



STARDUST

**A PROJECT BY DAVIDE ARIENI IN COLLABORATION WITH GIOVANNI BERGAMASCHI
PHOTOS AND TEXTS BY DAVIDE ARIENI
TRANSLATION BY DANIELA BOLLINI**

The end of the world has already begun despite illusions to the contrary. It is a slow, silent, invisible, relentless process.

It is neither an asteroid, nor pole reversal or a Maya prophecy. There is no external factor.

It is the human being, craving for success, wealth and power, that day after day irreversibly paves the way for his own decline, his own physical, social and cultural annihilation by making choices that favour private advantage over public well-being, immediate benefits over long-term benefits.

Broni, a small town with just over 9,000 inhabitants nestled in the green hills of Oltrepò Pavese, is a sad and unfortunate example of this perverse logic.

Originally an agricultural land, Broni grew economically and demographically for almost one century thanks to Fibronit S.p.A., a leading company in the manufacture of asbestos cement products. During its most flourishing period, it employed almost 1,300 workers on three shifts at full capacity. The so-called "cementifera" (cement plant) – this is how the company is still called nowadays in town – was a reliable source of income for entire families.

Simple people worked in this plant, people that after an eight-hour shift in the "cementifera" went back to maize fields and vineyards, people that were unaware of the substance that imperceptibly entered their bodies and overwhelmed them by making breathing impossible.



LUIGI BRIGADA was born in 1932 in Portalbera (Pavia), where he still lives. He worked as a maintenance engineer for Fibronit S.p.A. from 1969 to 1985, when he retired. As he is healthy, he is considered one of the few charmed workers of Fibronit.

Portalbera (Pavia), 28 June 2011, 4:00 p.m.

“The truth is hard to say” / “Fibronit was a money-spinner for Broni” / “It was a place of death” / “In 1970 nobody knew that asbestos was harmful” / “Fibronit occupied an area equivalent to 10-12 soccer fields” / “People were desperate for a job, working there meant no more worries” / “Workers in the asbestos department received an allowance of 40-50% of the base salary. Their working conditions were defined as arduous and stressful.” / “A medical van we dubbed “caruzun” arrived every 6 months to test us with an X-ray and a spirometry. If they found something abnormal, they told us not to worry and to drink a glass of milk once back home” / “Everybody benefited from the company” / “There wasn’t even a cafeteria because people wanted the meal allowance instead” / “50% of those who worked for Fibronit did not reach retirement age, they died before”

Pleural mesothelioma in Italy is expected to peak in **2016**.

300,000 square metres is the estimated area to be reclaimed in the municipality of Broni alone, including **60,000** square metres in the former Fibronit area. The remaining **240,000** square metres involve public and private facilities.

30 years is the latency period of mesothelioma from the beginning of exposure to asbestos fibres.

215 are the cases of mesothelioma investigated in the province of Pavia from **2004** to **2009**.

According to unofficial estimates, **1,200** people have suffered from asbestosis and asbestos-related disease in the district of Broni.

Mesothelioma cases were first reported in the United Kingdom in **1952**.

The median survival from the time of diagnosis of mesothelioma is **7.7** months (range **1-72**).

The most affected age group is between **40** and **60** years.

184 cases of mesothelioma were diagnosed in the area of Broni from **2000** to **2005**. **30%** of these cases involve people that came into contact with asbestos fibres due to environmental factors.

Unfortunately this percentage is bound to increase in the years to come.

The pathogenic risk of asbestos exposure had already been acknowledged by the International Congress on Occupational Health held in Milan back in **1906**.

In **1908**, in its judgement in case no. **1197/1906** of The British Asbestos Company Limited vs. Carlo Pich, Lawyer, the court of Turin in the name of King Victor Emanuel III referred to “the acquisitions of the International Congress on Occupational Diseases of Milan, which acknowledged that the most dangerous activities in terms of occupational mortality include dusty operations. These include notably operations that whip up mineral dusts and the most dangerous mineral dusts result from siliceous substances like asbestos because they cause lesions to the respiratory tract, if not to lungs when they reach them”.

Similar remarks are found in the Polyclinic of Turin, where **30** medical records contain the very same notes written by Dr. Scarpa, and in the provisions of Italian Royal Decree no. **442** of **14** June **1909** on unhealthy occupations, Italian Legislative Decree no. **1136** of **6** August **1916**, Italian Royal Decree no. **1720** of **1936** and Italian Law no. **455** of **12** April **1943**, recognising asbestosis as an occupational disease.



MARCELLA MINGRINO was born in San Fili (Cosenza) in 1957 to Carmela and Armando. She has been living in Broni since 1958, when her father started working for Fibronit S.p.A. Both her parents died from asbestos-related diseases.

Broni (Pavia), 5 July 2011, 11:00 a.m.

"My dad never missed a day of work, he went to the plant even with a fever" / "He drank wine to appease the burning thirst caused by dust" / "When he came back home, his socks were so dusty. He had asbestos cement even on his eyebrows, he looked as if he was covered with talcum powder" / "My mum washed my dad's clothes every day" / "That dust was everywhere, even in our house" / "In the late 1970s he was diagnosed with asbestosis during an annual check-up. He worked and received an invalidity allowance" / "Many co-workers of my father suffered from asbestosis" / "Acknowledging asbestosis did not mean becoming aware of this danger" / "I know I can be next"



CLAUDIO VENERONI was born in 1971 in Broni (Pavia), where he lived until 2008. He has never worked for Fibronit S.p.A. In January 2011 he found out he had two litres of liquid in his lungs. In June 2011 he had his right lung pleura removed. He died on 23 December 2011.

Broni (Pavia), 5 July 2011, 3:00 p.m

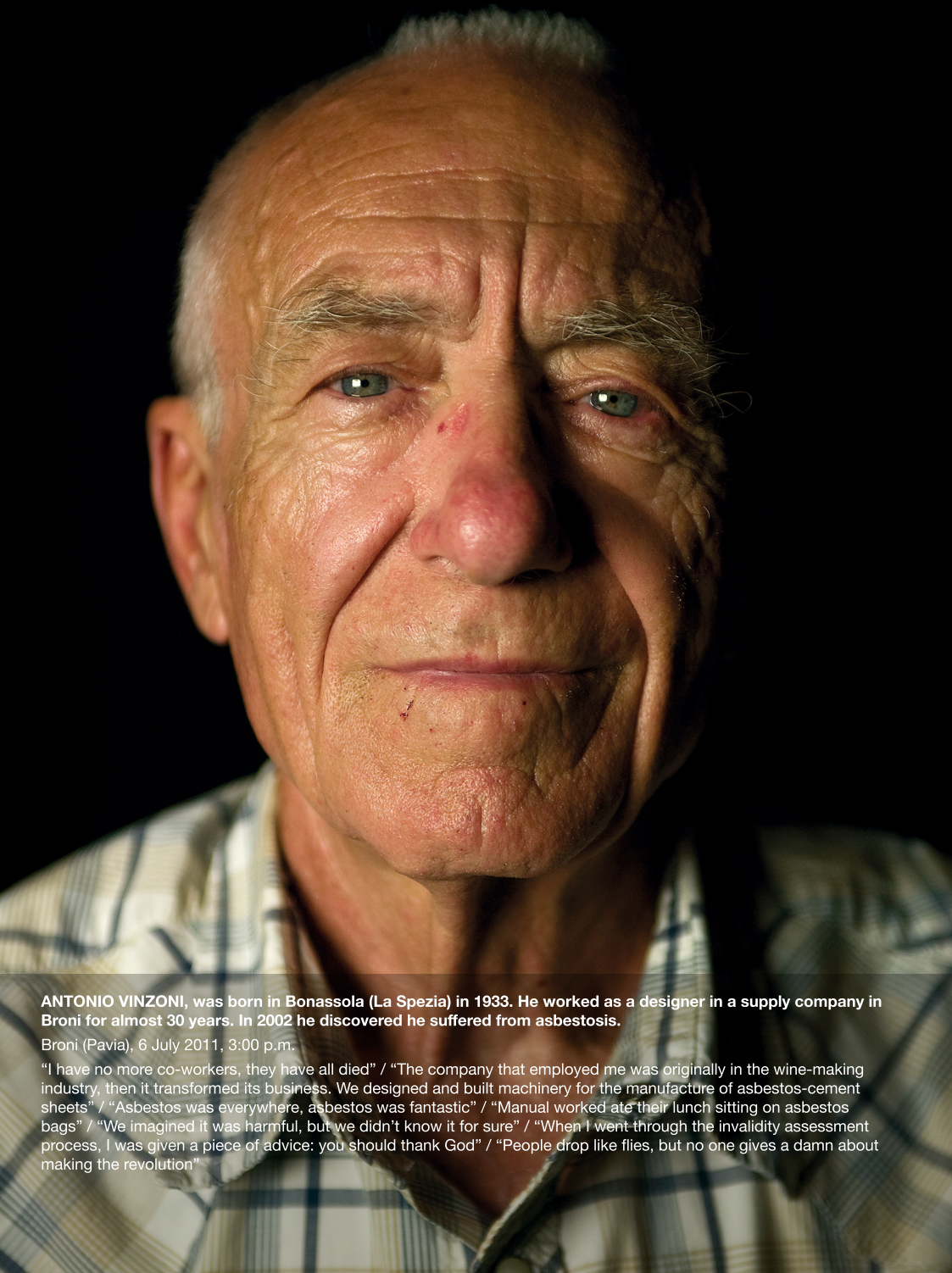
"I've never worked for Fibronit" / "My grandma's house opened precisely out onto the forecourt of Fibronit. I spent a lot of time at her place when I was a child" / "I lived opposite Fibronit until I was 17" / "The forecourt was always full of cement products ready for shipment" / "The primary school and the high school too were built with asbestos-based material" / "I never had any trouble until January, when I started suffering from a bad cough and a sore throat" / "Regular tests are made, but only 30% of former employees have underwent check-ups"



GRAZIANO SARVINI was born in Castana (Pavia) in 1954. He worked in the analysis department of Fibronit from 1972 to 1981. He is currently under treatment.

Broni (Pavia), 6 July 2011, 9:30 a.m.

"I worked in the analysis department, we dealt with asbestos on a daily basis. The only protections we used were a small mask and rubber gloves" / "Asbestos-cement sheets with defects, with cracks, were put aside. They were probably sent abroad" / "Mesothelioma, this is the little present I got from former Fibronit" / "The owner is destitute after pocketing billions" / "When I worked for Fibronit, I often saw funeral announcements on the wall just outside the entrance gate and I wondered: "How come they die so quickly?"



ANTONIO VINZONI, was born in Bonassola (La Spezia) in 1933. He worked as a designer in a supply company in Broni for almost 30 years. In 2002 he discovered he suffered from asbestosis.

Broni (Pavia), 6 July 2011, 3:00 p.m.

"I have no more co-workers, they have all died" / "The company that employed me was originally in the wine-making industry, then it transformed its business. We designed and built machinery for the manufacture of asbestos-cement sheets" / "Asbestos was everywhere, asbestos was fantastic" / "Manual worked ate their lunch sitting on asbestos bags" / "We imagined it was harmful, but we didn't know it for sure" / "When I went through the invalidity assessment process, I was given a piece of advice: you should thank God" / "People drop like flies, but no one gives a damn about making the revolution"