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Nannucci has availed himself of a wide variety of artistic media and genres, including video, film, tape recording, sound installation, photography and computer-assisted working processes, yet neon installations have always been a special focus. His early pieces in this field exploited visual and verbal tautology in a way comparable to *Image du ciel*. A red neon line, for instance, ended in the words 'red line' (1969) or neon letters spelling the word 'corner' ran round the corresponding part of a room (also 1969).

Nannucci later abandoned what he has called this 'methodological rigour' in favour of a colourful engagement with the potential of neon words to generate sentences, discourses and precepts that 'subvert tautological values without relinquishing them entirely'. This approach resulted in a sextipartite light installation for the Foreign Office in Berlin consisting of three pairs of concepts: *Time/Light*, *Time/Image* and *Time/Space*. These terms appear before the entrance to the tunnel between the old and new Foreign Office building in the form of brightly coloured overlaid neon letters, encouraging the viewer to decipher the words and reflect on the essentials of life and art that they denote.



A similar intention lies behind the neon text that Nannucci has installed around the interior of the rotunda housing the Bundestag library. The glow of the sentences both underscores the form of the architecture and intervenes in it in aesthetic terms. Literally and metaphorically, the text revolves around the core values of liberty and equality: the endless intellectual processes and challenges involved in engaging with these values, and the impossibility of their ever reaching a conclusion, are embodied visually in the constant circulation of the two sentences, linked so that the words at their beginnings and ends meet, 'Freiheit' (liberty) abutting 'Gleichheit' (equality) abutting 'Gleichheit' (equality). In this way, liberty and equality rotate like bodies orbiting in space, one concept losing visibility and significance the moment the other appears.

*Time/Light, Time/Image, Time/Space*; neon installation, six parts; Federal Foreign Office, Berlin, 2002

Nannucci's sentences tie in with the quotations from Thomas Mann and Ricarda Huch let into the floor of the entrance hall in the Paul Löbe Building by the American artist Joseph Kosuth, with the speeches by members of the Bundestag featured in Jenny Holzer's LED installation in the north entrance to the Reichstag building and with the articles of Germany's Basic Law inscribed on Dani Karavan's glass panels outside the Jakob Kaiser Building, on the Spree promenade immediately opposite the library. Literary quotations, speeches in parliament and the Basic Law thus combine with Nannucci's evocation of primary political values to form an overarching discourse encompassing all the parliamentary buildings on either side of the Spree.



**Art at the German Bundestag**  
Maurizio Nannucci





The neon installation *Blue Ring* by Italian artist Maurizio Nannucci can be seen from outside the library, shining through the glass rotunda. Consisting of two consecutive sentences inspired by a text by Hannah Arendt, the installation sets up a discourse between the principles of liberty and equality on which democracy is founded: 'Freiheit ist denkbar als Möglichkeit des Handelns unter Gleichen / Gleichheit ist denkbar als Möglichkeit des Handelns für die Freiheit' (Liberty is conceivable as the possibility of actions among equals / Equality is conceivable as the possibility of actions promoting freedom). The words prompt the viewer to think about the scope of political activity. A parliament building, in which political issues are discussed and decided, is an ideal place for raising questions of this kind, not least in the form of a verbal work of art: the word 'parliament' comes from the French *parler* (to speak) and parliament is a home to political speech, to words.

## Maurizio Nannucci

### Blue Ring

This is especially true of a parliamentary library, a place dedicated to collecting, preserving and adding to our knowledge of human culture. The function of a library is to bring together books – disseminators of words – and make them available. That is also the *raison d'être* of the room in the Marie-Elisabeth Lüders Building.

Nannucci focuses on the word in his art, particularly on the gravitational forces at work when language is combined with colour, light and space. Hence, his early work was akin to Concrete Poetry, a form of literature that explores language and linguistic logic in terms of visual and acoustical phenomena. In *Scrivere sull'acqua* (1973), for example, he wrote words on water, while in *Parole* (1976) he created an unconventional poem from a multi-voiced sequence of words obtained by inviting passers-by to speak a word randomly

into a tape recorder. *Image du ciel* (1978) featured the words of the title in blue letters on a transparent banner drawn across the sky by an aeroplane, an investigation of the relationship between word and image that blended signifier (the words on the banner) and signified (the sky, in the shape of a constantly changing background visible through the banner). In such works Nannucci extended the artistic and linguistic theories of Marcel Duchamp and Ludwig Wittgenstein by delving deeper into forms of communication between artist, image and viewer.



Maurizio Nannucci  
(born Florence, 1939; based in  
Florence and southern Germany)

*Blue Ring*, neon installation;  
1998, 2003; Library of the German  
Bundestag, Marie Elisabeth Lüders  
Building, Berlin