant-garde adventure at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is obvious and not limited to the name of the movement, to its manifests. The work domain of Inist artists knows no limits or barriers; art is not categorised in genres anymore but contains operational domains: video in poetry, sound poetry, painting, sculpture, and literature with multimedia influences. One of the declared objectives of Inismo is that of creating art which would not know the issue of the invariably debatable translation, linguistic barriers, or the passing of time.*

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Inismo is a new international artistic movement which, although it accepts being defined as ‘avant-garde’, is situated, through the poetic declarations and artwork that represent it, beyond it. The term ‘avant-garde’ has been assumed by Inists as an inner attitude in its simplest interpretation, distinctive from official art, the art accepted by society, but without implying the demolition and destruction of tradition, which is nevertheless restored by the few predecessors whom it knows. Just like in the case of its historical models, Futurism, Dada and Surrealism, we can establish an exact apparition date (3rd of January 1980, 3:30 p.m., at Café de Flore, Paris), a group of artists who further it (Gabriele-Aldo Bertozzi, founder; Laura-Aga Rossi and Jean-Paul Curtay) and especially the means of promoting its poetic art, the manifest. (The first manifest, *Qu'est-ce que l'I.N.I. - Che cos'è l'I.N.I.*, 1980, was written in both French and Italian, and the second one, *Apollinaria Signa*, was written in 1987 and published two years later.) The first INI works were also exhibited in Paris in September-October 1980 at the *Salon de la Lettre et du Signe*. Inists seem to prefer making their own *ars poetica* known first rather than gathering acolytes because, they argue, it is essential to acquire an ethic to uphold everything that follows: ‘One cannot become an Inist through recommendations and coups de théâtre but necessitates an exceptional dose of initiative, an avant-garde spirit and a deep need to go beyond the limits of reality to enter those of innovation, of the multiple horizons which overlap and expand towards new perspectives.’ (Gasbarrini 1995: 64). Gabriele-Aldo Bertozzi’s activity follows two paths: on the one hand, that of research and higher education (he teaches French language and literature at the Università degli Studi G. D’Annunzio in Pescara, has authored important studies on the avant-garde and French poetry, and has translated Rimbaud’s work) and on the other hand, that of literary and artistic creation (he writes poetry, novels, and theatre and produces artwork that

advocates the cultural movement whose founder he is). These two coordinates can be found in the establishments he has created and leads: C.U.S.M.A.R.C. (Centro Universitario di Sviluppo Multimediale Applicato alla Ricerca a allo Studio della Creatività) and *Bérénice* (a journal of comparative studies and research on the avant-garde). Well-known in the European avant-garde circles of the ‘70s, translated in the main European and Central American countries, coauthor of the most important anthologies dedicated to contemporary abstract poetry in Italy, character in several novels and films, such as *Un uomo fuori del tempo* by Lino Battista (traditional novel), *Rimbaud en Abyssinie* by Alain Borer (novel-essay), *Jonas* by Isidore Isou (hypergraphic novel), *Città* by Angelo Merante (Inist novel), *Le Roman de Chieti* by Roland Sabatier (object novel), and the film *San Remo* by Pietro Ferrua, Bertozzi remains the most prominent figure of Inismo.

The title awarded to the INI (Internazionale Novatrice Infinitesimale) movement reflects the main aspects of this experience: *Internazionale* announces an organisatory principle and defines the movement as not being ‘circumscribed within a country, but aiming toward art that belongs to everyone’ (Bertozzi 1989: 27). We can already consider the manifestations of Inismo, accompanied by exhibits, manifests and works of art, in France, Spain, Portugal, Argentina, the United States, and Sweden); *Novatrice* points out the ideological principle, consistent throughout the avant-garde, focused on the ‘uninterrupted renewal in the spirit of the movement itself’ (Bertozzi 1989: 27), the second manifest reads, ‘We will never repeat ourselves’ (Gianni e Inferrera 1998: 47); and *Infinitesimale*, the third term with a programmatic content, hints at the domain within which Inismo operates: ‘the splitting of the word in its primary elements’ (Bertozzi 1989: 29), just like physicists have performed the splitting of the atom through a process whose outcome is difficult to foresee. ‘Infinitesimal’ is the

term that describes best the activity of Inists, for whom, ‘il est inutile de limiter le domaine de l’art comme l’on fait tous les théoriciens jusqu’aujourd’hui. La création n’a pas de fin, elle est infinitésimale.’ (Gianni e Inferrera 1998: 42) In poetry, ‘infinitesimal’ entails the idea of an unknown and difficult to imagine infinity.

The link between Inismo and the avant-garde adventure at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is obvious and not limited to the name of the movement, to its manifests, which often invoke Futurism, Dada, Surrealism or, more recently, Lettrism, or to the open declarations of its promoters; Bertozzi defines Inismo as the third phase of the avant-garde, ‘the avant-garde that returns to the original purity’, the movement which, in a ‘post-theory’ era, is the ‘only defender of the intellect, of ideology’ (Gianni e Inferrera 1998: 32).

The activity of Inismo, however, goes much further. While the avant-garde movements dictated the abandonment of syntax and free words, the abolition of all rules, the oneiric and automatic language, the decomposing of artistic methods down to their minimal, primary elements (word-letter-phoneme, pure lines and colours, sound as noise), Inismo, on the contrary, wishes to achieve that ‘universal language’ advanced in *Lettre du Voyant* by Rimbaud, the prevalent figure in all Inist creations.

The work domain of Inist artists knows no limits or barriers; art is not categorised in genres anymore but contains operational domains (fields). The true nature of the goal pursued by Inists manifests itself in applying creativity to the *art of doing* (poetry) constantly and consciously, without enforcing any rules to the freedom of expression or creativity, that is, entirely free from models and conventions; they work with all the means of expression that they have at hand and often invent new ones, exchanging effortlessly the pen for the audio tape or the video tape for the photocopier. Inists adopt these means in order to transcend the genres which disintegrated the unity of poetic expression, attempting to return to poetry not only new energy and resources but also its ample significance of the *art of doing*.

In these ‘operational fields’, Inismo is expressed practically, not only through words: ‘Poetry is not necessarily a written page/ poetry may be seen or heard/ poetry is scent and gesture; a sonnet may be hypergraphic and rhyme with a drawing/ the poet may make indiscriminate use of the pen, brush, computer or hammer, the audio or video tape/ the image lab may be equipped with the mechanic’s undercarriage, the chemist’s tables, the informatician’s desktops and printers/ the hammer and the pen will be replaced by the computer, but thus, they will regain a Golden Age

as their use will reappear in the sacred rite and not in habit/ words will cease to be conventional terms and will regain their magic, evocative, sacred power. In the beginning was the word, and the poet will retrieve the word/ the word will be new or will have new meanings.’ (Gianni e Inferrera 1998: 48-49). The antithesis of ‘term’ and ‘word’, verified by ‘lack of meaning’ and ‘new, sacred meaning’, appears as a structural element in the theatrical opera *La signora Proteo* by Gabriele-Aldo Bertozzi, in which an eschatological effect is produced by utilising the words ‘infect, which contaminated people, already weak through their nature, with Logorrea Atrox’ (Bertozzi 1995: 12), in opposition with ‘The first Word, that from which sprang all other words’ (Bertozzi 1995: 11). Therefore, the term ‘poetry’ must be understood in its broad meaning, taking into account the various methods with which the Inists experimented (from videoini poetry and sound poetry to painting, sculpture, and literature with multimedia influences).

The Inists’ goal of making poetry that could be seen and heard was accomplished due to the multiplication of the expressive planes which was realised by ‘exhibiting poems as pictures which were not only pictures, reciting on the stage wordless poems that others would not have been capable of interpreting, recording on tape or discs poems that others would have only been capable of sculpting’ (Di Pancrazio 1991: 36). In this regard, the most representative works are Gabriele-Aldo Bertozzi’s *Palinsesto* (a schematic reproduction of an old manuscript in which the programmatic intention is obvious through the use of international phonetic symbols, made-up words and pictograms, as well as the collage) or *Pappa reale* (object poem, in which verbal support is replaced with objects or fragments of objects chose with the aim of surpassing operational borders in order to find an absolute means of expression).

The borders between various art genres having been abolished, *the painting to be read or yelled, the written voice, gesture poetry or videoini poetry* can come into existence. Certainly, the Inists were not the first to capitalize on these possibilities (one should not forget the tactile poems, abstract pictograms or multi-material compositions of the Futurists, all aimed at transcending the printed word), but they are praiseworthy for exploiting their new meanings, especially through the use of multimedia, to cross the ‘Gutenberg barrier’, an essential step in reviving the dormant literature, just like the visual arts had already succeeded in doing by going beyond the painted canvas (Barilli 1997: 91). In this fashion, poetry is introduced to the expositional and commercial circle of visual arts and actualises the physical convergence of

different means of expression, the abandonment of the limits related to the printed page.

One of the declared objectives of Inismo is that of creating art which would not know ‘the issue of the invariably debatable translation, linguistic barriers, or the passing of time’(Gianni e Inferrera 1998: 42), and the first step towards attaining it was the adoption of international phonetic symbols and arriving, a decade later, at the use of virtual reality. The embracement of these symbols is justified by the Inists through the outcome of creation: ‘Inismo is a poetic movement, so through its work, it wants to communicate not to inform’, and that is why we are following the wrong path if we ‘look for the signified within the signifier’ (Gianni e Inferrera 1998: 19-20); the International Phonetic Alphabet allows the pronunciation of the letters the way in which it has been conceived by the author and the communication by way of the signified, while the signifier, as abstract poetry, colour or shape, is left to rhythm, sight, touch, found within each individual. The International Phonetic Alphabet is adopted as to counteract the Lettrism of Isidore Isou, as mentioned in the first Inist manifest: ‘Lettrism, considering that the use of words is already obsolete, proposed the letter as a prosodic element, separating phonetic poetry from word poetry. However, these letters or innovative assemblages of letters do not represent the same sound for everyone.... Our poetry, on the other hand, can be read by everybody because we have adopted the symbols of the International Phonetic Association’ (Gianni e Inferrera 1998: 42). The Inist sign becomes the *ini*: ‘A face, a flower, the sea, before being an ensemble of shapes and colours, are signs; the shout, the crying, the laughter, before being sounds, are signs; a mood, a sensation, a dream are signs.... We provide the sign ... with the value of creation and not that of imitation, of knowledge and not of photographic reality. The signs are an orchestra of feelings and thoughts, the multiple and global vision which shows us life. And they portend the sublime order that is born from chaos. We called them “ini”.’ (Bertozzi 1996: 241)

Through the *ini*, the quintessence of the language is sought for, and it can be compared with the last stage in the alchemy (a word endeared by the Inists) of signs: gold. The Inist sign, whether it be graphic, phonetic or gestural, confers the maximum of freedom to the poet.

Starting from the phoneme, the abstract onomatopoeia, the Inist artists intend to ‘find, by truly abolishing the operational sectors, the origin of every creative moment (scriptural, pictorial, visual, plastic, sonic, etc.)’ (Bertozzi 1989: 28), focusing on and elating through synesthetic practice to discover the inner possibilities of any means of expression.

The use of the international phonetic symbols had to lead to *videoinipoetry*, which was launched in a manifest written in September 1990 and defined as ‘their [the international phonetic symbols] integration and amplification in visual art, not their substitution’ (Gianni e Inferrera 1998: 50). The term ‘videoinipoetry’ signifies not only the means through which it is created (the advanced technology offers diverse prospects in the art field as well) but also the new dimension of the artwork, represented by the simultaneity of its expository media.

The Inists’ intent is focused on distending perception and integrating shape, colour and sound with movement. They seek to make the novel perceptive freedom accessible to the viewer/user by surpassing the simultaneity of Futurists as a representation *on* different levels through a materialization ‘indifferent emotional, sensory, regenerative spheres’ (Gianni e Inferrera 1998: 64).

This becomes possible in ‘virtual reality’ (a term that leaves the Inists dissatisfied as there is no question of anything virtual, and one can only talk about a broadening of reality), through the strength given by its numberless possibilities, if the one producing it is a creator and not simply an ‘illustrator’. Bertozzi considers the artist is a visionary and defines Inist ‘visionariness’ in *La realtà virtuale* as ‘a cognitive approach [to reality] ... which will address the abstract rather than the figurative’(Gianni e Inferrera 1998: 65). Visionariness is, for Inists, the creator’s and artist’s specific attitude (the motto of the manifest *Videoinipoesia*, ‘sometimes I saw what the man only thought he saw’, is dedicated to a great visionary and model of the Inists, Rimbaud) and represents an egocentric element, exclusively psychological in nature, while visionary art is situated, from a spatial and representational point a view, beyond the three-dimensional Cartesian coordinates or those transcorporeal and hypermental of cyber reality.

The illusion that an infinite ‘mechanical’ multiplication or a visual, tactile or synaesthetic manipulation of reality would suffice is decidedly false. As such, virtual reality would become a simple ‘system to liquidate experience and reality’ (Gasbarrini 1995: 9). We owe it to art (Inists) the regaining of the ethico-spiritual dimension of reality through a visionary attitude not only at the level of imagery but also that of language.

Antonio Gasbarrini identifies two constant features of Inist visual art: the repetition and interaction of the acronym INI (Internazionale Novatrice Infinitesimale) in the context of the works and ‘the presence of certain symbolic phonemic roots taken from the vast repertoire of the written works sedimented in the various civilisations that have

alternated until nowadays or have simply been reinvented, often linked to the symbols adopted from the International Phonetic Association’ (Gasbarrini 1995: 21).

This ‘visionary iconography’ defines Inist works, especially those of Gabriele-Aldo Bertozzi (*Poème-ville [vision]*, 1995, or *MN*, 1955) and Eugenio Gianni (*Nascita dell’uomo inista*, 1995, and *Giudizio non finale delle avanguardie non iniste*, 1995), which highlight, at the same time, the mental and conceptual games of the former and the analytic and ludic approach of the latter.

‘Primitive archaism and futuristic modernism, the symbolico-ritual short circuit of the avant-garde, stylistic syncretism, contextual experimentation of all means of expression known until today and those that must be invented from now on’ (Gasbarrini 1995: 22) are the poetic parameters of a ‘visionary’ artist such as Bertozzi, capable of manoeuvring in a destructive manner, fed by disinhibition and irony, the ‘academic’ rules of the avant-garde, still praised by various experimental movements, but from which Inismo differentiates itself, considering them simple manners.

The work of Eugenio Gianni, who approaches Inismo through the study of the avant-garde movements, besides the theoretical elaboration of the movement -*Estetologia inista* corresponds to ‘beauty research applied to communication’ (Gianni 1993: 74), and *CromolNlfonia* makes ‘visible the aesthetic aspect of the sound to all those who are not able to perceive it adequately and cannot detect its varied movements’-, pays attention to the spatio-temporal component presented as ‘infinitesimal flux-energy’ (Gianni 1993: 77), and whose immediate consequence is the relativization of the supporting values of art history. In the cromolNiphonic domain are included the picto-sonic translation of fragments from Debussy’s *Clair de lune* and Grieg’s *Morning*. It implies a procedure which could be called visual translation and which respects certain unambiguous correspondences, established by the author, ‘between note and melody, between note and melody-harmony, between sound frequency and colour wavelength’ (Gasbarrini 1995: 23), allowing the ‘reader’ to perceive visually the ‘connections, harmonies, contrasts, tempo and length since these will live on the canvas just like in theatre’ (Gianni 1993: 78). (The works cited above, *Nascita dell’uomo inista*, 1995, and *Giudizio non finale delle avanguardie non iniste*, 1995, suggest the remaking of *The Creation of Adam*, found on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, from an intertextual, imagistic and scriptural perspective, with the use of calligrammes similar to those utilised by Apollinaire.)

The distinct values of the phoneme are also exploited in an interesting manner in the works of Laura Aga-Rossi and Angelo Merante, being, for the former, the dominating theme, analysed at different levels: anthropological (*Kalevala e AlchINia*, 1994), cultural (*A noir* and *Voyelles*, 1990, in which Rimbaud’s influence is evident) and imagistic (*Ini Init*, 1990, in which the ratio between the written sign and the colour of the page/canvas is given by the spatial distension of the phonemes, acronyms, monograms, anagrams, and other graphic combinations against a series of overlapping planes). In his works (*Call[iper]grafia*, 1990; *Anagramma ottico*, 1994), Angelo Merante uses both recognizable signs from the current or ancient alphabets and invented signs in order to obtain a unidimensional effect in extraordinary ‘hypertransalphabetic’ (Gasbarrini 1995: 23) writings. The simplest form of optical anagrams is represented by series of letters on a piece of paper. These graphic signs are subtly mixed together or sometimes combined with images to suggest a multiple reading of the text. Therefore, the optical anagrams, which implies an assorted array of technical solutions and fabrics, expands to poetry painting, which becomes a path toward the universal language. Inist photography, promoted by a manifest in 1996, is also worth mentioning in the context of Inist visual language. The distinction between Inist photography and photoinigraphy is given by its means of production: The former is created only through photographic means, whereas the latter combines the intervention of diverse technologies. The visual Inist work is defined, therefore, as a creative type of poetry on several planes, and which demands renewed readings and, especially, an emancipated reader who is able to manage, through a simultaneity of perception, the innovative freedom it has to offer.

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