

## Nanni Balestrini

(Milan, Italy, 1935)

Nanni Balestrini's path as a visual artist cannot be separated from his poetic path, where he emerged as a protagonist of the neo-avant-garde that took shape in Italy over the course of the 1960s. After his early publications in the mid-1950s (in, among others, Castellani's and Manzoni's *Azimuth*), he was part of the group of poets published in 1961 in the anthology *I Novissimi*, then later participated in Gruppo 63, along with Renato Barilli, Umberto Eco, Alfredo Giuliani, Edoardo Sanguineti, Angelo Guglielmi, Gausto Cori, Elio Pagliarini, and Antonio Porta. Balestrini has always developed his experimental production alongside an involvement in the life of his time; he was crucial to the birth of the cultural journals *Il Verri*, *Quindici*, *Alfabeta* and *Zoooom*.

Balestrini's artistic research is radical and is conceived to play an active, political role in society in the form of interventions. This is seen in his novels *Vogliamo tutto* (1971) and *Gli invisibili* (1987), dedicated to the political struggles of 1968, as well as the magazines he followed, particularly *Quindici*, which emerged from a need to provide a space of dialogue, open to the revolutionary masses and marked by the "radical destruction of bourgeois forms of art."

In his compositions from the 1960s, Balestrini makes broad use of collage, which he does not limit to the production of visual works and where he demolishes the signified/signifying mechanisms of language. He tends to use the word as a material, cutting and combining entire phrases taken from widely heterogeneous materials: poems by Montale, articles from *Corriere della Sera*, historical texts. In so doing, the artist is mindful of Burroughs's cut-up technique and Arp's poetry, which he translated into Italian, as well as the combinatory experiments of Fluxus. It is no accident that in the early 1960s he created *Tape Mark*, a radical poetic experiment that involves, through the drafting of texts, systems of algorithms, pushing to extreme limits the relationship between electronics, chance, and literature.

In the collages in the CRT collection that make up *La Quinzaine*, 1966, where he utilizes pages from the French literary magazine *La Quinzaine Littéraire* (which will inspire *Quindici*, an Italian magazine founded one year later, in 1967), he responds to the same criteria, establishing his distance from other well-known Italian examples of visual poetry, such as those by the Futurists, where the meaning of the word and its appearance were made to coincide. Balestrini, instead, makes a more violent and clear visual impression. He moves in an opposite direction, whereby language, having lost its objective status, is free to have a dialogue with different realities, such as the visual: "I think that poetry, after more than a century of efforts, has succeeded in exiting the typographic cage of the Gutenbergian book, where it had long remained closed. Today it is free to invade space and time, to offer itself in thousands of different ways to the eye and ear. The book remains a practical recording tool, but its page is no longer the medium, or even just the support to which the words of poetry must limit themselves" (interview with Balestrini in C. Brancaleoni, *Il giorno dell'impazienza*, 2009, p. 202). (EV)