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You Are Here...

perew



The 70s: Total Restructuralization

"I have to create a system or be enslav'd by another man's." (W. Blake) (1).

In the second half of the 70s, anyone venturing into the outskirts of Milan would encounter factories, dormitory towns, laborers, strikes, ring-roads, austerity ... an artificial life on the edge of an industrial metropolis.

The companies and the factories were the "monsters" of Milan, conditioning people's lives and acting as the main protagonists, the real subjects of the world.

Faced with all this, we were assailed by an irresistible attraction and sense of admiration towards those self-sufficient structures with their own internal regulations where nothing seemed to happen by chance. At the same time, however, we would feel an overwhelming sense of unease and impotence: these were the structures that loomed over men and conditioned everyone's lives.

As a result of this love-hate relationship Premiata Ditta was born. We set out to become the Subject and, in turn, transformed ourselves into a company or, to be more precise, into a set of individuals/companies.

In the 1950s, G. Anders spoke of man's unease *"when faced with the shamefully high quality of the things he himself had created"*, alongside which he himself appeared unqualified and inferior as a mere man *"...as a product of nature, a body, he was too unilaterally defined to be able to keep up with the transformations of his world of instruments that changed daily"*.

Anders went on to state, adapting a famous addage by Marx, *"It is not enough to be able to interpret the body, one also has to transform it."* (Premiata Ditta, from the leaflet *Art, Industry*) (1989) (2).

Our project for autonomy required its own vocabulary which we constructed basing ourselves on a company model. This metonymy had involved every aspect of our lives: what we also needed, however, was a background, an alternative past.

"The sometimes ingenuous simplicity of the instruments on display in this show will no doubt raise a smile among some of the spectators (...) I would appreciate it, however, and this is the real aim of the exhibition, if every one of you were to reflect, for at least one moment, on the considerable results that these apparently primitive instruments have obtained over these years which have proved so difficult for our company." (From Dr. Giuliani's inaugural speech, 1980) (3).

However schizophrenically, we divided our identity up into a multitude of different characters (directors, laborers, technicians); all of whom served to ensure the smooth running of our body/company from the inside with all the responsibilities and successes shared accordingly.

"I remember the Vice President saying: Every one of us is the President of a company that we carry inside of us ... a company which in turn contains other companies, not unlike in an indefinite game of Chinese boxes." (from *A Meeting of Sector Managers*, 1984) (4).

"Let us reply immediately to the technician Conti who would like to know whether or not after ten years of activity he is entitled to free Total Restructuralization: certainly, Mr. Conti. You must simply present an application to your nearest Total Restructuralization Center and, within a few days, if the documentation is in order, you will be called for. Total Restructuralization is an assistance service which all technicians are free to take advantage of, completely free of charge and has been since 1978." (From *La Ditta*, Issue N. 10, 1983) (5).

The solution for life was to become mutants, and to create a mental organization that would allow for a representation of the world and ourselves as a company.

"If you are wondering what it is like to be part of our company, imagine a complex of highly concentrated technology, an intelligent edifice in a permanent state of evolution endowed with a dense network of internal movements of data and materials; horizontal transactions but, more than anything, vertical transitions, from the bottom upwards and vice versa; transitions between sectors, departments and offices." (From *the Guide to Company Productions*, 1982) (6).

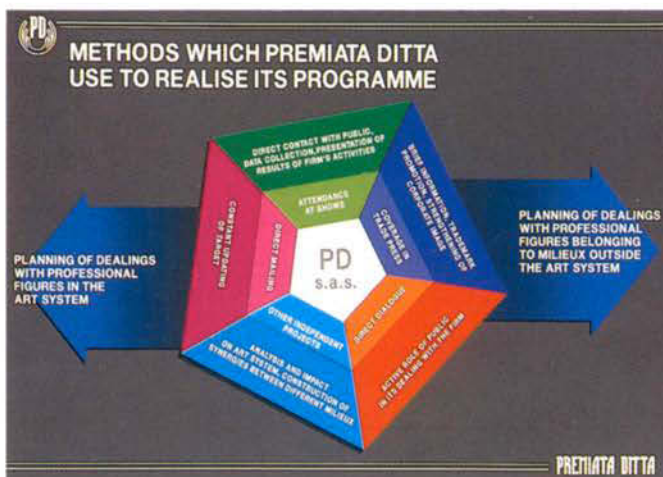
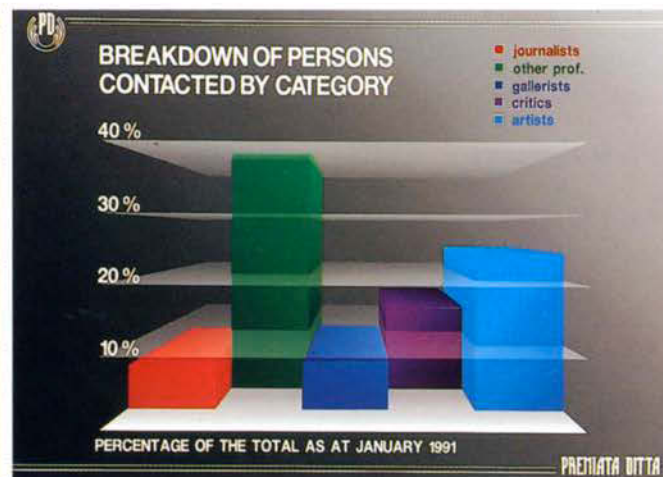
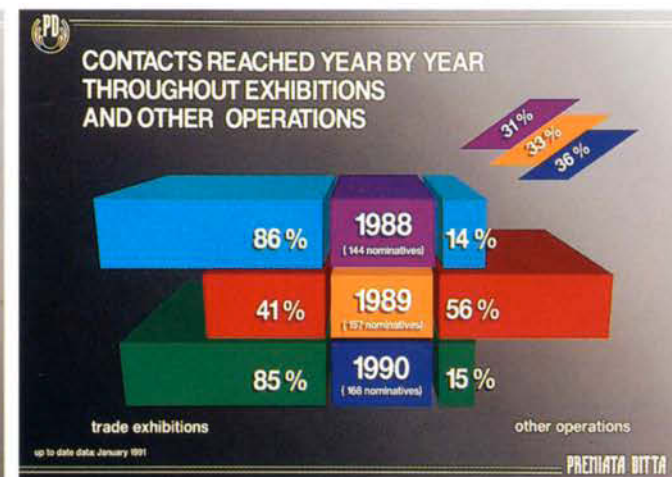
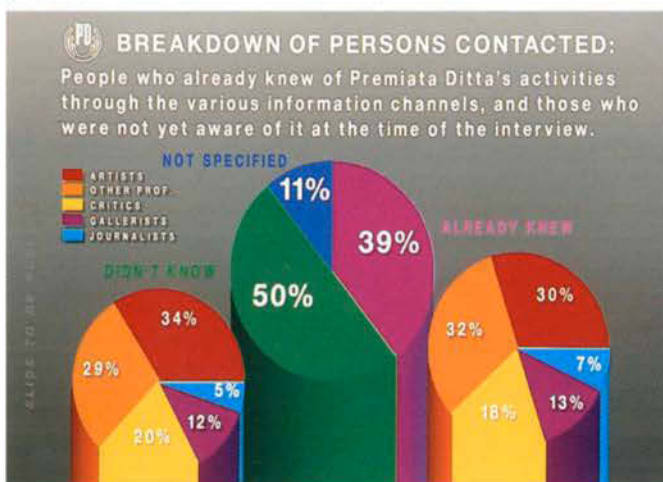
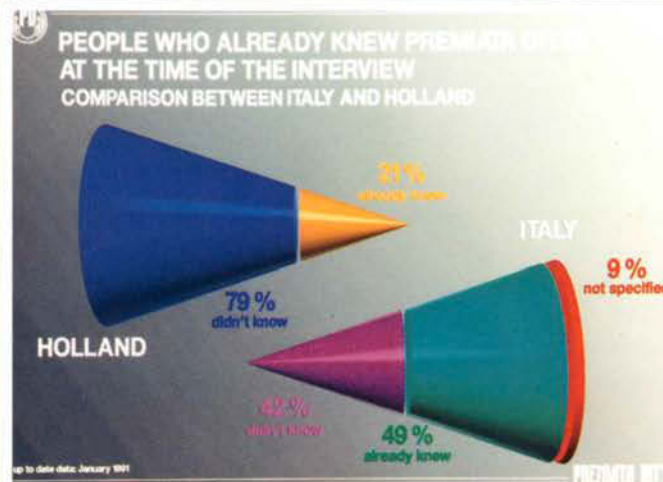
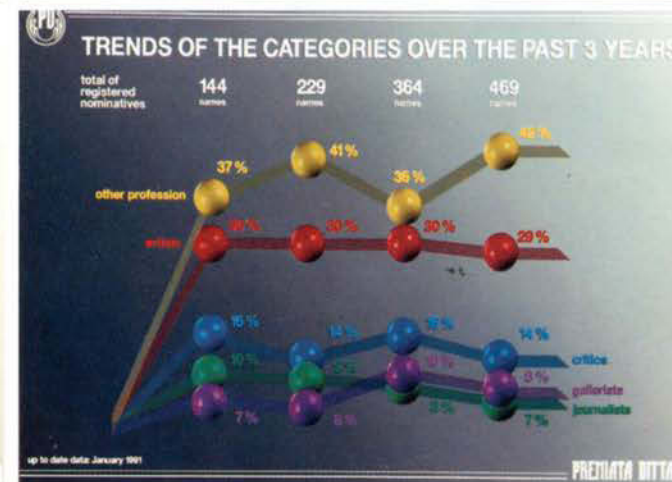
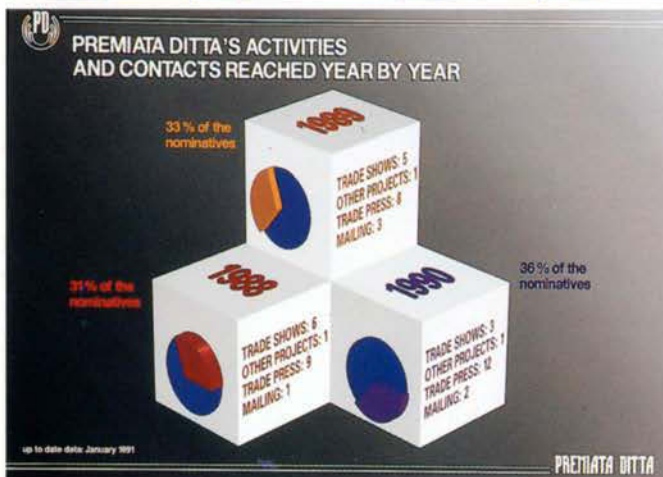
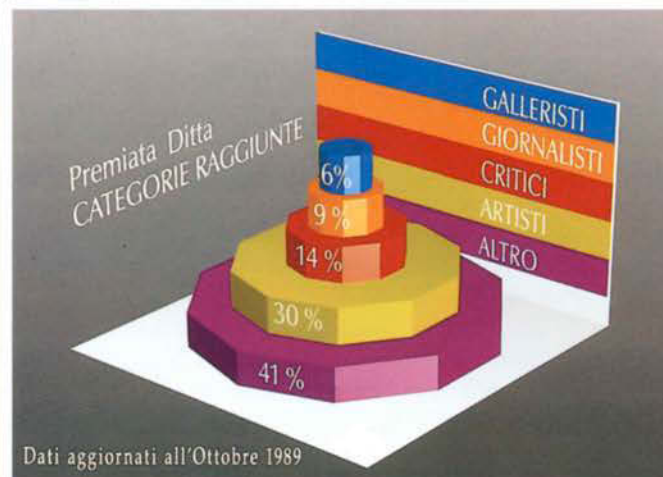
The relations between man as flesh and blood and the technological apparatus is developed according to the model of super-hero endowed with renewed powers but not, however, a Frankenstein figure, the reassembled corpse, the ready-made.

On the contrary, it was a new machine, a technological mutant, a bionic robot capable of obtaining above-average results in his relations with others. These results were qualified with the aid of mathematical equations which would then be scrupulously filed away.

The robot/factory, the individual turned company, eventually triumphed against the decay of his biological parts and death:

"Allow me to tell you, gentlemen, briefly in the short time that has been conceded to me, that I work without respite. My life is fulfilled. I create my own thoughts so that our President need no longer lament. I oversee the work that transforms him into plastic and program the







Our first brochure, 1985



Our stand

electronic metamorphosis of his limbs into colored chambers full of tasted and command the mutation of his blood into latex. Gradually, everything is transformed and the noises become mechanical rhythms which remain forever the same and with no more pain involved." (From Dr. Zanetti's personal diary, 1980) (7).

This nth "celibate machine" therefore required "victims" (his fuel being his social relations) and represented a reaction against the "no future" ethic of cyberpunk, the post lead years and the end of the workers' struggles.

" On his island that he calls a museum, Morel says: So I thought of setting up large albums or family and public museums for my images. But what is a museum if it is not to human capital (the people invited by Morel) what a bank is to financial capital? The system is constantly giving advances on what has been deposited in it (the various moments experienced by the people invited onto the island) while confiscating forever what is invested in it, which is to say the very lives of the people invited.

This recording reproducing apparatus is the perfect image of the capitalistic megamachine." (P. Gorsen) (8).

The 80s: Language is a virus

In addressing the art system, we have always paid considerable attention to the language destined for use in all texts published, for our first brochure (1985) and all the information leaflets we have distributed from our stands at exhibitions.

The conscious participation of the public in our projects became an issue of fundamental importance for us and exceeded the more fantastic, mechanical aspects of our activity so that consequently, we became a real organization of people in collaboration between each other.

From being a mechanism that produced existence (our own), we became a Company that produced meaning (for ourselves and others).

Unreal personalities made way for real collaborators from a variety of different disciplines (sociologists, philosophers, communications experts, copy writers and computer experts).

Our model had been modified and not unlike in the theory of systems, the organization was born of our environment and other systems.

What we were interested in was small-scale research as was happening in the world albeit on a much vaster scale: a dialogue, a reciprocal influence between different languages and disciplines.

We have often remarked on the importance of our project as a whole in relation with its output and the instruments involved, as if in an attempt to emphasize the supremacy of software over hardware.

We could be compared with a service industry but certainly never with a holding company or a company that produces machinery.

Interactivity was a fundamental consideration in our work, as regards the presence of external collaborators as well as the active participation of the public.

The concept of " operation " which we use to define our service is actually based on the "prosumer" figure (the producer-consumer) who renders a service concrete by using it.

We organized various opinion polls and debated in order to promote this dialogue:

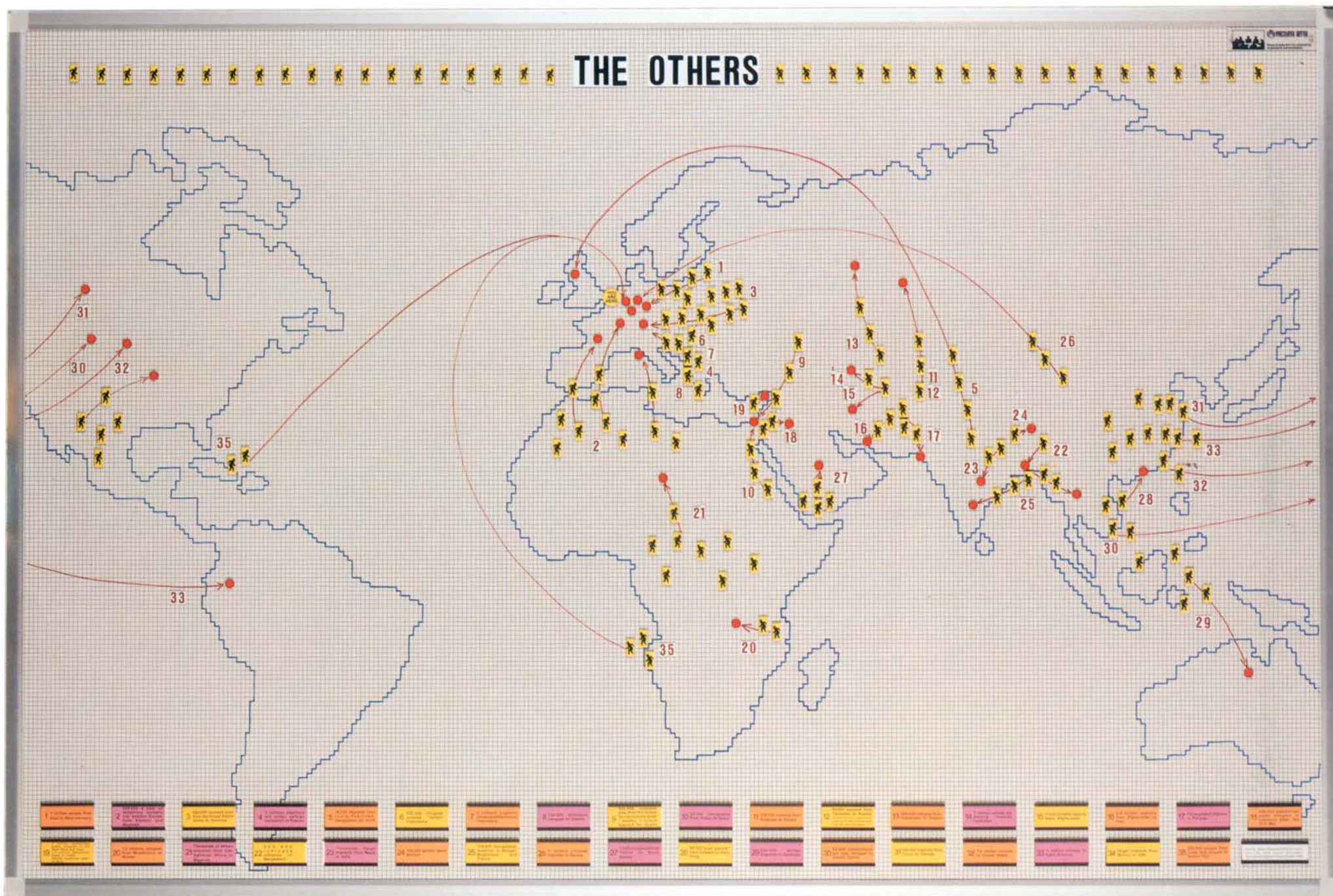
"What is highlighted is the encounter and the clash of languages which continually produces meaning and eradicate certain differences but which, above all, perpetuate the creation of new differences... For some time now, scientists dealing with society as well as scientists dealing with the human brain, psychology, town planning and even those who are involved in the planning of transport systems have been opening up a dialogue based on these concepts of diversity, variety and mixture, a dialectic between experimentation and standardization, bricolage and heterogeneity of the space, original time and newly created time." (G. Bocchi, from his contribution to *Art Industry*, 1989) (9).

Art, Industry is an example of the way in which we conceive of an operation, a project which was created in collaboration with numerous parties and which was to be carried out over a period of three month period (December 1988 and March 1989).

It took place at Ansaldo when the old factory was hosting the "Cento Anni di Industria" (100 Years of Industry) show.

A mini-congress was held on the relations between art and industry, promoted by Premiata Ditta and coordinated by Giulio Ciavoliello. Participants in the meeting included Gianluca Bocchi, Aldo Castellano, Gillo Dorfles and Ezio Manzini.

For the occasion, the results of a survey carried out in three Italian galleries Studio Casoli (Milan), Alice Gallery (Rome), Studio Scalise (Naples), were presented in the form of slides. Visitors to these museums had been required to answer questions asked by a computer regarding the relationship between art, new technology, other areas of knowledge and avantgarde movements." (*Flash Art Italia*, 1989) (10).



Above:
The others. Migrations in the world: millions of people are moving in search of better life conditions.
 Gridboard, magnetic symbols, letters and numbers. 100 x 150 cm.



"Art, Industry", 1989



The continuous recording of those who came into contact with our work (either at the shows or via our mailing processes and advertising in magazines) provided us with perpetually updated data regarding our public from which we were able to extract a series of statistics which we proceeded to visualize by exhibiting them on panels.

"Art in Ruins, ABR Stuttgart, BP, General Idea, Group Material, IFP, Stille Helden and V., so many artists in London, Stuttgart, Toronto, New York, Hamburg who are approaching art under a name which is not their own.

This tendency has undergone a notable development and is affecting countries from Yugoslavia (Irwin), Switzerland (Paperpool Int. Corporation) to Italy (Premiata Ditta)...The sole producer of the artistic object is no longer the artist but also becomes a task capable of permeating every level of the spectacle society that the word has now become and in which everyone has a role to play in accordance with the social model the individual has been attributed with." (J. Sans, 1988) (11)

"Laurie Anderson in Home of the Brave says: "Language is a virus". Just as viruses manage to deceive the cell that is hosting them, so Premiata Ditta undertakes to analyze and subvert the data it acquires from its position within the stereotypes of the dominant languages." (Giulio Ciavoliello, 1988) (12).

" This way of utilizing economic methodologies and production apparatus points to an alternative and positive way of using the economic environment which is in direct opposition with the cynical yuppie philosophy, making for a "social sculpture" as was the intention of Joseph Beuys". (G. di Pietrantonio, 1988) (13).

The 90s: You are here

Nowadays, the company is a much more widespread phenomenon in art, especially in Italy and, alongside it, many other "hybrids", such as hackers, medial specialists, groups and trade marks have flourished. It would appear, therefore, that the virus has already spread.

The question we are inclined to ask is: Are we really witnessing the birth of a new brand of artist? That is to say, an artist capable of managing his own communications, economy and distribution as well as his own quality of life? An artist who has acquired know-how that extends beyond his own specific competence? We are talking about someone who does not collaborate in order to transform everything into more or less easy deviations but who is capable of representing a jarring, even potentially subversive voice.

Any descriptive practice is too pacifying (for instance, the nude shot of Benetton in the press): it is a requirement of the end-of-the-century mediocrity at large in the "wealthy" part of the world.

The yuppies met their end that famous black Monday of October 87 yet, as far as art is concerned, many still appeared to view the introduction of economic issues into their artistic practices as a destructive element. There is no doubt about the fact that an artist can't exempt himself from overseeing the economic aspect of his own work and we were among the first to emphasize the urgent need for the art system to come to terms with the economic, legal and professional aspect of artistic activity.

From the very outset we have been saying it is time to eliminate the romantic rhetoric of a system that must remain uncontaminated and which feigns ignorance towards the dynamics of the market that makes up an integral part of the way in which it functions.

"After I was through with that thing called art (or at least that is what it likes to be called), I dedicated myself to business art. I want to be an art businessman or a business artist. Being good at business is the most fascinating form of art" (14).

This is what Andy Warhol was saying, and after him, Jeff Koons, a good yuppie, set about systematically putting this logic into practice with spectacular results.

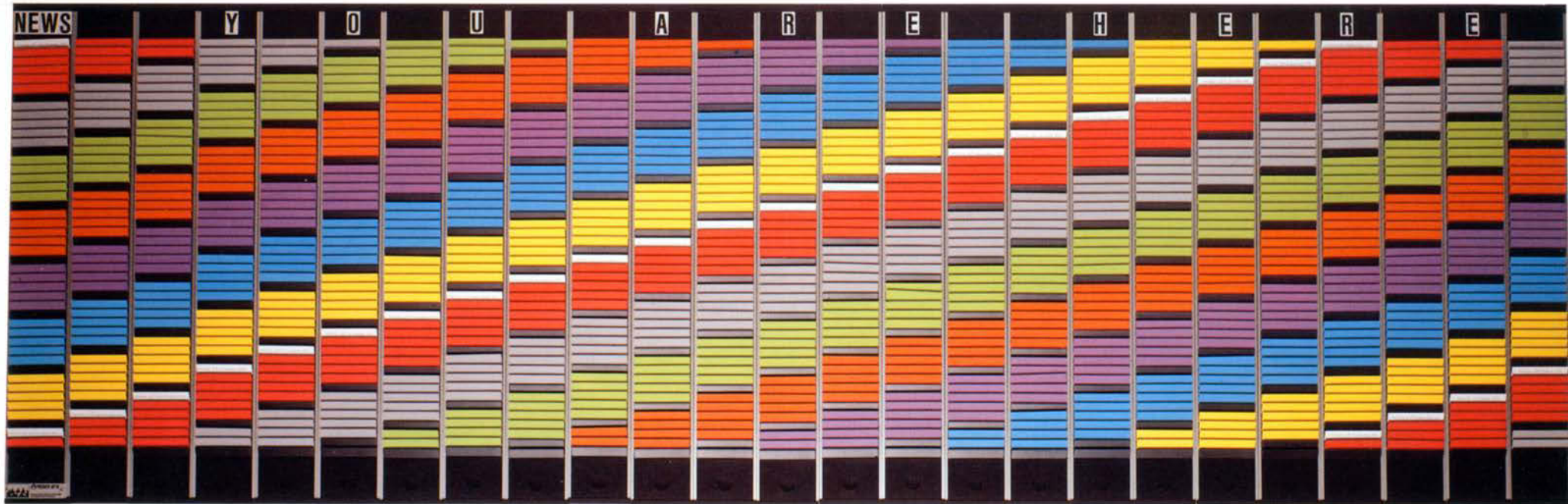
We find it strange that such values can still prove to be of artistic interest even today, especially when exhibited as procedures.

"By capitalism we mean any system that holds the product in higher regard than the production and, more specifically, any system for which the product is nothing more than a means of production. Communism, by distancing itself from its object (which is to say, revolution) becomes "a pretext for an apparatus" in order to capitalize on the desire for revolution". (P. Gersen) (15).

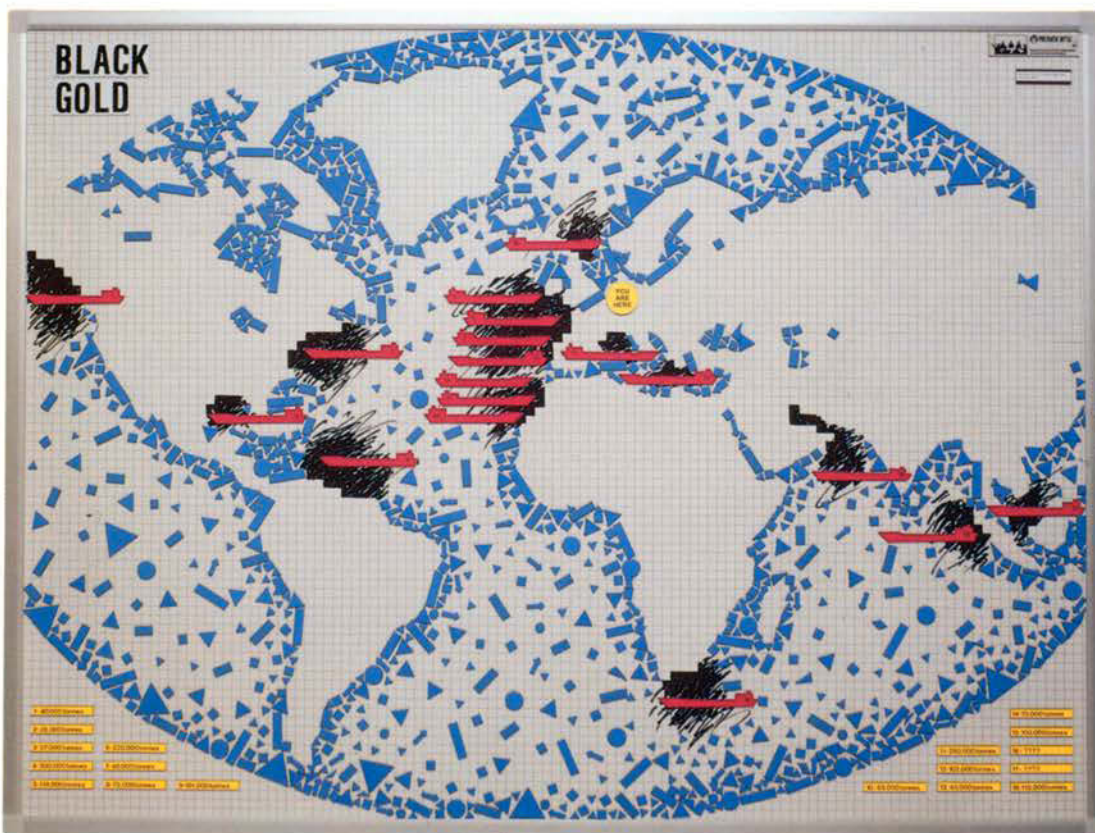
Nowadays, there is the danger that the company, along with its attendant systems, be packaged, exhibited and "sublimated" in art in such a way that the whole becomes a figurative representation of the "external" reality of the individual.

The company as subject can only exist when its procedures serve to reach certain aims; in the absence of specific aims, the trade mark, the business, the company set-up will crumble.



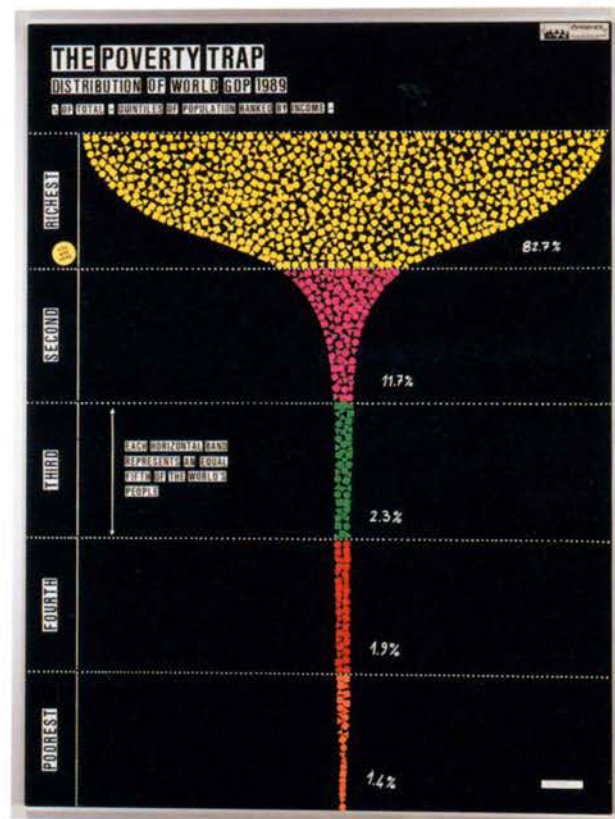


Above:
Slide-index.
Contains the
foreign news
headlines that
have appeared on
the front pages of 5
leading European
newspapers in the
last 6 months.
25 modules, coloured
cards. 85 x 250 cm.



Left:
Black gold.
Disasters on crude
oil shipping routes
in the last 25
years.
Gridboard, magnetic
symbols, letters and
numbers.
90 x 120 cm.

Right:
The poverty
trap. Distribution
of the world's gross
product.
Speedboard, magnetic
symbols, letters and
numbers.
90 x 120 cm.





Our stand at Kunstrai, 1990



Gulf War

The survey "Luoghi Comuni", 1991



Being registered at the Chamber of Commerce might represent a departure point but it is certainly not the point of arrival.

"We would like to constitute a viral presence within reality: there exists a culture whereby the company's instruments are used to overturn its meaning, show up its limitations, not only to declare them but to highlight the power wielded by the economic structure. We would like to put people position of being able to make a critical analysis, using us as instruments" (Premiata Ditta sas, 1992) (16).

Often we have tried to demonstrate this attitude of ours within the field, such as the time we organized the debate intitled *"How the Company Influences the Artist, How The Artist Influences The Company"* (Milan, 1992), to which we invited managers, designers, marketing experts and personnel trainers from large companies as speakers. What was evident from their contribution was the instrumental interest on the part of the companies in creative processes and the way in which the techno-consumeristic idea channels every effort of cultural production. Old problems? Perhaps, but the artists present at the conference found themselves face to face with a split in these phenomena and were therefore able to take a position.

"The poet and the revolutionary are the people who, in the name of society itself, protest against those aspects of it which betray the image society has of itself" (P. Rorty) (17).

We carried out a survey among the visitors to the Cologne Art Fair for a program about contemporary art on the German TV channel WDR. (Luoghi Comuni, 1991).

The responses to our questions (drawn up with the aid of a group of sociologists) were nothing but clichés which is only to be expected according to the "What You Measure Is What You Get" principle.

The mediocrity of the results leads us to reflect upon the equilibrium of phenomena within reality which, as experts from any "scientific" discipline would tend to tell us, is the result of an "exceptional equality" in the repetition of the developments of these very phenomena along with an order which can be normalized, and therefore the result of a statistical average. Information is selected and hypotheses formed by philosophers, scientists, sociologists, scientists, managers and politicians by virtue of their individual "qualities".

As Feyerabend would say, "Science is an art"

Whoever works in the art world soon develops the cult of their own individual autonomy and, consequently, refuses to identify with the mediocrity of the average.

Perhaps every one of us conders oneself to be the height of their own "species", and to be capable of capturing what lies beyond their own range like a radar. Only with a touch of irony might we be able to salvage the image that we would all like to have of ourselves and face the noisy, contradictory life we all share as both producer and audience, different or alike, us and them: rights, pride, necessities.

"A subject which is very familiar to us, one which has been undermined by its very intimate wealth and multiplicity and assailed by differences which it can only survive by virtue of a voluntary deficiency in its identity profile" (F. Carmagnola, 1991) (18).

We live in a society where radio and TV programmes are made with the audience participation and where companies create an ever increasing range of products aimed at meeting the public's exigencies as indicated by the public itself.

Nowadays, companies are involved in a real race for the possession of information while the people live to the rhythm of the media.

"The advanced economy based on computer technology, information, knowledge and highly intense fluxes of communication leads us to question all the traditional defence mechanisms of democracy and challenges us to redefine them in terms more suitable to the 21st century". (A. Toffler, 1991) (19).

The struggle for information, its tactics and strategies, conditions our lives and reduces our autonomy in decision-making (despite appearing to increase it.) For some time now, Gabriele Peretta has been elaborating his theory on Medialism and, among other points he declares,

"The Media artists does not mimic any particular instruments of the mass-media..." (G. Peretta, 1992) (20).

Our space at the Groningen Museum is a container full of information we have collected on various topics that are currently making for heated debate in public opinion on an international level.

The data we are presenting represents our own personal research and consists of news items from a variety of sources which we have interpreted, compared and discussed with journalists, sociologists, and researchers.

Because of its very nature, the results of this research are to be considered provisional; they represent a sort of "snap shot" of the moment that will no doubt be replaced by a more updated version. This information which reaches us in continual fluxes is often contradictory depending

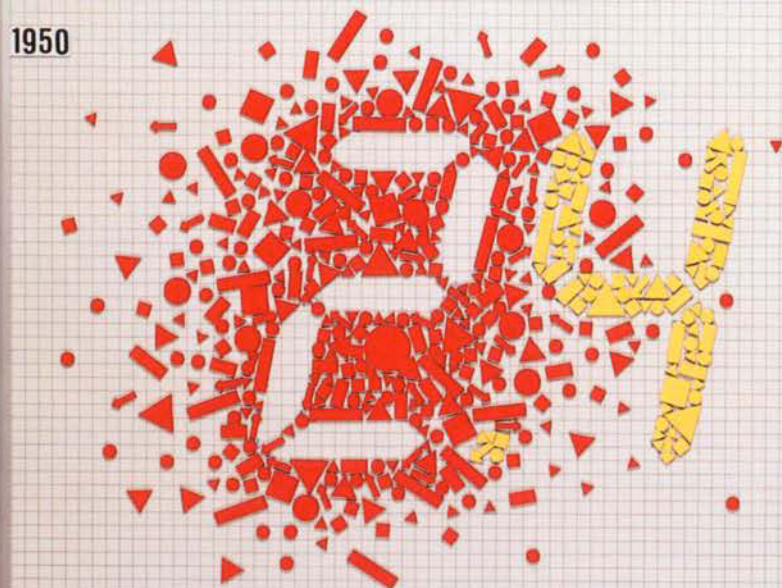
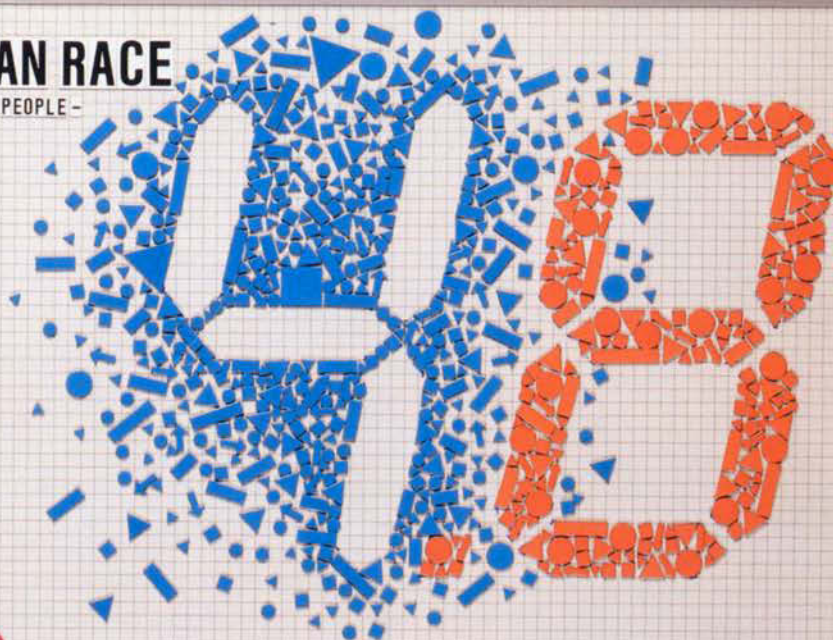
THE HUMAN RACE

- BILLIONS OF PEOPLE -



1985

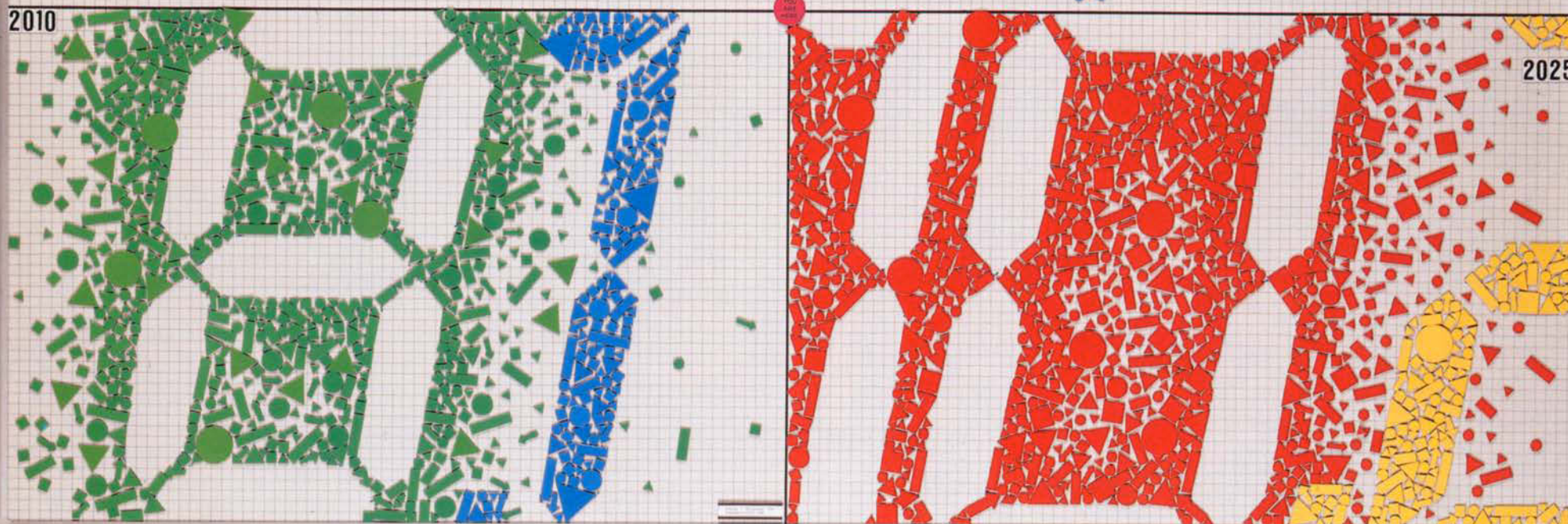
1950



2010



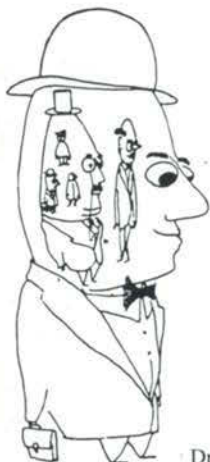
2025



Above:
The human race. Growth of the world's population: from 2.4 bn people in 1950 to 10.2 bn forecast for 2025.
Gridboard, magnetic symbols, letters and numbers. Size: 100 x 150 cm.



The debate "How the Company...", 1992



Drawing by H. Von Foerster

on the source.

We are well aware of the fact that in this society dominated by language, things are not as they are but as they are said. The speedboards with their mobile magnetic symbols actually serve to visualize the notion of data "in movement".

Our contribution to the Groningen show is entitled, "You Are Here", a message which appears on all of the boards exhibited which helps the spectator to "find his bearings" within the maps of data and, more importantly, to remind him that he, just like everyone else, is part of this symbolic whole and the fact that the topics exposed regard him and his history.

Anna Stuart Tovini and Vincenzo Chiarandà.

Translated from Italian by Christopher Martin

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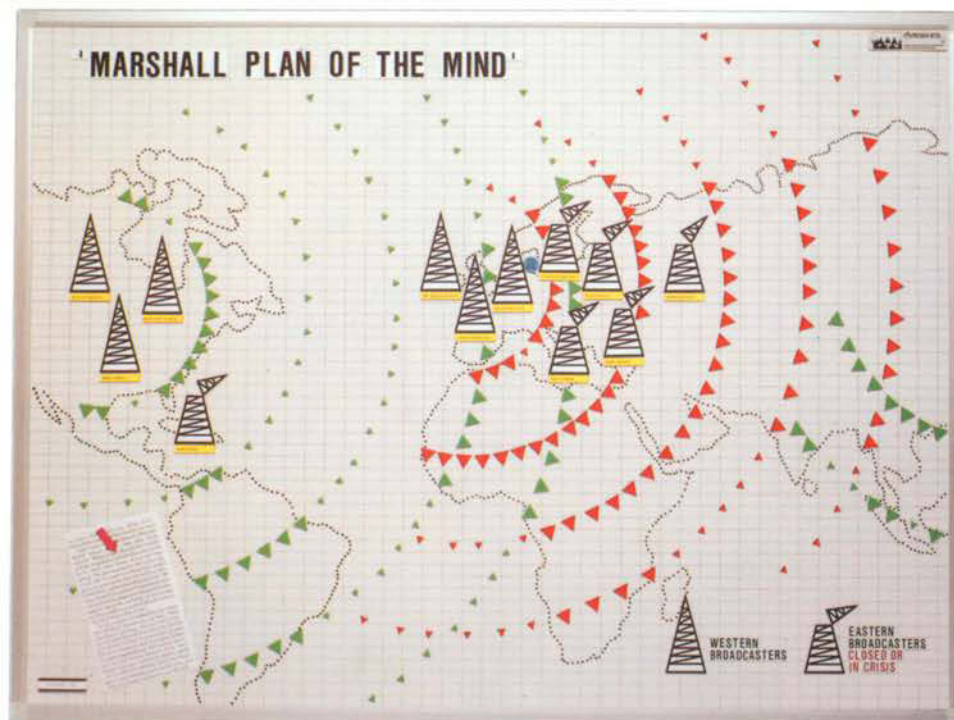


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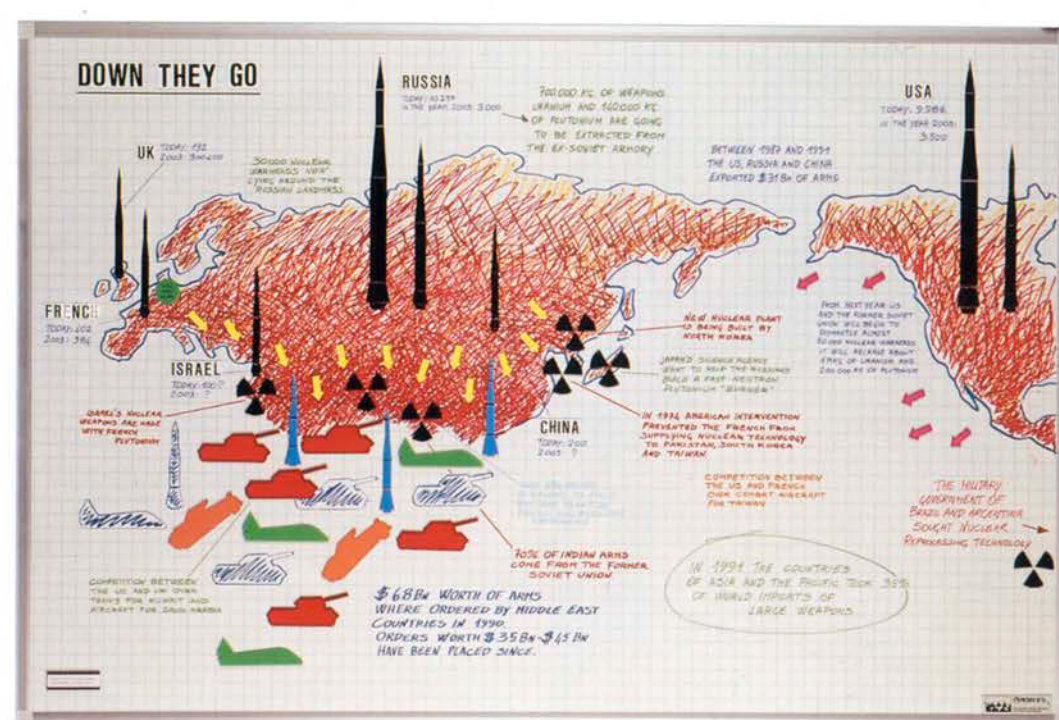
The global village. Radio and TV sets sold in the world.
Gridboard, magnetic symbols, letters and numbers. 100 x 150 cm.

Next page (below, right):

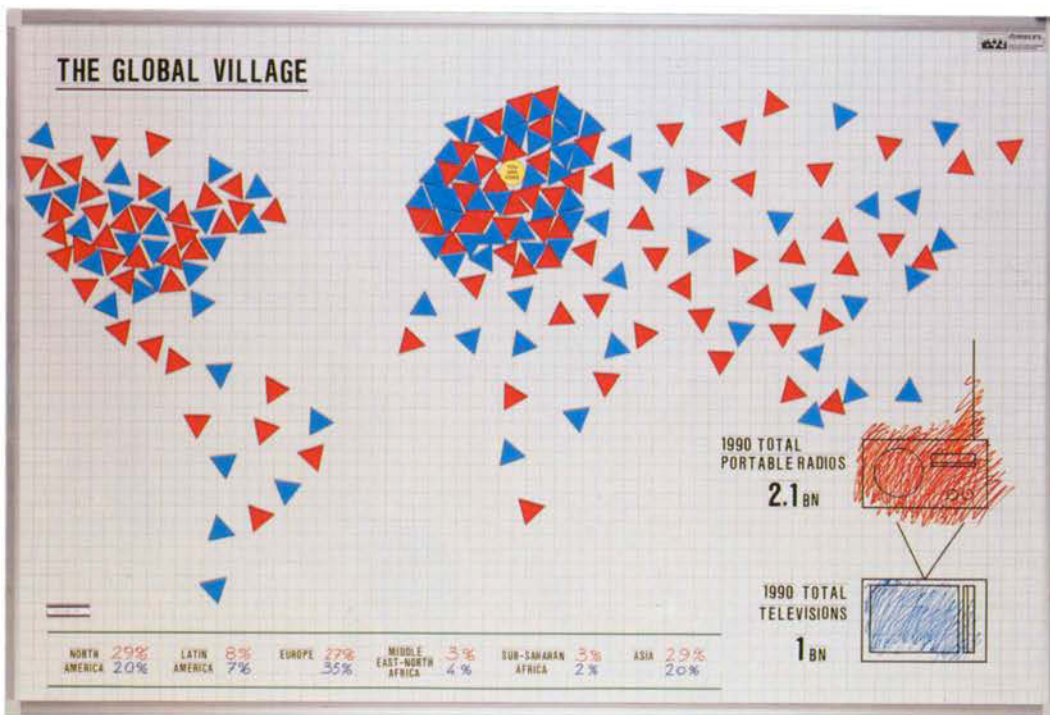
Illiterate today. % of illiteracy country by country. In many undeveloped countries it is sufficient to be able to sign one's own name to not be considered illiterate.
Gridboard, magnetic symbols, letters and numbers. 90 x 120 cm.



Above: The Marshall plan of the mind. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe changed the landscape of international broadcasting. Gridboard, magnetic symbols and letters. 90 x 120 cm.



Above: Down they go. Weapons sales: only a few of the deals we have learn about... Gridboard, magnetic symbols, letters and numbers. 100 x 150 cm.



Premiata Ditta s.a.s. (Limited partnership)

Premiata Ditta s.a.s. was established in 1978 and the company is owned by the two members Vincenzo Chiarandà (Milan, 1959) and Anna Stuart Tovini (Genoa, 1962).

Premiata Ditta s.a.s. works with various external collaborators and carries out a variety of operations based on a constant contact with the public as well as "others" languages and practices outside the art system.

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