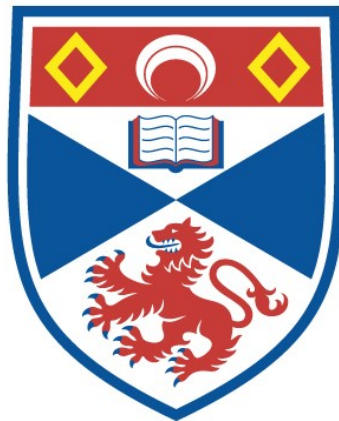


THE SEASONS IN THE CITY : ARTISTS AND RURAL
WORLDS IN THE ERA OF CALVINO AND PASOLINI

Elisabetta Rattalino

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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The Seasons in the City. Artists and Rural Worlds in the Era of Calvino and Pasolini

Elisabetta Rattalino



University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

at the University of St Andrews

September 2018

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I, Elisabetta Rattalino, do hereby certify that this thesis, submitted for the degree of PhD, which is approximately 79,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

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ABSTRACT

The Seasons in the City. Artists and Rural Worlds in the Era of Calvino and Pasolini explores rurality in postwar Italy. Between 1958 and 1963, the country underwent an unprecedented yet uneven industrialisation, a period known as the Economic Miracle. Drawing on a relational and dynamic understanding of rural space provided by human geography, this thesis investigates the impact of these economic and socio-cultural transformations on the countryside, and on the ways in which the rural world was perceived and conceptualised in the following decades, especially by contemporary artists and intellectuals.

Works of Gianfranco Baruchello, Claudio Costa, Piero Gilardi, Maria Lai, Ugo La Pietra, Antonio Paradiso, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, and Superstudio have been selected and analysed for the complex views on the topography of the country they convey, whilst challenging more conventional forms of art. Organised in themed chapters that find resonance in the contemporary works of two iconic Italian intellectuals, Italo Calvino and Pier Paolo Pasolini, these artistic practices manifest the ways in which Marxist theory and anthropology contributed to artists' identification of rural landscapes and communities at the time.

More importantly, this thesis offers an alternative geographical perspective on 1970s Italian art, one that challenges the pastoral myths that were constructed in the country's metropolitan centres.

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This thesis is dedicated to them, and to all that home is.

BIGLIETTO
LASCIATO PRIMA DI NON ANDAR VIA

Se non dovessi tornare,
Sappiate che non sono mai
partito.

Il mio viaggiare
é stato tutto un restare
qua, dove non fui mai.

Giorgio Caproni, 1982

Introduction

Italo Calvino (1923-1985) was one of the most influential Italian writers of his generation.¹ In 1972, he published *Le città invisibili*, a catalogue of possible worlds that are synthesised in urban forms, and which are presented through an imaginary conversation between the early fourteenth-century Venetian explorer, Marco Polo, and the Mongol Emperor, Kublai Khan.² Polo had been recounting to Kublai Khan about the cities within his immense kingdom, when, during one of their last conversations, the Emperor expressed his disappointment: 'Tu mi rimproveri perchè ogni mio racconto ti trasporta nel bel mezzo di una città senza dirti dello spazio che si estende tra una città e l'altra: se lo coprano mari, campi di segale, foreste di larici.'³ In response, Polo narrates the story of his experience of Cecilia, a city so expanded that its boundaries no longer exist, precluding the possibility of ever escaping from it. This dissertation instead complies with Kahn's requests: it discusses rural-themed art projects in order to mobilise the city-centred geography that dominates established discourses on 1960s and 1970s Italian art.

The underlying premise of this dissertation is that the urban and the rural are physically contiguous areas, which are economically, socio-culturally, and conceptually-interrelated. This integrated understanding of the city-countryside relation implies that the repercussion of Italy's uneven postwar industrialisation and urbanisation were manifested not only in the major urban centres of the country, but also in rural areas, and in the way in which these two realms were reciprocally perceived. Hence, this thesis explores the transformation occurring in Italy between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s through the works of artists and architects who, in their art, engaged with agrarian practices and the ways of life of the countryside. They did so through installations, happenings, land art sitings, community-based and participatory practices, and by assuming the identity of ethnographer. These works were often exhibited in urban art galleries, and their presence is what the title of this thesis, inspired by Italo Calvino's subtitle of *Marcovaldo* (1963), primarily wishes to evoke.

¹ Among the most authoritative interpretations of Italo Calvino's work, the following influenced this research the most: Elisabetta Mondello, *Italo Calvino* (Pordenone: Edizioni Studio Tesi, 1990); Silvio Perella, *Italo Calvino* (Bari: Laterza, 1999); Franco Ricci, ed., *Painting with Words, Writing with Pictures: Word and Image Relations in the Work of Italo Calvino* (Toronto: Toronto university press, 2001); Marco Belpoliti, *L'occhio di Calvino* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006); Marco Barenghi, *Italo Calvino, le linee e i margini* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2007); "Calvino Sospeso", special issue, *Aut Aut*, 372, (December 2016).

² About *Le città invisibili* and urbanism, see Letizia Modena, *Architecture of Lightness. The Utopian Imagination in the Age of Urban Crisis* (New York; London: Routledge, 2011).

³ Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili* (Milan: Mondadori, 2008), 156.

This study is a far from exhaustive account of all art about this theme; instead it presents a range of experimental projects that date from 1965 to 1981, and which engaged with the Italian rural world as a complex cultural and socio-political space. As the English scholar and writer Raymond Williams stated in his influential study, *The Country and the City* (1973), “Country” and “City” are very powerful words, and this is not surprising when we remember how much they seem to stand for in the experience of human communities [...] A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times. Yet the real story, throughout, has been astonishingly varied.⁴ Learning about the rural, about the ways in which its relationship with the city changed during the postwar years, and how these transformations were perceived and represented, is crucial if we want to develop a more integrated approach to the understanding of the socio-cultural and territorial changes occurring in the country at the time.

Identifying the Rural: Applying a Human Geography Perspective

Even though it might seem simple to distinguish between what is countryside and what is not, defining rural space is complex.⁵ The city-countryside dichotomy is a model for understanding historical processes that is rooted in the Marxist tradition.⁶ In the first book of *Capital*, Marx regards the city-countryside dichotomy as the engine of all economic history, and their relation as the foundation of every division of labour.⁷ The two spaces differ in their respective modes of production, and entertain an antagonist relationship.⁸ In Italy, the anti-fascist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) developed this Marxist

⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Frogmore, St Albans: Paladin/Granada Publishing Limited, 1975), 9.

⁵ For an introductory history of the geographical debates about urban and rural sociology, see: Paul Cloke, “Urban-Rural”, in *The Sage Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, eds. John A. Agnew and David N Livingstone (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 563-570. About Italy, see: Daniela Storti, *Tipologie di aree rurali in Italia* (Rome: Istituto Nazionale di Economia Agraria, 2000), 13-27.

⁶ Marx, however, acquired this notion from Sir James Stuart’ *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* (1767): Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 472. For an overview of the Marxist city-country dichotomy applied to socio-economic research in Italy, see: Giovanni Crocioni, *Il rapporto città-campagna nel dopoguerra. Trasformazioni territoriali e ciclo economico fra il 1945 e il 1975* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1978), 13-17; for the role of the city in Marxist thought, see: Henry Lefebvre, *Il marxismo e la città* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1973); for an assessment of Marxists’ relevance in the study of the city, see: Ira Katznelson, *Marxism and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1993).

⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 472. This topic was previously discussed at length in *The German Ideology*: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974), 68-72.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

account of the city-countryside dichotomy by applying it to the historical contrast between the hegemonic North and the South of the country.⁹

Even though Gramsci's Marxist approach was seminal in Italy during the years explored in this dissertation, this thesis appeals to an approach to the rural that tends to draw more on other sources. The adoption of an approach that encompasses the antagonistic relationship between these two socio-cultural and spatial realms in fact appears more appropriate to explore their reciprocal transformations at the time. In particular, it is inspired by recent English-speaking human geography. Dedicated branches of sociology, geography and development studies have each contributed to what the British rural geographer Paul Cloke has called 'a palimpsestual landscape of theoretical enquiry.'¹⁰ In his *Handbook of Rural Studies*, Cloke suggests that three conceptual assumptions have contributed to the construction of an idea of rurality.¹¹ Firstly, there is a functional concept of rurality, which associates the rural with agricultural production. But this theoretical assumption ceases to be suitable for defining rural areas when social and productive mobility increases, as indeed comes about with the decentralisation of industrial production and the expansion of infrastructure. Secondly, rural space can be interpreted through the international (if not global) political economy. This model is based on the premise that city and countryside are two different expressions of similar phenomena. However, this erases the specificity of the countryside, which is a space whose cultural peculiarity is nonetheless widely recognised. Cloke therefore considers these two perspectives partial because they do not take into consideration the role that culture plays in socio-spatial distinctiveness, and so he proposes a third theoretical framework, which draws on poststructuralism, and which defines the rural as a socially-constructed concept.¹² The lack of pragmatic application of this poststructuralist framework has impelled geographers to elaborate a new model for defining rural space.

Noticing the progressive detachment of ideas of rurality from its referent space in contemporary postmodern geographical literature, the British geographer, Keith Halfacree conceived a pragmatic working definition to overcome the *impasse* of postmodern

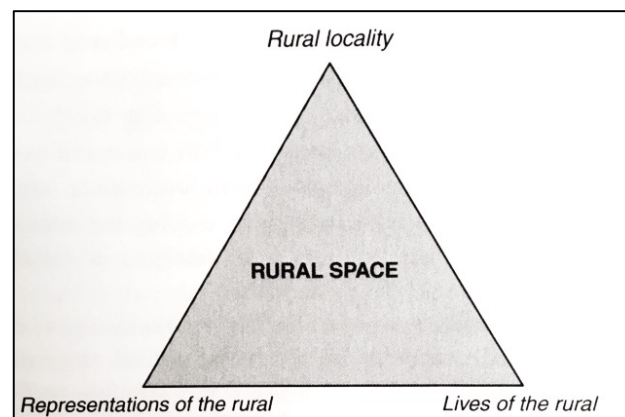
⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, Valentino Gerratana ed., vol III, (Turin: Einaudi, 2011), 2037; about the hegemony of the North on the South, see: Gramsci, *Quaderni*, vol. I, 131; Antonio Gramsci, *La questione meridionale*, eds. Franco De Felice e Valentino Parlato (Rome: Riuniti, 1973); Robert J.C. Young, "Il Gramsci meridionale", in *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, eds. Neelam Srivastava and Baidik Bhattacharya (New York: Routledge, 2012), 17-33.

¹⁰ Paul Cloke, Foreword to *Rural Geography: Processes, Responses and Experiences in Rural Restructuring* by Michael Woods (London; Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), xi.

¹¹ Paul Cloke, 'Conceptualising Rurality', in *Handbook of Rural Studies*, eds. Terry Marsden, Paul Cloke and Patrick Mooney (London; Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 18-28.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

relativism, and to interrogate the complexity of the rural.¹³ It is this working definition that I mainly adopt in this thesis. Invoking the concept of space elaborated by Henri Lefebvre, who argues that it is not a container that exists independently, but both facilitates and informs social processes, Halfacree conceives a three-fold notion of rural space [0.1]. According to his model, the rural space emerges at the intersection of rural locality, formal representations *of* the rural, and everyday lives *in* the rural.¹⁴ The first facet corresponds to distinctive spatial practices, linked both to production (agriculture) and consumption (tourism). The second appeals to the way in which the rural is represented and presented by political and economic powers. The third includes individual and social interpretations about the rural, which the geographer Owain Jones defines as ‘lay discourses’.¹⁵



0.1. The three-fold model of rural space (after Halfacree, 2006)

As Michael Wood argues, Halfacree’s definition does not understand rural space to be a unified and congruent entity; instead it is a dynamic one, in which tensions and competing narratives have the potential to create a ground of negotiation that can become a space for the political reconfiguration of the rural itself.¹⁶ Furthermore, this conceptualisation is relational. This thesis does not go so far as to elide the distinction between human and non-human altogether, so as to propose an ecological understanding of the rural space, as has the post-structuralist geographer Jonathan Murdoch.¹⁷ Instead, it

¹³Keith Halfacree, “Rural Space: Constructing a Three-Fold Architecture,” in Marsden, Cloke and Mooney, *Handbook of Rural Studies*, 44-62.

¹⁴ For a commentary about Halfacree’s model, see: Michael Woods, *Rural* (London: Routledge, 2010), 9-12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 38-40.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40-47.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 41. Jonathan Murdoch, “Co-Constructing the Countryside: Hybrid Networks and the Extensive Self,” in *Country Visions*, ed. Paul Cloke, (Harlow: Pearson, 2003), 263-282.

draws on Halfacree's model of the dynamic, hybrid, and relational nature of rurality, which is arguably more suited to tackling the Italian situation in its making at the time.

City-Countryside Changes in Postwar Italy

After the end of the war, Italy, a Republican democracy freshly instituted with its first national, universal referendum in 1946, saw its very landscape as well as its inhabitants' ways of life undergo profound transformations.¹⁸ Several interrelated processes of change, namely industrialisation, urbanisation, internal migration, land reform, agricultural mechanisation and the spread of consumerism, together created conditions which unsettled the relationship between city and countryside, and this will be outlined briefly below. Established histories of postwar Italy periodize the transformation of the country in terms of four different eras: a 'reconstruction' phase that lasted from 1945 to 1950-1952; an 'expansion' period lasting from 1953 through to 1962-63; then a 'stagnation', that began in 1964 and continued until the end of the decade, followed, finally, by a moment of 'crisis', that lasted from 1971 to 1976.¹⁹ In this dissertation, I shall be focusing on the period that coincides with the third and fourth of these phases. Those years witnessed the first hiccups in the economic growth of the country, and were characterised by a contraction of the urban expansion and immigration on the one hand, and by socio-cultural and political unrest on the other.²⁰ It was a period in which the country was coming to terms with the changes that had occurred in the previous decades.

The period between the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s represents Italy's transition from being an agriculture-based country to becoming an industrial power on the international market, a transition that has been named the Economic Miracle.²¹ Despite

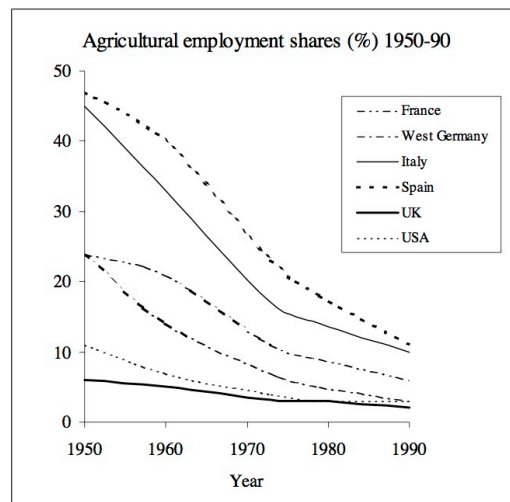
¹⁸Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), 212.

¹⁹Crocioni, *Città-campagna*, 25.

²⁰Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni Ottanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2003), 6. About the socio-political unrest of the following decades, see: Nanni Balestrini, and Primo Moroni. *L'orda d'oro 1968-1977. La grande ondata rivoluzionaria e creativa, politica ed esistenziale* (Milan: Giannino Feltrinelli Editore, 2011); Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (New York: Verso Books, 1990); Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy, 1968*. Translated by Lisa Erdberg (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1996); Marc Lazar and Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, eds. *Il libro degli anni di piombo: storia e memoria del terrorismo italiano* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2010).

²¹Further readings on the Italian Economic Miracle in the European postwar context include Carl Levy and Mark Roseman, eds. *Three Postwar Eras in Comparison: Western Europe 1918-1945—1989* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, c2002). Specifically on Italy, see: Luciano Boggio, "Italy: From Semi-Industrialized Economy to the Sixth Industrial power", *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali* 2, (April-June, 1995): 223-252; Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano: culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni Cinquanta e Sessanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996); John Coen and Giovanni Federico, *Italian Growth 1820-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

some areas of north-west Italy being affected by the industrial revolution in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and new industrial fields developing during the Fascist period, Italy was still considered a semi-industrial country until the end of the 1940s: in 1949, the industrial sector employed 29% of the workforce, compared to 49% for agriculture, even though it contributed to Gross Domestic Product more significantly than did the primary sector.²² This situation changed drastically in the following three decades, to the point that, in 1995, only 7% of the population was employed in the agricultural sector, which was comparable to the figures of other industrialised Western European countries, such as the United Kingdom or France, whose share of agriculture was already between 7% and 25% by the end of the war [0.2].²³



0.2. Agricultural employment shares (%) 1950-90

With almost a century of delay compared to other European countries, industrialisation only properly took off in Italy between 1958 and 1963. Interpretations of what brought about this expansion differ, but it was undoubtedly favoured by international investors who supported the reconstruction of the country, by the opening of the international markets and the birth of the European Common Market (1957), and by the availability of cheap migrant labour from the south. Industrialisation occurred in diversified productive sectors, adopted differentiated modes of production, and was dispersed over a heterogeneous geographical area. Following a trend that started before the war, northern

2001); Antonio Cardini, *Il miracolo economico, 1958-1963* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006); Valerio Castronovo, *L'Italia del miracolo economico* (Bari: Laterza, 2014).

²² Boggio, "From Semi-Industrialized Economy to the Sixth Industrial Power", 226.

²³ John Temple, "Structural Change and Europe's Golden Age" (May 20th, 2001). (<http://www.efm.bris.ac.uk/ecjrw/abstracts/realloc21.pdf>, accessed on December 16, 2015).

industrialisation developed faster, especially in Turin, Milan and Genoa. These important industrial and financial centres, the so called north-western ‘industrial triangle’, were characterised by large-scale Fordist systems of production. The Padana Plain was the powerhouse of industrial growth from the early 1960s onwards, but other areas also invested heavily in industrial projects. The centre of the country developed ‘industrial districts’, which allowed a territorial network of smaller firms specialising in specific fields of production to flourish.²⁴ Other areas played an equally relevant role in the industrialisation of the country.²⁵ Chemical and petrochemical plants were established in Ravenna (Anic, and Sarom), Porto Marghera and Brindisi (Montecatini), Naples, and on Sardinia and Sicily. Mechanical industries, producing household electrical appliances and cars, developed in Friuli-Venezia-Giulia (Zanussi), Marche (Merloni, Ariston), Tuscany (Piaggio), and Lombardy (Candy, Ignis). The Emilia-Romagna region, along the Roman route of the ‘via Emilia’ and with Modena at the forefront, saw the rise of small industrial firms.²⁶ The south of the country was not industrialized to the same extent, although there were nonetheless a few belated attempts to develop certain areas. Following the approval of new measures for southern industrial development from the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno in 1957, public and private companies invested in its industrialisation: iron and steel plants were built in Taranto and Bagnoli, near Naples, and petrochemical plants in Brindisi, and Gela (in Sicily).²⁷ Even though these factories offered employment for the local population, they were nicknamed ‘cathedrals in the desert’ because of their questionable lack of connection with the surrounding territory, and their failure to bring significant wealth to the southern Italian economy.

Such uneven and diversified modes of industrialisation were accompanied by an unruly process of urbanisation, leading to the expansion of urban centres, and migration from the countryside to the more densely populated towns and cities.²⁸ The specific issues this caused, especially in relation to Milan and Rome, will be discussed later in this thesis, but, for now, it is worth emphasising the general nature of phenomenon. In the early 1930s, Gramsci argued that Italy’s urban expansion was not related to the industrial development

²⁴ On territory-based forms of Italian Economic development, especially as a valuable alternative to large-scale systems of production: Elisabetta Basile, and Donato Romano, eds. *Sviluppo rurale: società, territorio, impresa* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002); Calogero Muscarà, Guglielmo Scaramellini, and Italo Talia, eds. *Terza Italia. Il peso del territorio*, vol. 3 of *Tante Italie Una Italia. Dinamiche territoriali e identitarie* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011).

²⁵ Crainz, *Miracolo italiano*, 117-129.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 124-126. About the “Third Italy”, see also: Kevin Stannard, “How Many Italies? Processes and Scale in the Development of the Italian Space Economy”, *Geography* 84 (1999): 308-318.

²⁷ Crainz, *Miracolo italiano*, 126-129. See also: Piero Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell’Italia meridionale dall’Ottocento ad oggi* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005).

²⁸ In Italian, the term ‘urbanisation’ is described by two different terms: ‘urbanizzazione’, meaning the spread of the urban dwellings, infrastructure, services, and urban cultural elements on a non-urbanised territory, and “inurbamento”, dwellers’ migration from rural areas to urban centres. See: Giuseppe Ragazzini, ed. *Dizionario Inglese-Italiano/Italian English* (Bologna: Zanichelli Editore, 2010), 1968; 2620.

of the country.²⁹ But after the war, it was, at least partially. Urbanisation, and the flow of migrants towards urban centres that accompanied this, was fuelled by many different factors. The northern cities promised opportunities, while rural conditions in southern areas remained poor. The possibility of employment in the building industry and emerging industrial sector was an alluring option for the Italian underprivileged population. Already by the end of the Second World War, Italy had found itself with the challenges that arose from the need to rebuild cities, industrial areas, infrastructures and smaller towns in strategic positions, damaged by the five years of bombing by both enemies and allies. This situation offered possibilities for employment, which attracted workers to the construction industry, thus enlarging the urban population.³⁰

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, and increasingly in the 1960s, the rising industrial and service sectors affected the demographic and territorial expansion of the main northern cities, such as that of Milan and Turin, and, to a lesser extent, the medium urban centres. There were twenty-six cities with over 100,000 inhabitants in 1951. Twenty years later this number had already increased by nineteen units.³¹ Medium-sized small towns also increased their suburban areas, even though studies at the time focused mainly on urban centres.³² Following a global trend that started in the nineteenth century, the number of Italians living in urban areas had increased consistently since the beginning of the century: in 1903, 7% of the population lived in towns of more than 5,000 inhabitants; at the end of the 1970s, urban dwellers constituted 70% of the total population.³³ Especially between 1955 and 1970, internal migrations speeded up: around twenty million Italians changed their residence addresses.³⁴ Before the 1924 Johnston-Reed Act, most Italian migration had been to the Americas.³⁵ Subsequently, in the late 1950s, it was to northern Europe. But the migrations of the 1960s and 1970s occurred largely within the nation's boundaries. Before the war, this would have not been possible due to Fascist legislation that prevented peasants from leaving their regional homelands.³⁶ But in 1961 this law was repealed, which eased all legal restrictions on internal migration.³⁷ The multi-directionality of this wave of migration is best reflected statistically: fifteen million moved within the areas of the north and centre; five million changed addresses within the centre and south;

²⁹ Gramsci, *Quaderni*, vol III, 2036.

³⁰ Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*, 212

³¹ Achille Ardigò, *La diffusione urbana: le aree metropolitane e i problemi del loro sviluppo: saggio sociologico* (Rome: AVE, 1967), 110.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 111.

³³ Crocioni, *Città e campagna*, 70.

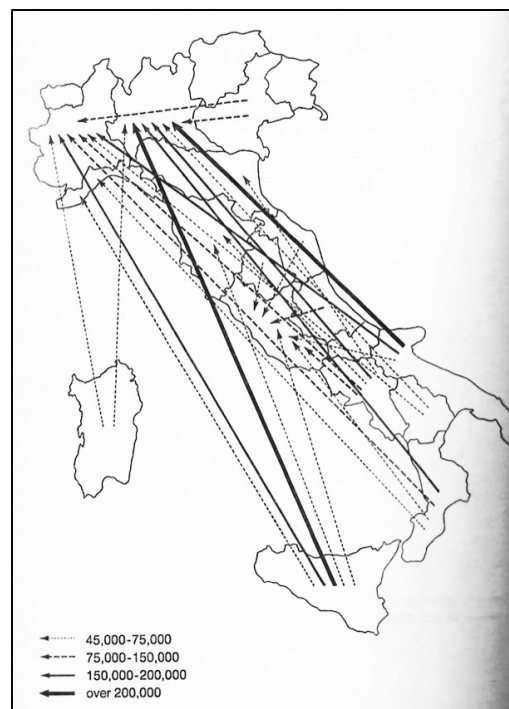
³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Domenico Preti, "La politica agraria del Fascismo: note introduttive," *Studi Storici* 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1973): 813.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 842; 845-846;

³⁷ Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*, 218.

three million migrated from the south to the north, and one million travelled from the north to the south [0.3].³⁸ The primary migratory pattern saw dwellers of more remote areas (such as mountain valleys, hilly areas, isolated farms or dispersed rural settlements) moving to more urbanised areas. But another important pattern linked the southern rural areas of the country to the northern cities: between 1958 and 1963, around one million people moved from the south to the centre and the north of Italy. Partial internal migration also needs to be added to this data: the number of part-time workers and commuters who left their work in the fields, and joined the labour forces of factories in urban and rural towns, increased during those years.³⁹



0.3. Principal flows of inter-regional migration, 1955-1981

In the period of the Economic Miracle, industrialisation and urbanisation impacted heavily on the topography of the country. The territorial manifestation of the development will play a relevant role in this thesis. As Crocioni wrote in 1978: 'si può affermare con certezza che gran parte dell'attuale paesaggio urbano italiano, quello che oggi viviamo con maggior frequenza, si sia consolidato in quel periodo.'⁴⁰ In his 1963 book, *The Italian Townscape*, the English architect Ivor De Wolfe, aka Hubert de Croning Hastings, considered these topographical transformations to be minor, and not extensive enough to distort the

³⁸ Crainz, *Miracolo italiano*, 88.

³⁹ Corrado Barberis, *Sociologia rurale* (Bologna: edizioni agricole, 1965), 53-88.

⁴⁰ Crocioni, *Città-campagna*, 30.

unique visual identity of Italian towns and of their surroundings.⁴¹ Nonetheless, and despite the considerable regional differences, the expansion and the enlarged populations of cities were not only the primary elements of the established twentieth-century narrative about progress and modernisation.⁴² Metropolitan centres, such as Rome, Turin, Genoa, Florence, Bologna, Bergamo, Brescia, Verona were enclosed by walls at the beginning of the twentieth century, as too were Milan, Novara, La Spezia, Cremona, Vicenza, Treviso, Rovigo, Udine, Trento, Piacenza, Pistoia, Livorno, Pisa, Arezzo, Lucca, and Siena. Yet by the 1970s, they had outgrown these traditional boundaries.⁴³ As early as the 1960s, terms describing the expansion of urban centres beyond their traditional boundaries, such as ‘urbanizzazione a macchia d’olio’, ‘urbanizzazione diffusa’ and ‘campagna urbanizzata’ entered common usage.⁴⁴ These were actual occurrences, which we can glimpse through statistics. In the past sixty years, urbanised land in Italy quadrupled.⁴⁵ This process began first on the plains, while the expansion of tourism meant that urbanization in coastal areas was thirty percent faster than in other geographical areas. The scale of growth resulted in a dramatic rise in the use of building construction materials, particularly cement: throughout the 1970s an average of 800kg was used per inhabitant per annum.⁴⁶

The industrialisation and urbanisation of the country had a great impact not only on the industrialised cities, or in areas directly involved in the industrialisation process. These processes had a crucial impact on the rural world, in terms of its economy, demography and culture. This was the primary cause of socio-economic structural change to the Italian countryside during the post war period.⁴⁷ Before the second world war and during the Fascist period, Ruralism was supported Benito Mussolini’s economic and socio-political agenda.⁴⁸ A series of measures were undertaken to foster the economic development of the country in the face of contraction caused by international market competition. In 1926, the *Duce* started the ‘battaglia del grano’, which can be better

⁴¹ Ivor De Wolfe, *The Italian Townscape* (London: The Architectural Press, 1963), 19.

⁴² Bernardo Secchi, *La città del ventesimo secolo* (Bari: Laterza, 2015): 13-18.

⁴³ Achille Ardigò, *La diffusione urbana: le aree metropolitane e i problemi del loro sviluppo: saggio sociologico* (Roma: AVE, 1967), 148.

⁴⁴ Monica Seger, *Landscape In Between. Environmental Change in Modern Italian Literature and Film* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 13.

⁴⁵ Fabrizia Ippolito, “Il paesaggio che cambia”, in *Comunità Italia. Architettura/Paesaggio/Città. 1945-2000*, eds. Alberto Ferlenga and Marco Biraghi (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2015), 113.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ For an analysis of the transformation in the rural world in postwar Italy, see: Piero Bevilacqua, *Storia dell’agricoltura italiana in età contemporanea* (Venice: Marsilio, 1992); Pier Paolo D’Attore and Alberto De Bernardi, eds., *Studi sull’agricoltura italiana. Società rurale e modernizzazione* (Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 1993); Anna Rossi-Doria, ed., *La fine dei contadini e l’industrializzazione in Italia* (Rome: Rubettino, 1999); Attilio Esposito, ed. *Contadini e democrazia in Italia nel XX secolo. Il ruolo dei contadini nella formazione dell’Italia contemporanea* (Turin: Robin edizioni, 2006).

⁴⁸ About Fascist Ruralism see: Philip Morgan, *Italian Fascism 1915-1945* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 119-124; for an unorthodox interpretation of the Fascist Ruralism and its territorial expression, see: Antonio Pennacchi, *Fascio e martello. Viaggio per le città del duce* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 125-155; 201-241.

understood as his attempt to rebalance self-sufficiency in food-provision.⁴⁹ This national endeavour was part of a series of anti-urbanisation measures, aiming at decreasing immigration from the impoverished countryside to the main urban centres of the country. As already mentioned, a series of laws restricted mobility within the country, but, in addition, from 1928 onwards, a wide land reclamation campaign, the 'Bonifica totale', had also been conducted in the north, centre, and, to a lesser extent, the south, with a view to providing new employment opportunities.⁵⁰ These operations were portrayed by the regime's propaganda machine as a populist undertaking, and the lives of the peasants were celebrated as examples of moral virtue and modesty.⁵¹ However, these initiatives mainly benefitted landowners, and worked to the advantage of industrial development in the north of the country. As Domenico Preti argues, tying the peasants to the land was in fact a way for the national industrial monopolies to have a readily-available labour force at their disposal, should market expansion ever demand it.⁵² As he suggests, this condition greatly influenced the course of migratory history during the postwar period.⁵³

Immediately after the war's end, peasants and small tenants, both in the north and the south of the country, increased their political voice through the newly instituted democracy of the country, and with support from different parties. There were several uprisings in the north and south that were initiated by peasants for, respectively, enhanced work conditions and rights to land property.⁵⁴ The Republican government responded to these protests by proposing a series of partial agrarian reforms (Decreto Gullo, 1946; Lodo De Gasperi, 1946), and by creating alliances with new institutions of support for peasants (Coldiretti, the national association of farmers, 1944). They also initiated programmes to develop the south (the 'Cassa per il Mezzogiorno', 1950).⁵⁵ Yet the epic proportion of peasants' collective land occupations under the Communist flag in Calabria, Basilicata, Abruzzi, Sicily between October 1948 and 1950, and the equally significant events which took place in the north of the country, compelled the then ruling Christian Democratic government to tackle the fundamental issue of land redistribution, a promised intervention that was influenced by the Americans, but unrealised until that point, owing to internal

⁴⁹ About fascist agrarian policies see: Preti, "Politica agraria del fascismo", 802-869; Jon S. Cohen, "Fascism and Agriculture in Italy: Policies and Consequences", *The Economic History Review* 32 (1979): 70-87.

⁵⁰ About the political preconditions for the Bonifica, see: Mauro Stampacchia, *Tecnocrazia e ruralismo: alle origini della bonifica fascista 1918-1928* (Pisa: ETS, 1983).

⁵¹ About fascist Ruralism and cinema, see: Deborah Toschi, *Il paesaggio rurale. Cinema e cultura contadina nell'Italia fascista* (Milan: Vita & Pensiero, c2009).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 834.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 842.

⁵⁴ Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*, 122-129.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

opposition within the party.⁵⁶ It was between May and December 1950 that three agrarian laws for land redistribution among the peasantry were approved by Parliament.⁵⁷ These consisted of the remunerated expropriation of around 70,000 hectares of uncultivated land from large properties, divided and redistributed amongst non-tenant peasants and small farmers. The views on the impact of this Agrarian Reform and parallel policies, its application, efficacy, and long-term achievements are conflicting.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, it resulted in the fragmentation of the land into small properties that were often too constricted and barren to provide more than what was needed to support a family's self-subsistence.

This territorial fragmentation in southern areas, which often resulted in precarious living conditions, was one of the conditions that, according to Paul Ginsborg, catalysed the migration exodus.⁵⁹ In the northern areas, another factor contributed to emigration from the countryside: agriculture was modernised, which dramatically reduced the size of the labour force.⁶⁰ Although mechanical machinery had already been introduced in Italy during the Fascist period, the historian Gianluigi della Valentina demonstrates that it was only after the War that modern modes of agriculture became widespread, thus having an effective impact on the agricultural productivity and on the rural milieu.⁶¹ If the mechanisation changed the rhythms of agriculture (making it, in many cases, forty times faster than traditional forms of agriculture), the greater use of fertiliser, pesticides, and selected seeds also had an impact on the quality and quantity of its productivity. Productivity doubled in the two decades between 1950 and 1970, above all in the north of the country, which was able to respond more promptly to modernisation opportunities.⁶² Therefore, even if new specialised professionals and technicians entered the countryside to support and manage the new systems of production, fewer general workers were required in the fields and on the farms to complete the harvest, resulting in a general drop in employment rates in the primary sector. In other words, the modernisation of agriculture

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 127, see also: Emanuele Bernardi, *La riforma agraria in Italia e gli Stati Uniti. Guerra fredda, il piano Marshall e interventi per il Mezzogiorno negli anni del centrismo degasperiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 121-140. For the Calabrian Sila region (*Legge Sila*), the Fucino basin (Abruzzi), the Maremma Toscana (Tuscany), the Po delta, and other area of Sardinia, Basilicata, Campania, Puglia (*Legge Stralcio*), and Sicily (Sicilian law).

⁵⁸ See also: Piero Bevilacqua, "L'agricoltura meridionale nel secondo dopoguerra", in *La fine dei contadini e l'industrializzazione in Italia*, ed. Franco Bonelli, Guido Crainz and Anna Rossi-Doria (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 1999), 69-90; Corrado Barberis, *Le campagne italiane dall'Ottocento ad oggi* (Bari: Laterza, 1999), 465-519.

⁵⁹ Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*, 212-214. Architect historian Cesare De Seta denounced the post-war territorial fragmentation in the South: Cesare de Seta, *Città, territorio e Mezzogiorno* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 5-20.

⁶⁰ Bevilacqua, "L'agricoltura meridionale nel secondo dopoguerra", 75-76.

⁶¹ Gianluigi Della Valentina, "Meccanica agraria e motorizzazione dell'agricoltura italiana," in *Studi sull'agricoltura italiana. Società rurale e modernizzazione*, eds. Pier Paolo D'Attore and Alberto De Bernardi (Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 1993), 404.

⁶² In 1950, it took thirty days to harvest 3000 kg of wheat; in 1980, 3000 kg of wheat can be harvested in thirty minutes. See: Bevilacqua, "Agricoltura meridionale nel secondo dopoguerra," 75.

enhanced national agricultural productivity, but also changed the social fabric, and the annual rituals and daily routines of the countryside.

The Rural in the Expanded City: Italo Calvino and Pier Paolo Pasolini

Along with Calvino, Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975), was another of the most iconic intellectuals of the postwar generation.⁶³ Poet, novelist, film director, essayist, Pasolini was an outspoken critic of late-capitalism.⁶⁴ During his life, he offered an important social commentary on the implications of Italy's unprecedented industrialisation and urbanisation. Although both he and Calvino gave different accounts of the experience of the city in their works, both increasingly perceived the national topography as an identity-less urban continuum.

Calvino's *Le città invisibili*, 'written in a period of crisis in urban life', and Pasolini's *Uccellacci e Uccellini* (1966) offer some of the most memorable images of this expansion in its progression. Calvino organised his novel into eleven thematic categories with five cities each.⁶⁵ Among them, the five *Città continue* comment on issues of the contemporary expanded city: *Leonia* is a reflection on contemporary consumerism, new materials, and wastelands; *Trude* refers to the homologation of airports; *Procopia* is an ironic comment on overpopulation; *Cecilia* deals with the impossibility of reaching the boundaries of a city, and, lastly, *Pentesilea* describes the displacement that occurs with the loss of a coherent city centre. In the same years as Calvino was starting to write about cities, Pasolini released his *Uccellacci e uccellini* [0.4]. Marking the political and poetic crisis of the author, the movie portrays his protagonists Totò and Ninetto wandering in the suburbs of Rome.⁶⁶ They walk among the building site of the Roman Raccordo Anulare, which epitomised the material expansion of the city into the surrounding territory. It is not only topographical changes that appear in the movie: Ennio Morricone's music, to which a group of youths are dancing in a

⁶³ The two authors have been discussed together by Carla Benedetti, *Pasolini contro Calvino. Per una letteratura impura* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri editore, 2004).

⁶⁴ Among the most authoritative interpretations of Pier Paolo Pasolini's work, these are the ones who had greater influence on this research: Naomi Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Cinema as Heresy* (Princeton NJ; Oxford: Princeton University press, 1990c); Michele Micciché, *Pasolini nella città del cinema* (Venice: Marsilio, 1999); Gianni Biondillo, *Il corpo della città* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli srl, 2001). Fabio Vighi, *Le ragioni dell'altro: la formazione intellettuale di Pasolini tra saggistica, letteratura e cinema* (Ravenna: Longo, 2001); Luca Caminati, *Orientalismo eretico: Pier Paolo Pasolini e il cinema del terzo mondo* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2007); Noa Steimatsky, *Italian Location. Reinhabiting the Past in Postwar Cinema* (Minneapolis London: University of Minnesota press, 2008), 117-167.

⁶⁵ About the phases of the book structure, see: Barenghi, *Calvino*, 253-270.

⁶⁶ Greene, *Pasolini*, 80-81.

countryside tavern, is both one of the most iconic images of Pasolini's cinema, as well as the symbol of the permeation of consumerist customs into suburban areas.



0.4. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Uccellacci e uccellini* (still), 1966

The expanded, boundary-less urban environment, and the impossibility of distinguishing the city from the countryside, resonated with contemporary urbanistic and sociological discourses. As Bernardo Secchi pointed out, there are essentially three main readings of the city in the twentieth century. Beside the progressive disillusionment towards the modernist paradigm and the continuous search for individual welfare in urban spaces, the most widespread narrative expresses concern with the expansion of the city, and the resulting dispersion of its identity.⁶⁷ In response to this three-fold discourse about urban expansion, Italian architects waded in with their contributions, and their approaches will be explored in Chapters Four and Five. Not only did the growth of the city reconfigure the way in which urbanists thought about urban planning, but the contemporary migration that fuelled this expansion influenced a shift in the field of sociology. Rural sociologists reconfigured their field of studies, as Corrado Barberis reported at the time.⁶⁸ The intensity of migration obliged experts to improve their understanding of rural populations, and to consider their impact on city life once they had migrated. The social continuum between the city and the countryside encouraged further scholarly research on patterns of migration and urban integration more than on rural life *per se*, as had been the case during previous decades.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Secchi, *Città del ventesimo secolo*, 3-12.

⁶⁸ Guidicini, *Città-campagna*, 50-52.

⁶⁹ Barberis, *Sociologia rurale*, 14-15.

For both Calvino and Pasolini, reflecting on the nature of contemporary city was also a way of thinking about the consequences of modernisation more generally. They adopted extremely different approaches. Pasolini was highly critical: he denounced the ‘anthropological mutation’ of the Italians, which he associated with the spread of neo-capitalism and consumer culture, and prompted him to eulogise the archaic, and pre-industrial and pre-capitalistic cultures. Calvino was more cautious than Pasolini in his judgements. Beside engaging with the exploration of the potential the fantastic (*I nostri antenati*, 1960; *Cosmicomiche*, 1965; *Ti con Zero*, 1967) and his experiments in combinatory literature (*Il castello dei destini incrociati*, 1973; *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore*, 1979), he reflected indirectly on urban-related issue. His collection of short stories, short novel *La Speculazione edilizia* (1957), *Marcovaldo* (1963), and *Le città invisibili* (1972) represent his most articulated narratives about the contemporary spread of the city.

In these considerations on the city, the rural world, in its socio-cultural and economic implications, became a residual space. As the scholar Noa Steimatsky advocates: ‘a distinct archaic space opens up in Pasolini’s work to be set against modernity and, more specifically, against a dreaded late-capitalist emptying out of those reservoirs of revolutionary energy that Pasolini envisioned he could locate not only [...] in the urban periphery but on the margins of Europe.’⁷⁰ Pasolini’s longing for a lost ‘archaic’ run throughout his varied productions, and is reflected in his commitment to the dialectal poetry of Friuli (*Poesie a Casarsa*, 1942), to the Roman *borgate* in his novels (*Ragazzi di vita*, 1955) and films (*Accattone*, 1961; *Mamma Roma*, 1962), as well as in his reflections about southern Italian culture (*Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*, 1964) and in his discussions of the Third World (*Appunti per un’Orestiade africana*, 1970). This position was partially informed by Antonio Gramsci.⁷¹

In his version of heterodox Marxism, Gramsci accorded a great deal of relevance to intellectuals in the revolutionary process. The Sardinian philosopher distinguished between ‘traditional intellectuals’ and ‘organic intellectuals’, and saw the former as concerned only with high culture and its lineage, while ‘organic intellectuals’ emerge from subaltern social classes, and play a critical role as mediators between the Party and the people.⁷² Through a

⁷⁰ Steimatsky, *Italian Location*, 118.

⁷¹ Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 53-58. For a critical interpretation of Pasolini’s use of Gramsci, see: Zygmunt G. Baranski, “Pier Paolo Pasolini: Culture, Croce, Gramsci”, in *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, eds. Zygmunt G. Baranski and Robert Lumley (Houndmills, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990), 139-159. Pasolini’s position was sharply criticised and his positions interpreted as reactionary and bourgeois in Alberto Asor Rosa, *Scrittori e popolo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2015).

⁷² Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol. III, 1513-1524; 1550-1151. See also: Diego Fusaro, *Antonio Gramsci* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2015), 118-128.

rather problematic operation of cultural translation, the role of organic intellectuals as prescribed by Gramsci was one of fostering class identity and organisation.⁷³ Pasolini was greatly influenced by this, and, in his early work, repeatedly stated the social importance of the philosopher. With *Uccellacci e uccellini*, his political commitment underwent a crucial crisis, and so did his belief in the survival of subaltern social classes.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, he continued to develop an explicit critique of the expansion of the contemporary city under the pressure of capitalism, and he remained committed to preserving pre-capitalist forms of territorial transformation. In fact, Pasolini campaigned for the conservation of the traditional city as an expression of pre-capitalist society in his documentary *Le Mura di Sana'a* (created during the shooting of *Decameron* in Yemen, 1971) and in his short documentary about the form of the city (*La Forma della città*, 1975).⁷⁵

Representations of the rural appear more explicitly in Calvino's *Marcovaldo* and in *Le città invisibili*. The former, written during two different periods of the Economic Miracle, is a collection of twenty short stories, which narrate with bitter irony the adventures of Marcovaldo, a new immigrant (possibly from a rural area) to an imaginary industrial city somewhere in the north of the country.⁷⁶ However, his most developed reflections on the ontology of the city appear in his 1972 novel. As Modena has noted, Calvino wished to contribute a positive message to the contemporary apocalyptic discourses about the future of the city: a dust-like utopia.⁷⁷ In several cities, however, Calvino's optimistic vision is more explicit than in others. The book ends with an alternation of *Città continue* and *Città nascoste*, the latter conceived as seeds for possible futures. The central part of the book includes the most accomplished images of weightlessness and poetry in the category of the *Città sottili*. Although not directly engaging with the countryside, the complete dissolution of the rural world and its sublimation into a form of vanishing memory, appears in marginal passages in this book, and will be discussed in several chapters of this thesis. Of course, these two authors were not the only intellectuals who engaged with similar issues.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, Calvino and Pasolini provide an invaluable introduction to these topics, and for this reason I will be calling on them throughout this thesis to introduce the many issues

⁷³ Benedetto Fontana, "Intellectuals and Masses: Agency and Knowledge in Gramsci," in Antonio Gramsci, ed. Mark McNay (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 55-75.

⁷⁴ Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, 80-81.

⁷⁵ See: Vincenzo Trione, *Effetto città. Arte/ Cinema/ Modernità* (Milan: Bompiani, 2014), especially "Pasolini e la forma della città"

⁷⁶ Italo Calvino, "Author's Note", in *Marcovaldo* (London: Vintage Books, 2001).

⁷⁷ Modena, *Architecture of Lightness*, 57; 121-130

⁷⁸ For an overview of the filmmaker who contributed to the topic, see: Pepa Sparti, ed., *Cinema e mondo contadino. Due esperienze a confronto: Italia e Francia* (Venice: Marsilio, 1982); and Michele Guerra, *Gli ultimi fuochi. Cinema e mondo contadino dal fascismo agli anni Settanta* (Rome: Bulzoni editore, 2010).

connected with the modernisation of the country that are addressed by the artists that I will be exploring.

Visual Arts, the City and the Countryside

The transformations of the country and their physical manifestations did not go unnoticed by visual artists. In the early twentieth century, Futurism represented and reflected on the city, its growth and its values. Their creative endorsements of modernity were associated with the first industrialisation of the country during the Giolitti era.⁷⁹ Many artworks and art projects engaged with the shape, semiotics, spaces, and experiences of the inhabitants of the city, and did so through a wide range of practices, experimenting in formal languages, new materials, and performative practices.⁸⁰

After the war, architects were faced with the task of postwar reconstruction, and the problem of designing cities suitable for larger, socially differentiated and rapidly expanding populations.⁸¹ Yet many postwar artists also began to envision alternative urban organisations, and so there was considerable fluidity between art and architecture during this era. In 1952, the Milan-based Joe Colombo (1930-1971), who later became an internationally known designer, but who was, at the time, associated with the Pittura Nucleare group, designed what he called his *Città nucleare stratificata* [0.5].⁸² Seven years later, Pinot Gallizio (1902-1964) installed his *Caverna antimateria* at the Gallery René Drouin in Paris. Gallizio's work was the result of his involvement with the conceptualisation of French Situationist Constant Nieuwenhuys's anti-capitalist city *New Babylon* (1959-1974) in Alba (Piedmont).⁸³ In 1969, Pietro Consagra (1920-2005), a founding member of

⁷⁹ On Italian Futurism and the city, see: Enrico Crispolti, ed. *Futurismo 1909-1944. Arte, Architettura, spettacolo, grafica, letteratura*, (Milan: Mazzotta, 2001), especially: Ezio Godoli, "Città, architettura e ambientazioni", *Futurismo 1909-1944*, in *Futurismo*, ed. Crispolti, 99-114; Renato Nicolini, "Futurismo e città", in Crispolti, *Futurismo 1909-1944*, 410-411.

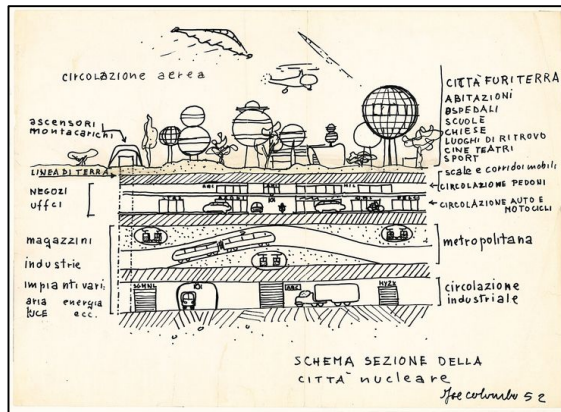
⁸⁰ For a brief overview of the relationship between modern art and the city, see: Carla Subrizi, ed. *Case, strade, giardini. L'arte e la città dalla modernità a oggi* (Rome: Aracne, 2008).

⁸¹ See: Patrizia Bonifazio, Sergio Pace, Michela Rosso, and Paolo Scrivano, eds., *Tra guerra e pace. Società, cultura e architettura nel secondo dopoguerra* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1998).

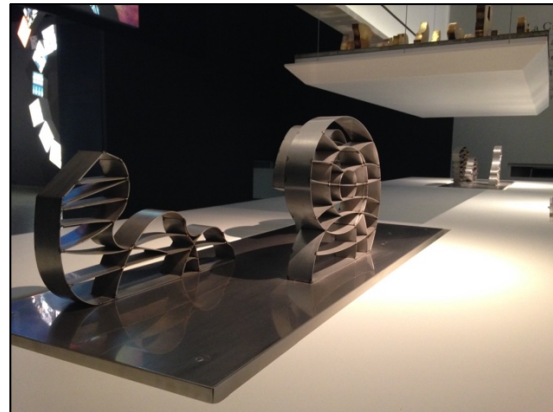
⁸² About Joe Colombo, see: Ignazio Favata, and Mateo Kries, eds. *Joe Colombo. L'invenzione del futuro* (Milan: Skira, 2005). The *Città nucleare stratificata* is mentioned in Adachiara Zevi, *Peripezie del dopoguerra nell'arte italiana* (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 2006), 136.

⁸³ About Pinot Gallizio, see: Maria Teresa Roberto, Giorgia Bertolino, and Francesca Comisso, *Pinot Gallizio: Catalogo generale delle opere (1953-1964)* (Milan: Mazzotta, 2001); Andrea Busto, ed., *Pinot Gallizio e il suo tempo* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2007); an exhibition about Gallizio and the nomadic city was curated by Francesco Careri, Francesca Comisso and Cristiano Isnardi: *Pinot Gallizio: Il pittore e la città nomade* (Mondovì, 2005).

the artists' collective Gruppo Forma I, in 1947, published his urban utopia *La città frontale* (1969), which he later applied in several of his projects [0.6].⁸⁴



0.5. Joe Colombo, *Città nucleare stratificata*, 1952



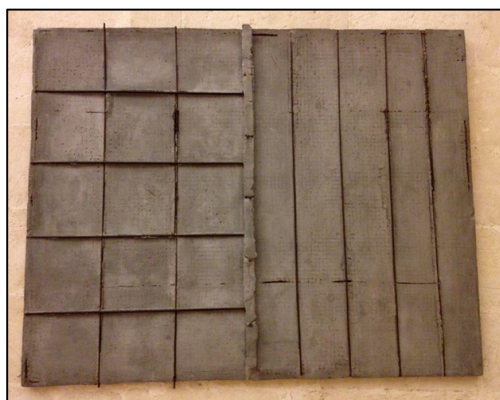
0.6. Pietro Consagra, *La città frontale*, 1969



0.7. Franco Angeli, *La lupa di Roma*, 1961



0.8. Mario Schifano, *I futuristi rivisitati a colori*, 1965



0.9. Giuseppe Uncini, *Cemento armato*, 1961

⁸⁴ See: Pietro Consagra, *La città frontale* (Bari: De Donato, 1969). See Consagra's works on this theme, on his webpage: <http://pietroconsagra.it/html/sottilissime.html>, accessed on 18th December 2015. About Consagra's works, see: Giovanni Maria Accame, and Gabriella Di Milia, eds., *Pietro Consagra: Scultura e architettura* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1996).

These artists attempted to rethink the shape of the city. They engaged with the visual languages of the urban environment, bringing into play new materials and participating in the metropolitan, industrial, and new media imaginaries that were playing a crucial role in the development of modern northern Italian metropolitan society. Since 1959, Gruppo T in Milan and Gruppo N in Venice and Padua experimented in the field of kinetic art. Presenting the viewer with purely visual and psychological experiences, their works explored the potential of a collaboration between new technologies and art, attempting to achieve an objective artistic language that responded to the terms of abstraction.⁸⁵ Less focused on industry, but nonetheless engaging with the material of the new city, Gruppo 1, whose Rome-based members included Nato Frascà, Nicola Carrino, and Giuseppe Uncini, worked on new possibilities for structuring shapes, with a view to making plastic languages more objective, and proposing a response to the so-called *informel* painterly style [0.9]. As the artist Nicola Carrino stated, the aim of their works was to equate ‘al linguaggio urbanistico e al linguaggio della città, perchè ogni operazione che viene fatta, nella musica, nella poesia, nelle letteratura, e nell’arte figurativa concorre alla possibilità di costruire l’urbano possibile.’⁸⁶ As the art critic and historian Maurizio Calvesi recognized, a corresponding engagement with industrial society and urban landscape could be found in Italian versions of Pop Art, especially in those artists who converged around Plino de Martiis’s gallery, *La Tartaruga*, and in Piazza del Popolo in Rome.⁸⁷ Arguably associated with North American influences, this diverse group of Rome-based artists, now generally known as Scuola di Piazza del popolo, and who include Franco Angeli, Tano Festa, and Mario Schifano, essentially shared a network of acquaintances rather than a visual language [0.7]. Nonetheless, they engaged with the consumerist dialects of the contemporary city. They were not oblivious to the Futurists’ legacy, as is suggested by Mario’s Schifano series of enamel paintings, *Futuristi rivisitati a colori* (1965) [0.8].

⁸⁵ For an overview of kinetic art and *arte programmata* in Italy, see: Marco Meneguzzo, ed. *Arte programmata e cinetica in Italia: 1958-1968* (Verona: Aurora Grafiche, 2000); and Zevi, *Peripezie*, 154-225. An anthology of contemporary critical writing about the *kinetic art* and *arte programmata* in Italy, see the catalogue of the seminal 1967 exhibition: Maurizio Calvesi, and Giuseppe Gatt, eds. *Realtà dell’immagine e Strutture della visione* (Rome: Galleria Il Cerchio, 1966).

⁸⁶ Nicola Carrino’s video statement in the exhibition *Pasolini a Matera. Il Vangelo secondo Matteo cinquant’anni dopo. Nuove tecniche di immagine: arte, cinema, fotografia* (Matera, Museo Nazionale d’Arte Medievale e Moderna di Palazzo Lanfranchi) curated by Marta Ragozzino, Giuseppe Appella, and Ermanno Taviani, recorded by the author on January 28th, 2015.

⁸⁷ At the Venice Biennale 1964, the art critic Maurizio Calvesi presented a selection of Italian artist representing the Italian Pop Art, inviting artists especially from Rome, and the *Scuola di Piazza del Popolo*. *On the Scuola di Piazza del Popolo*, See: Andrea Tugnoli, *La scuola di Piazza del Popolo* (Firenze: m&m - Maschietto Editore, 2004). For an overview of the Italian Pop Art: Walter Guadagnini e L.M. Barbero, *Pop Art Italia 1958-1968*, (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2005).



0.10. Gianni Pettana, *Laundry*, 1969
(Photography by Ugo Mulas)

Besides this critical interest in the form and language of the modern city, artists also started to work outside the space of the gallery. Adopting performative and ephemeral intervention, they created works in critical dialogue within the physical spaces of the city, its streets and squares, and with its dwellers. Ever since the one-day event *Campo Urbano. Interventi estetici nella dimensione urbana collettiva* (1969), which was curated by Luciano Caramel, Ugo Mulas and Bruno Munari, artists accepted the challenge of creating works that would disrupt the locals' habits and perceptions of their urban spaces.⁸⁸ Preluding contemporary participatory public art practices, a number of these experiences were curated and discussed by the art historian and critic Enrico Crispolti (b. 1935).⁸⁹

In addition to these postwar examples of involvement with the urban environment, a large number of artists represented the peasants' world and the rural landscape through traditional, figurative means, such as drawings, paintings, and sculptures. At the end of nineteenth century, artists such as the Divisionists married their aesthetic quest in relation to light and colour with science and, to some extent, with socialist revolutionary ideals. They were committed to representing the working classes, both in the city and in the countryside.⁹⁰ Artists such as Balla, Morbelli, Longoni, and Pellizza da Volpedo represented urban dwellers, their social exclusion and collective political actions,

⁸⁸ About *Campo Urbano*, see: Zevi, *Peripezie*. 439-441; Alessandra Pioselli, "Arte e scena urbana. Modelli di intervento e politiche culturali pubbliche in Italia tra 1968 e 1981," in *Arte pubblica nello spazio urbano*, eds. Carlo Birrozzi e Marina Pugliese, (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2007), 20-33.

⁸⁹ Enrico Crispolti, *Arti visive e partecipazione sociale* (Bari: De Donato, 1977).

⁹⁰ Simonetta Fraquelli, Giovanna Ginex, Vivienne Greene, Aurora Scotti Torini, eds. *Radical Light. Italy's Divisionist Painters 1891-1910* (London: National Gallery Company Limited, 2008). For further readings on Italian Divisionism, cfr: Gabriella Belli, ed. *Divisionismo italiano* (Milano: Electa, 1990); Vivien Greene, *Divisionism/Neo-Impressionism: Arcadia and Anarchy* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2007).

while they also painted genre scenes of rural labour that were indebted to the works of Jacques-Francois Millet, as well as rural landscapes.⁹¹ Umberto Boccioni, who would later fully commit to Futurist celebrations of the city, started out as a Divisionist, and portrayed the Italian countryside and rural inhabitants in several of his early paintings.⁹²



0.11. Angelo Morbelli, *Per ottanta centesimi!*, 1895-97

A similar realist interest in representing the peasants' world continued into the postwar period. Through pictorial qualities variously indebted to Expressionism and Cubism, several artists demonstrated concerns with the peasants' challenging living conditions (Giuseppe Motti), their survival in the face of natural disasters (Tono Zancanaro), their political struggles (Renato Guttuso, Armando Pizzinato, Giuseppe Zigaia), and their experiences as immigrants in the new urban environment (Alberto Sughì) [0.13; 0.14; 0.15].⁹³ Among others, the socialist realist painter Renato Guttuso, official painter of the Communist Party, represented the land occupations in Sicily that preceded the Agrarian Reform in a series of canvases matured on the example, stylistic and above of all of civic engagement, of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* [0.12].⁹⁴ Carlo Levi also represented the southern Italian peasants in his paintings, but portraying their archaic humanity described in the pages of his *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* (1945) with a fluid sign and a dull chromatic palette [0.16].⁹⁵

⁹¹ Giovanna Ginex, *Divisionism to Futurism: Art and Social Engagement*, in *Radical Light. Italy's Divisionist Painters 1891-1910*, eds. Fraquelli, Ginex, Greene, Scotti Torini, 37-46.

⁹² Maurizio Calvesi, *Boccioni. L'opera completa* (Milan: Electa, 1983).

⁹³ On Realist paintings on the peasants' world: Mario De Micheli, *Arte e mondo contadino* (Milan: Vangelista editore, 1980).

⁹⁴ On Renato Guttuso see: Enrico Crispolti, ed. *Leggere Guttuso* (Milan: Mondadori, 1987). For an analysis of Guttuso's works on land occupation movement in relation with De Santis's movies and the PCI, see: Lara Pucci, "'Terra Italia': The Peasant Subject as Site of National and Socialist Identities in the Work of Renato Guttuso and Giuseppe De Santis", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 71 (2008): 315-334.

⁹⁵ About Carlo Levi, see: Vincenzo Napolillo, *Carlo Levi: dall'antifascismo al mito contadino* (Cosenza: Brenner, 1994); Giovanni Battista Bronzini, *Il viaggio antropologico di Carlo Levi: da eroe stendhaliano a guerriero birmano* (Bari: Dedalo, 1996); Franco Vitelli, *Il germoglio sotto la scorza: Carlo Levi vent'anni dopo* (Salerno:



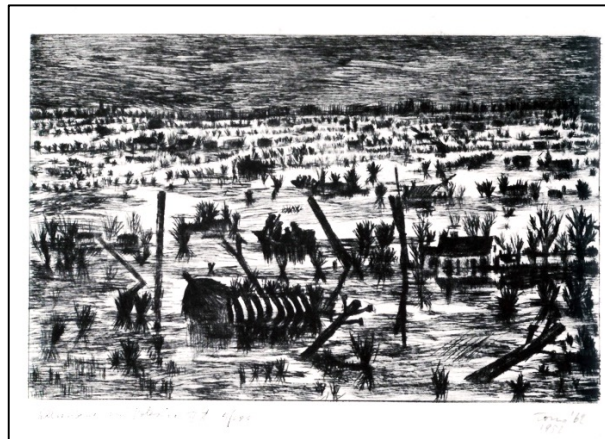
0.12. Renato Guttuso, *L'occupazione delle terre or La marsigliese contadina*, 1947



0.13. Armando Pizzinato, *Un fantasma percorre l'Europa*, 1948



0.14. Giuseppe Motti, *Le mondine e l'acquiolo*, 1951

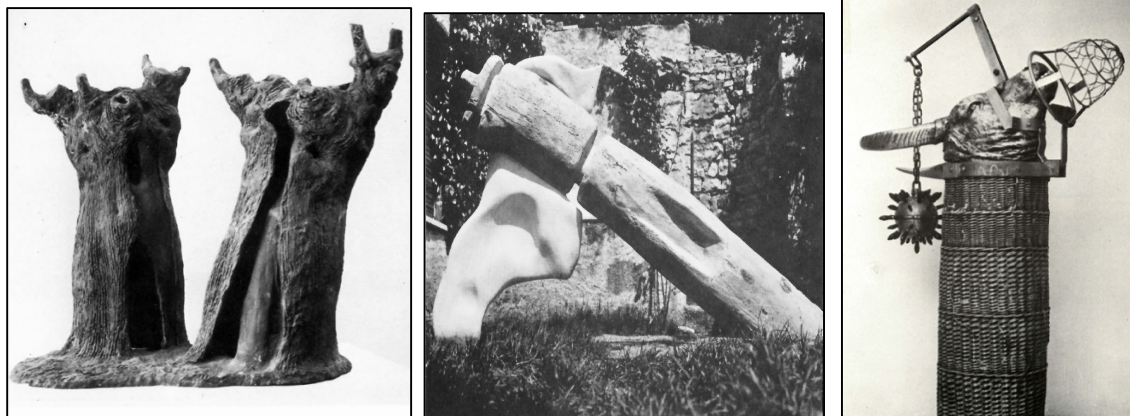


0.15. Tono Zancanaro, *Alluvione in Polesine*, 1952



0.16. Carlo Levi, *Lucania 1961*, 1961

Avagliano, 1998); Daniela Bartalesi-Graf. *Voci dal Sud: a Journey to Southern Italy with Carlo Levi and his Christ Stopped at Eboli* (New Haven, Conn. ; London: Yale University Press c2011); Giovanna Faleschini Lerner, *Carlo Levi's Visual Poetics: the Painter as Writer* (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan 2012).



0.17. Giuseppe Gorni, *Due gelsi*, 1961 0.18. Paolo Cenedella, *Monumento per l'aratro*, 1974 0.19. Valeriano Trubbiani, *T'amo pio bove*, 1977

In sculpture, other countryside-related themes emerged beside the representation of the peasants in the postwar period. Pietro Cenedella and Giuseppe Gorni produced, respectively, enlarged versions of rural tools (*Monumento per l'aratro*, 1974), and made casts of elements of the northern rural landscape (*Gelsi*, 1961), modified through peasant labour [0.17; 0.18]. Rural and agricultural values of the Mediterranean south were associated with the use of rough materials, as in the case of Pietro Cascella's work. Echoing Adrian Stokes's chapter on the Mediterranean landscape in *Stones of Rimini*, Cascella used tufa and sandstone, left unpolished and sourced from the countryside of Pescara, to express his rural origins.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, animal issues connected with the modernization of agriculture were tackled sculpturally by Valeriano Trubbiani.⁹⁷ Based in Ancona, he cast painfully disturbing bronze traps composed of weapons, mechanical engines, or agricultural tools, along with animals, or animal parts [0.19].

In this dissertation, however, I focus less on artists who used traditional art media to depict rural themes. Instead, I engage more closely with artists who adopted more experimental approaches, notably Gianfranco Baruchello (b.1924), Claudio Costa (1942-1995), Piero Gilardi (b.1942), Maria Lai (1919-2013), Ugo La Pietra (b.1938), Antonio Paradiso (b.1936), Giuseppe Penone (b.1947), Pino Pascali (1935-1968), and Superstudio (Adolfo Natalini, b.1941; Christiano Toraldo di Francia, b.1941; Roberto Magris, 1935-2003; Gian Piero Frassinelli, b.1939; Alessandro Magris, 1941-2010; Alessandro Poli, b.1941). This dissertation considers their rural-themed art works and art projects 'oltre la pittura' and

⁹⁶ Adrian Stokes, "Stones of Rimini", in Adrian Stokes, *The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes*, Lawrence Gowing, ed., vol. I, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 205-227; Enrico Crispolti and Manuela Crescentini, eds., *La scultura di Pietro Cascella: I segni della memoria dell'uomo* (Milano: Electa, 1984).

⁹⁷ Floriano De Santi, Fortunato Bellonzi, Giulio Carlo Argan. *Trubbiani. Ancona, mostra antologica 1958/1979*. (Bologna: Grafis edizioni, 1979).

‘oltre il quadro’, meaning those works that, following Lucio Fontana’s vision, experimented with materiality, spatiality, temporality and conceptual themes.

Much critical attention has been given to experimental artistic production during the period of Italian art that this thesis covers. However, these accounts almost always focus on established artistic circles, which are largely based in the country’s major cities. Since the 2001 exhibition, *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972*, at the Tate Modern and the Walker Art Center, Germano Celant’s Arte Povera has played the role of protagonist for identifying the most important Italian art from the 1960s and 1970s.⁹⁸ The artists involved in the original group (Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Piero Gilardi, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Gilberto Zorio) were mainly based in Turin, Rome, Milan, and Genoa, and their work has often been considered as a response to the industrialization of the country and to its socio-political contemporary context. As Giovanni Lista stated, their work has been seen as an expression of Franciscan humility that is inherently critical of consumerism.⁹⁹ There have been individual studies of several artists from within the group, which have explored their political agendas, their visual, artistic and performative strategies, and contextualised them in relation to the socio-political protests that were taking place in the main Italian cities during this period.¹⁰⁰ If the scholarly interest in Arte Povera artists appears not to have faded in the last few years following the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the group, but it has been accompanied by a

⁹⁸ After: Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, ed. *Arte Povera*. (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), the exhibition was the first attempt to reconsider the Italian Art of the 1960s, without the direct participation of Germano Celant: Richard Flood, and Frances Morris. *From Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Tate Modern, c2001). In this work, there will be made a distinction between ‘arte povera’, to indicate those artistic expressions that used non-traditional artistic media but everyday “cheap” materials, and ‘Arte Povera’, naming the group of artists, who was first gathered and exhibited by Celant’s between 1967 and 1972, and later presented by the critic himself at PS1 in New York. [Germano Celant, ed., *The Knot Arte Povera at P.S.1* (Turin: U. Allemandi, c1985)].

⁹⁹ See: Robert Lumley, *Arte Povera* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004); Giovanni Lista, *Arte Povera* (Milan: 5 continents, c2006); and Giovanni Lista, *Arte Povera. Interviste raccolte da Giovanni Lista* (Milan: Abscondita Srl, 2011).

¹⁰⁰ A whole issue of the art journal *October* was dedicated to Italian postwar art in spring 2008, with six contribution about Arte Povera, out of nine: Claire Gilman, ed., *Postwar Italian Art*, special issue 124 (spring 2008). Several young scholar have recently dedicated their works to few artists of the Arte Povera group. Elizabeth Mangini, “Arte Povera in Turin 1967-1978. Contextualizing Artistic Strategies During the Anni di Piombo” (PhD Dis. City University of New York, 2010); Elizabeth Mangini, “Feeling one’s way through a cultural chiasm. Touch in Penone’s sculpture c.1968”, in *New perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies. The Arts and History*, ed. Graziella Parati, Vol. 2 (Madison : Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), 153 – 174; Elizabeth Mangini, Introduction to “Gli anni di piombo”, *Palinsesti 4*, vol 1 (2014): I-VI. Clair Gilman, “Teatro nell’ Arte Povera: Pistoletto, Kounellis, Pascali” (PhD dis., Columbia University, 2006); Clair Gilman, “L’arte povera a Roma”, in *Il confine evanescente. Arte italiana, 1960-2010*, eds. Gabriele Guercio and Anna Mattiolo (Milan: Electa, 2010), 43-73; Jacopo Galimberti, “A Third-Worldist Art? Germano Celant’s Invention of Arte Povera”, *Art History 2*, Vol. 36 (2013) 418-441. A similar interest was developed by Nicholas Cullinan, in his “From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam: The Politics of Arte Povera”, “Postwar Italian Art”, special issue, 124 (2008): 8-30. Christopher Bennett, “Substantive Thoughts? The Early Work of Alighiero Boetti”, *Postwar Italian Art*, special issue, 124 (spring 2008): 75-97.

renewed interest in forms of socio-political activism.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, a significant number of scholars have recently engaged with Public Art, often in its relationship with the reconfiguration of public urban spaces and social participation in 1970s Italy.¹⁰² An interest in postcolonial approaches is also raising awareness of Feminist Italian artists and intellectuals.¹⁰³

In addition to this scholarly interest, recent exhibitions have emphasised the heterogeneous artistic panorama of postwar Italy. On one side, the art of the 1960s and 1970s has often been presented through overviews of a specific period of history in a specific city, such as Turin, Milan, Rome, Genoa, organised by the local Modern and Contemporary Art institutions, or with a focus on specific artistic movements.¹⁰⁴ On the other side, monographic retrospectives on individual artists or collectives of the artist have been conspicuous in terms of their number and quality.¹⁰⁵ More recent themed exhibitions have forged links between works from the 1960s and 1970s and more contemporary international practices, as in the case, for instance, with *Arts&Food – Rituals from 1851*, which was the 2015 exhibition curated by Germano Celant at the Triennale di Milano, or through retrospectives that focus on circumscribed issues, such as the 2015 and 2016 exhibitions, *EARTHRISE Pre-Ecological Visions in Italian Art 1967–73* in Turin, or the 2016 *Comunità Italia. Architettura/Città/Paesaggio. 1945-2000*, also at the Triennale di Milano.¹⁰⁶

The history of Italian art of the 1960s and 1970s often appears as a confused parenthesis between the Celant's *Arte Povera*, and Achille Bonito Oliva's *Transavanguardia*,

¹⁰¹ Celant, Germano, ed. *Arte Povera 2011* (Milan: Electa, 2011). Cristina Casero, and Elena Di Raddo, *Anni '70: l'arte dell'impegno. I nuovi orizzonti culturali, ideologici e sociali nell'arte italiana* (Cinisello Balscano: Silvana Editoriale, 2010); Cristina Casero and Elena Di Raddo, eds. *Anni Settanta. La rivoluzione nei linguaggi dell'arte* (Milan: Postmedia, 2015). Di Raddo, Casero and Francesca Gallo organized a conference on 1970s practices titled 'Arte fuori dall'arte: Incontri e scambi tra arti visive e società negli anni '70' on 12th -13th October 2016 (<http://www.unicatt.it/eventi/evt-arte-fuori-dall-arte>)

¹⁰² Cecilia Guida, *Spacial Practices. Funzione pubblica e politica dell'arte nella società delle reti* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2012). Carlo Birrozzi and Marina Pugliese, eds., *Arte pubblica nello spazio urbano*, (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2007); Anna Detheridge, *Scultori della speranza* (Turin: Einaudi, 2010); Michele Dantini, *Geopolitiche dell'arte. Arte e critica d'arte italiana nel contesto internazionale dalle neoavanguardie a oggi* (Milan: Marinotti, 2012). Alessandra Pioselli, *L'arte nello spazio urbano. L'esperienza italiana dal 1968 ad oggi* (Monza: Johan & Levi editore, 2015).

¹⁰³ Contribution to women's and gender studies in Italy, include: Raffaella Penna, *Arte, fotografia e femminismo in Italia negli anni Settanta* (Milan: Postmedia, 2013); Emanuela De Cecco and Gianni Romano, eds., *Contemporanee. Percorsi e poetiche delle artiste dagli anni Ottanta ad oggi* (Milan: Postmedia, 2002) and Carla Subrizi, *Azioni che cambiano il mondo. Donne, arte e politiche dello sguardo* (Milan: Postmedia, 2012) includes Italian artists in the international context of women artists; Laura Iamurri, and Sabrina Spinazzè, eds. *L'arte delle donne nell'Italia del Novecento* (Rome: Melteni editore, 2001).

¹⁰⁴ For instance, see: Daniela Lancioni, ed. *Anni 70. Arte a Roma* (Rome: Iacobelli editore, 2013); Luca Massimo Barbero, ed. *Torino sperimentale: 1959-1969: una storia della cronaca: il sistema delle arti come avanguardia* (Torino: Allemandi, 2010); Sandra Solimano, ed. *Attraversare Genova: Percorsi e linguaggi internazionali del contemporaneo, Anni '60-'70* (Milan: Skira, 2004).

¹⁰⁵ The most relevant monographic exhibitions of each artists will be mentioned in the individual chapters.

¹⁰⁶ Germano Celant, ed. *Arts&Food – Rituals from 1851* (Milan: Electa, 2015); Alberto Ferlenga and Marco Biraghi, eds., *Comunità Italia. Architettura/Paesaggio/Città. 1945-2000* (Milan: La Triennale di Milano, 2015); no catalogue was published after "Earthrise" (<http://parcoartevivente.it/mostre/archivio/mostre-2015/earthrise/>, accessed on 20th March 2016).

or between politically engaged experimentation and a return to order.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, these critical approaches have been inclined to address the city as a politicised environment, without considering the contemporary changes that the countryside within contemporary Italy underwent. This thesis aims to present an alternative art-historical narrative of the experimental artistic panorama at the time, by bringing the countryside into the picture of the experimental Italian art scene of the 1960s and 1970s. It presents a body of works that often transcend established categories. Considering the transformations of the rural, it explores the tensions between the avant-gardist nature of these works, the artists' attempts to move beyond the spatial frame of the picture plane, their rural themes, and their contemporary socio-economic, political and cultural contexts.

Other scholars have expressed interest in similar topics, albeit in other disciplines. In *Pride in Modesty*, Michelangelo Sabatino develops a rich study on the ways in which Italian architects have dealt with vernacular architectural clues in their modernist works, during the first half of the twentieth century. More recently, Monica Seger engaged with ecological themes that arise in the works of Italian authors and filmmakers, including Calvino, Pasolini, Gianni Celati, Simona Vinci, and the duo Daniele Ciprì and Franco Maresco – who turned to interstitial spaces as a result of the modification of the natural environment following the Economic Miracle.¹⁰⁸ A 'post-disciplinary' book by Serenella Iovino (*Ecocriticism and Italy*) has instead opened new approaches to the study of the Italian historical environment.¹⁰⁹

In recent years, an interest in art practices that engage with rural themes has also emerged in Italy. The 2016 *Altri tempi, altri miti* Quadriennale di Roma included a section titled *De Rerum Rurale*, which was curated by Matteo Lucchetti.¹¹⁰ The exhibition set out to problematize the concept of the countryside, although it relied on the notion of rural space as the degree zero of man-made space. Presenting multimedia works of ten Italian artists, this exhibition nonetheless demonstrated a renewed interest in the countryside and its socio-cultural environment. In the same year, Simone Ciglia published *Il campo espanso. Arte e agricoltura dagli anni Sessanta ad oggi*, a study dedicated to the way in which artists have engaged with agriculture in their diverse neo-avant-garde practices in Italy over the

¹⁰⁷ This perspective is epitomised in the critiques received by Celant's *Identité italienne* (Paris, Centre Pompidou, 1981), and discussed by Maria Grazia Messina, "Identité italienne a Parigi, Centre Pompidou, 1981: le ragioni di un catalogo-cronologia", *Palinsesti* 4 (2014): 1-20.

¹⁰⁸ Michelangelo Sabatino, *Pride in Modesty. Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular Tradition in Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Monica Seger, *Landscapes In Between: Environmental Change In Modern Italian Literature And Film* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁹ Serenella Iovino, *Ecocriticism and Italy* (London: Bloomsbury publishing, 2016).

¹¹⁰ <http://www.quadriennalediroma.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/c-Q16-Exhibition-section.pdf>, accessed on August 17th, 2017.

past five decades.¹¹¹ Earlier in 2009, *Ruritalia.it - Agricoltura e lavoro nell'arte del Novecento dal Futurismo a Facebook*, curated by Agostino Bagnato, presented a rich overview of over fifty artists who have been dealing with the rural world and its transformation in the past century.¹¹² Closer to the period of interest to this thesis, and thus with an ambiguous status of both primary and secondary source, *Arte e mondo contadino* was curated by the art critic Mario De Micheli in 1980, and was an itinerant show between Piedmont and Lucania, following Carlo Levi's footsteps.¹¹³ While *Arte e mondo contadino* focuses on more traditional fine arts media, such as drawings, paintings, and sculpture, and especially on the rural as a peasant's world in the second postwar period, *Ruritalia.it* considers a wider range of media, thus including more experimental art pieces, such as Joseph Beuys's and Baruchello's, and a wider temporal framework. Both these exhibitions offer a rich compendium of the relationship between art and rural Italy, while providing the artworks with a political and sociological context. This thesis instead primarily focuses on avant-garde examples of artistic practices to investigate the ways in which they reflect the relationship between city and countryside in the period following the Economic Miracle. Unlike Ciglia's book, however, this thesis widens its field of research, drawing on a more complex notion of rurality, and discusses artworks outside the stricter historiographical categories of canonical 1960s and 1970s art.

This thesis is organised in five chapters, each of which engages with a different art practice and associated rural-related issues. Its aim is to construct a picture of Italian rural worlds in the late 1960s and 1970s, in which political and social issues intersect with the artists' practices. The five chapters are divided into two parts, with each part analysing the individual response of an artist to the specific topic of the chapter. Chapter one discusses Pino Pascali's and Piero Gilardi's floor pieces as responses to the immediate contemporary transformation of the topography of the country. Chapter Two compares the ways in which two artists of rural origins, Giuseppe Penone and Antonio Paradiso, used rural land as a sculptural material yet represented different attitudes towards their cultural heritage and adopted distinct political stances. Chapter Three engages with the participatory work of Maria Lai in Ulassai, and the way in which her works monumentalises a rural community's relationship with the land, contrasting it with previous politicised experiences of audience participation in Italy. In her work, the relationship between the land and its dwellers is conceived not in materialist terms, but mythological and poetical ones. Whilst Lai considers

¹¹¹ Simone Ciglia, ed., *Il campo espanso. Arte e agricoltura in Italia dagli anni '60 ad oggi* (Rome: crea - consiglio per la ricerca in agricoltura e per l'analisi dell'economia agraria, 2016).

¹¹² Agostino Bagnato, and Claudio Crescentini. *Ruritalia.it. Agricoltura e lavoro nell'arte del Novecento dal Futurismo a Facebook* (Rome: L'Albatros, 2015).

¹¹³ Mario De Micheli, *Arte e mondo contadino* (Milan: Evangelista, 1980).

creativity as a feature of the locals' myth-making process, the artists examined in Chapter Four endorse an idea of creativity as an anthropological skill. Claudio Costa's *Museo di antropologia attiva* and Superstudio's didactic research project *Cultura materiale extraurbana* consider rural material culture as pedagogical tools for the re-appropriation of this intrinsically human creative capacity. The fifth and final chapter considers agriculture, and thus the activity of working the land, as a potential political tool through the practices of Ugo La Pietra and Gianfranco Baruchello. Whilst La Pietra still relied on creativity in anthropological terms as a form of re-appropriation of and self-determination in the urban environment, Baruchello uses agriculture as an epistemological challenge to the established system of knowledge.

Chapter One

Piero Gilardi, Pino Pascali and the Changing Topography of the Country

Transumanza, the seasonal livestock migration from one grazing location to another, features in Calvino's *Marcovaldo* (1963) and *Le città invisibili* (1972). The protagonists' different experiences of *transumanza* shed light on Calvino's reception of the contemporary topographical transformation of the country, and on the author's shifting understanding of the city-countryside relationship. In this chapter, both these aspects will be explored in relation to a discussion of Piero Gilardi's and Pino Pascali's floor installations.

In *Marcovaldo*, the noise of a cattle herd disrupts the dullness of a summer night, and wakes Marcovaldo up.¹ That night, one of his sons joins the drovers for their journey up to the mountain pastures, leaving him longing for the delights of pastoral life. Only when the child returns in the autumn does he confront his son's rough, non-idealised experience of farm work. Meanwhile, in *Le città invisibili*, Marco Polo meets a goat-herder in Cecilia. The herder is lost, and asks Polo for directions: 'Compatiscimi', the shepherd says 'Tocca alle volte a me e alle capre di attraversare città, ma non sappiamo distinguerle.'² This is not the only time that Polo meets this man and his goats. Many years after their first encounter, they meet again in Cecilia. This time, it is Polo who has lost his direction. When Polo sounds surprised at having reached Cecilia again, the shepherd bitterly reveals: 'I luoghi si sono mescolati. Cecilia è dappertutto.'³

The two narratives evoke, respectively, Marcovaldo's experience of urban life and his desire to escape, and the impossibility of exiting the urban environment in the contemporary city. At the same time, they suggest two different ways in which its relationship with the countryside is perceived. In *Marcovaldo*, the *transumanza* is an energetic wave of animals and men that shakes the city and reminds the protagonist of the countryside. At this point of his reflection, there is such a physical space as the countryside, but it is as industrialised in its modes of production as the city. As a consequence, Calvino criticises both the rural and the urban ideal, writing in the 1966 introduction to his collection: 'la critica della "civiltà industriale" si accompagna ad un altrettanto decisa critica a ogni sogno di un "paradiso perduto". L'idillio industriale è preso di mira allo stesso tempo dell'idillio campestre: non solo non è possibile un ritorno all'indietro nella storia, ma anche

¹Italo Calvino, *Marcovaldo* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), 48-53.

²Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, 152.

³*Ibid.*, 153.

quell' "indietro" non è mai esistito, è un'illusione.⁴ In *Le città invisibili, transumanza* is instead reduced to the presence of an old man and few animals who have lost directions. There is nothing left of the countryside space but a memory that resides in goats' instinct for recognising herbs on traffic islands. The city is a continuous constructed surface that has expanded well beyond the traditional city walls. As Calvino writes about Pentecilea, the city 'si espande per miglia intorno, in una zuppa di città diluita nella pianura.'⁵ There is no such thing as the countryside. The city is everywhere, formless and without a centre or identity, and the longing for the pastoral life vanishes into the acceptance of the current urbanised condition.

These tensions between the myth of the rural and the contemporary topographical changes that defined Italian life during the 1960s provide a context for revisiting the agriculture-themed works of Piero Gilardi and Pino Pascali. Gilardi's well-known series of *Tappeti natura* (1965-1968) and Pino Pascali's *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione* (1967) have been generally associated with the attitude we find in Marcovaldo's daydream about a pastoral countryside. However, a closer analysis of these works suggests a more ambiguous reflection on the transformations occurring in Italy at the time. Pascali's and Gilardi's works have primarily been categorised under the critical umbrella of Arte Povera.⁶ Before Pascali died in a tragic motorbike accident and Gilardi left the avant-garde scene for ideological reasons, both artists, who were themselves friends, exhibited with the group at the first four collective shows, but were not included in Celant's 1969 publication *Art Povera*.⁷

Arte Povera, as theorised by Germano Celant, often emphasised its focus on natural, organic, materials.⁸ Natural processes and presences were core themes of the artistic investigations of the artists connected with the group. Their visual language endorsed tautology as a visual rhetorical strategy, and they frequently attempted to activate

⁴Italo Calvino, "Introduzione", in Calvino, *Marcovaldo*, III-XII.

⁵Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, 156.

⁶The artists' involvement with the Arte Povera contingent was rather different. Gilardi, friend with Pistoletto and Gian Enzo Sperone, was one of initial promoters of the group, until the exhibition *Arte Povera + Azioni Povere*, in October 1968. Contradicting Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's views (*Arte Povera*, London, 1999) that positioned Gilardi on a route parallel to Arte Povera, several critics have recently repositioned Gilardi within the group, and as a key figure of the art scene of Turin (see: Robert Lumley, *Habitable Art: In and Around Piero Gilardi*, <http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/writing/lumley>, accessed on 3rd April 2016). On Gilardi role and political stand in relation to Celant's Arte Povera, see: Galimberti, "Germano Celant's Invention of Arte Povera": 419- 441. Pascali died aged 33 in early September in 1968 and thus he did not participate in the theoretical critical revision of Arte Povera. Even though his work has been interpreted under the aesthetic category of Arte Povera, his work was not included by Celant in his 1969 publication *Arte Povera* (Mazzotta, 1969); neither was Gilardi's.

⁷Gilardi reveals that he left the Sperone's circle, and stopped to produce art objects for ideological reasons. See: Andrea Bellini and Piero Gilardi, "Conversation with Andrea Bellini", in *Piero Gilardi - Collaborative Effects, 1963-1985*, eds. Lionel Bovier, Clement Dirié, and Benôit Porcher (Zurich: JRP| Ringier, 2012), 4; 7; see also: Angela Vettese, ed. *Piero Gilardi: Interdipendenze*. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2006).

⁸ See especially: Germano Celant, "Arte Povera", in Galleria de' Foscherari, eds., *Arte Povera o povertà dell'arte?* (Bologna: Galleria de' Foscherari, 2011), np.

communication with the viewer on a pre-iconographical, and pre-cultural level.⁹ Nicholas Cullinan recently advocated for the rural and artisanal imperative of these artists' aesthetics.¹⁰ The critic's overview offers a wide range of fascinating examples, but draws on a loose definition of rural and rural aesthetic. Within the varied body of works produced by the Arte Povera artists before the publication of Celant's first manifesto in November 1967, Pascali's and Gilardi's rural-themed floor pieces stand out for being explicitly figurative. Thus, this chapter moves beyond Celant's interpretative framework. It suggests that these works, horizontal as the format of traditional landscape paintings and as the ground we walk, shed a new light on the artists' reception of the topographical changes that the country was undergoing. The first section discusses the way in which Gilardi crafted his *Tappeti* blurring the boundaries between art and design, demonstrating a controversial endorsement of new technologies for satisfying contemporary longings for nature, and resolving the urbanisation of the country in the private sphere of the individual home. The second section overturns established interpretations of Pascali's *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione*, and argues that this floor installation critically engages with the audience's perception of the contemporary transformations of the land and of agriculture.

⁹ Synthesised in: Robert Lumley, *Arte Povera* (Lodon: Tate publishing, 2004), 13-17.

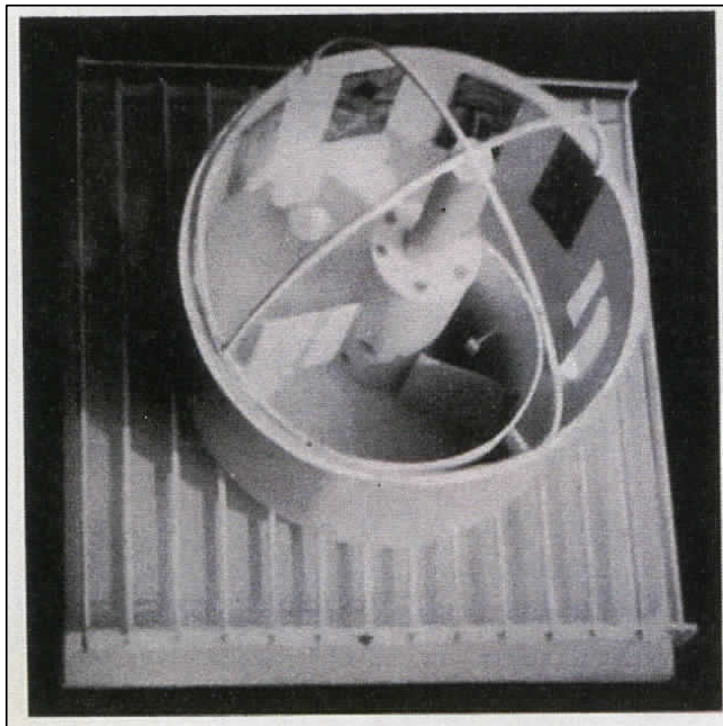
¹⁰ Nichola Cullinan, "La ricostruzione della natura: gli imperativi rurali e artigianali dell'arte povera", in Celant, *Arte Povera*, 65-72.

From the Land to the House: Gilardi's *Tappeti*

*Forse c'è da capire quanto siamo estranei e inadatti alla
'vita piena di pena', l'unica che c'è (calamità, dolore, morte).*

*E come tutto lavori a dimenticarci, ci aiuti a mettere
degli argini, per poter dire che 'ha i suoi lati buoni', per
mettere i nanetti di Walt Disney davanti alla porta;
insomma per dire e mostrare sempre e dovunque
che è una cosa tutta diversa da quella che è.*

Gianni Celati, *Verso la foce*, 1989¹¹



1.1. Piero Gilardi, *Cellula individuale di abitazione*, 1963.

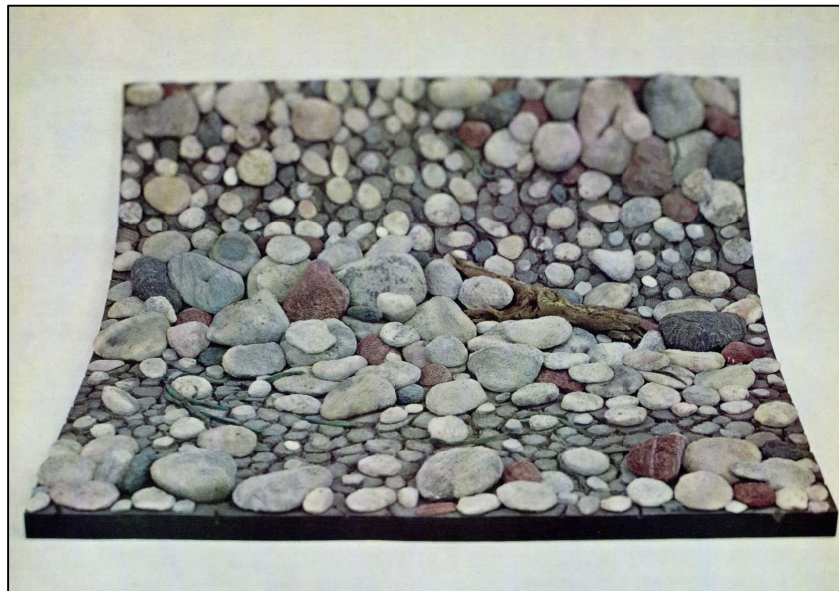
In the catalogue accompanying the artist's exhibition in Paris in January 1967, Michael Sonnabend wrote about Gilardi stating that he is an artist whose inspiration 'le tire, à travers le notre jungle technologique, vers un monde meilleur.'¹² The artist's early endorsement of new technologies will be discussed in this section in relation to the commodity-status of the *Tappeti*. Drawing on recent interpretations, this section suggests that the changes these works underwent over the years reflect the artist's shifting attitude towards the role that standardised technological commodities could play in the enhancement of everyday life.¹³

¹¹ Gianni Celati, *Verso la foce* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1989), 44.

¹² Micheal Sonnabend, *Gilardi* (Paris: Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, 1967), np.

¹³ See: Anne Palopoli, *Piero Gilardi. Nature Forever* (Macerata: Quolibet, 2017), but also the contributions to the exhibition Piero Gilardi: *Piero Gilardi - Collaborative Effects, 1963-1985* in Turin (Castello di Rivoli), Eindhoven

Gilardi's interest in the possibility of the recent technological development was evident ever since his first exhibition at the Galleria L'Immagine (Turin) in 1963. On this occasion, the artist envisioned a futuristic hyper-technological society presented through two 8mm short movies, architectural models, and a series of *Macchine per il futuro*.¹⁴ The *Cellula individuale di abitazione* was an individual housing unit, imagined to provide its dweller with items of primary necessity and comfort for an existence supported and controlled by technology [1.1]. The controversial aim of the *Cellula* was one of alleviating and overseeing the psycho-physical unbalance caused by the transition to a fully-technological modernity.¹⁵ The *Macchine per il futuro* were conceived to furnish this domestic environment, with utopian social functions. These devices offered synthetic experience of human relationships, and aimed at replacing conversations (*Macchina per discorrere*) and procreation and pregnancy (*Macchina per la fecondazione e la gestazione artificiale*), and at the fulfilment of human instincts (MAI - *Macchina per appagare gli istinti*). With a similar intention, large-scale images of natural landscapes decorated the *Cellula*. These images suggested the persisting importance attributed by the artist to the presence of nature in the everyday domestic space even in the context of a highly-technological future environment. In return, however, natural elements were reduced to bi-dimensional images that could be contemplated on a wall.



1.2. Piero Gilardi, *Tappeto natura (Sassaia)*, 1966

(Van Abbemuseum), and Nottingham (Nottingham Contemporary) in 2013:

<http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/event/collaborative-effects-symposium>, accessed on 21st April 2015.

¹⁴ Gilardi described the works exhibited on that occasion in his 1967 interview with LeGrace Benson and Gabriele Muresu. LeGrace G. Benson, Gabriele Muresu, and Piero Gilardi, "An Interview with Piero Gilardi", *Leonardo*, vol. 1, 4 (1968): 432.

¹⁵ Ettore Sottsass reports the artist's statement in Ettore Sottsass Jr, "Piero Gilardi", *Domus* 445 (1966): 52.

It was these last items in the *Cellula abitativa* that the artist Gilberto Zorio (b. 1944), Gilardi's assistant at the time, noticed as precursors for the *Tappeti*, thus retracing a continuity of intentions between the *Macchine* and his later works.¹⁶ The representation of nature within the 1963 show acquired a three-dimensional physicality in the *Tappeti natura*. Gilardi started this series in 1965, which he continued until 1968, the year when he left the artistic community altogether [1.1].¹⁷ Reproducing a variety of iconographical natural motives, the artist assembled his *Tappeti* by gluing and tying together individual carvings in polyurethane foam, a material that could be easily bought in hardware shops in the suburbs of Turin [1.3; 1.4].¹⁸



1.3. Piero Gilardi, disassembled *Tappeto natura* during restauration



1.4. Piero Gilardi, *Campo di grano*, 1968

Ambiguously positioned at the intersection of sculpture, painting, and object design, the *Tappeti* were first envisioned as organic shapes for the synthetic, industrial and technological, cyber cell of the future.¹⁹ Later, they were produced for the art world and for the furnishing of the contemporary house. 'There is not yet this idea of structuring the modern landscape in an organic fashion' Gilardi stated in 1967, 'so then, my act has been an act of magic. At least in the home of the individual, I would like there to be this organic dimension.'²⁰

During an interview with the critic Mirella Bandini in 1972, Piero Gilardi recalled the diffused optimistic endorsement of the standardisation and depersonalisation of consumerism as a form of democracy in his artistic circle in Turin as early as 1963-1964.²¹

¹⁶ Mirella Bandini, 1972. *Arte Povera a Torino*. (Turin – London – Venice: Allemandi & C, 2002), 98.

¹⁷ Gilardi resumed his production of *Tappeti* in 1980, but without the same social underpinning of his first production. His more recent *Tappeti* were created in order to support the publication of his 1981 book *Dall'arte alla vita all'arte*, and his artistic research (Gilardi and Bellini, "Conversation", 12).

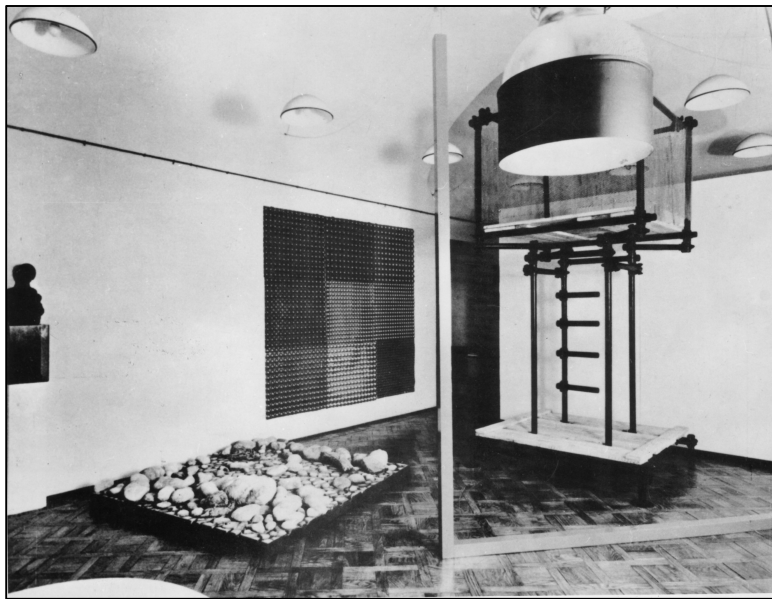
¹⁸ I am grateful to the Archivio Piero Gilardi for this information.

¹⁹ Gilardi and Bellini, "Conversation", 4

²⁰ Benson, Muresu, and Gilardi, "Interview with Piero Gilardi", 435.

²¹ Bandini, 1972. *Arte Povera a Torino*, 42.

Fascinated by the promise of American capitalism, Gilardi and his fellow artist friends believed that access to modern commodities could have been a solution to social contradictions and inequality.²² Already in 1966, however, this optimism was fading. It was a time when signs of crisis in the extraordinary economic growth of the country were surfacing, anticipating the socio-political turmoil that shook Turin and the country between 1968 and 1969.²³ As it can be seen in the production of his *Oggetti poveri*, Gilardi's faith in the social potential of mass-produced objects was starting to dim. Impersonating Levi Strauss's *bricoleur* (*Le pensée sauvage* was first translated and published in Italy in 1964), he created a number of everyday objects reusing found materials: a comb, a pair of sandals, a saw, and a shopping trolley.²⁴ Meanwhile, despite the optimism that initially animated them and their success on the art scene, the Tappeti came to demonstrate a similar shift, especially in the artist's optimistic views of standardisation and homologation of mass-produced industrial objects, and in their potential to be a social equaliser.²⁵



1.5. Invitation to the *Arte abitabile* Exhibition with view of the display, 1966



1.6. Piero Gilardi, *Oggetti poveri*, 1967

This changing attitude was metaphorically announced by a work presented at the *Arte abitabile* exhibition in July 1966, consisting of a balcony, a self-standing structure

²² *Ibidem*; about the artists's fascination for the American capitalist society, see: Piero Gilardi, *Dall'arte alla vita. Dalla vita all'arte: il percorso artistico, politico e umano dell'esperienza transculturale cominciata nel '68* (Milan: La salamandra, 1982), 11.

²³ Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni Ottanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2003), 31-64.

²⁴ Piero Gilardi and Francesco Manacorda, "Temporary Artistic Communities. Piero Gilardi in Conversation with Francesco Manacorda (2010)", in Bovier, Dirí, and Porcher, *Gilardi - Collaborative Effects*, 68.

²⁵ In 1967, the *Tappeti* were exhibited in Paris, New York, Cologne, Hamburg, Venice, Bologna, Brussels, Amsterdam. Bovier, Dirí, and Porcher, *Gilardi - Collaborative Effects*, 117.

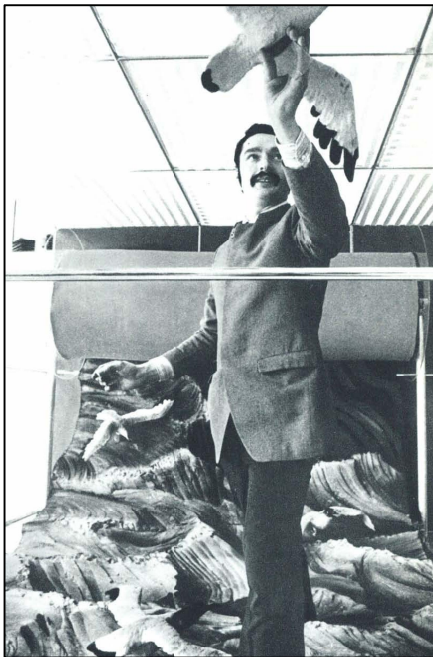
constructed of Dalmine tubes [1.5]. Held at the Sperone Gallery, *Arte abitabile* showcased three of Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Oggetti in meno* (1965-1966), three of Gianni Piacentino's *Artigianato inutile* objects (1966), Gilardi's *Balcone* as well as the *Tappeto* titled *Ciotoli* [1.6]. As noted by Robert Lumley, this exhibition engaged with the idea of *habitability*, and explored the possibilities intrinsic to the relationship between art objects and the surrounding, lived space.²⁶ It also proved the artists' attempts to tie art and life, by using materials and addressing and rethinking items pertaining the urban, both public and domestic, environment. On this occasion, the coexistence of Gilardi's two pieces suggests the compresence of inner tensions within his practice. The balcony, an external feature of modern proletarian buildings turned into a furnishing element for the internal environment, offered an unusual viewpoint, from above, of the exhibition space and of the pieces on show. Overlooking the *Tappeto-torrente*, *Balcone* metaphorically encouraged the beholder to reflect on the works, and possibly suggested the emergence of the artist's critical reflection upon his own production. In the *Tappeti* series, the changing attitude towards mass-production and standardisation found expression in three main aspects: in their format; in the ways in which the artist prescribed interactions with the works; in the role craftsmanship played in their public presentation.

The first *Tappeti* exhibited at the Galleria Sperone in May 1966 were standardised in size and form, but since 1967 the artist gradually abandoned the use of standard measurements. Ranging between one and two square meters, they were consistently square in shape. For instance, *Greto di torrente con martin pescatore* (1965), and *Pesche cadute* (1965) and *Sassaia* (1966) are artworks both published in the pages of *Domus* in September 1966, and are all 170cm by 170cm. In 1967, Gilardi began to produce rolls of *Tappeti natura*, first presented in reels at the Fischbach Gallery in New York and available to cut on demand. Offering the possibility to personalise the size of the art object, Gilardi already demonstrated a shift in his attitude towards mass-production.

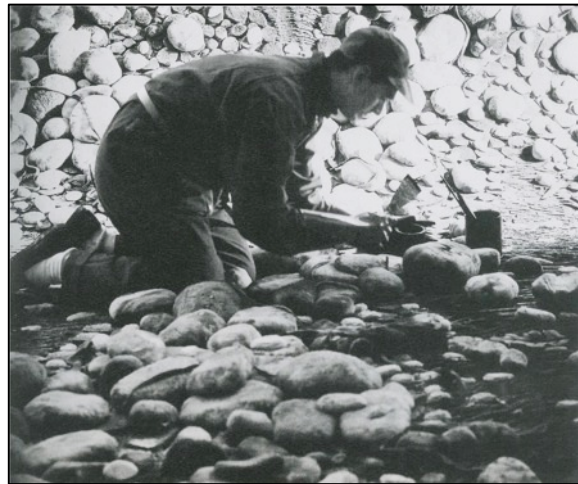
The variation in size was also accompanied by a less prescriptive attitude towards the use of the *Tappeti*. While in the *Cellula di abitazione individuale*, the proto-*Tappeti* were used with a decorative function, in 1968 art critic Henry Martin noticed that the meaning of the *Tappeti* relied on the misunderstanding they generated about what they were for: 'The difference between good design and bad design is a matter of the quality of the information that an object transmits, about precisely how it is to be understood. A well-designed object usually contains whole networks of indications about the character of its proper use. But

²⁶ Robert Lumley, *Habitable Art: In and Around Piero Gilardi*, <http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/writing/lumley>, accessed on 3rd April 2016.

this is not so with Gilardi; indications about what we should do with the carpets are something that he carefully avoids.²⁷ Eschewing to impose a prescriptive utilisation, Gilardi allowed freedom of interaction with and personalisation of his works: ‘Cut them into squares,’ he incited his audience in the exhibition catalogue of his show at the Sperone Gallery in Milan ‘put them onto polished marble, and display them under glass! Have your tailor turn them into cocktail frocks! Take them into the country for an ant-free pic-nic!’²⁸ The artist’s openness to the audience’s varied use of his works was also expressed in the gallery display. As rugs in hardware shops, the artworks were piled in an asymmetrical stack in Paris, cut on demand from rolls in New York, folded on shelves in Foligno, or on display in small samples on a vertical display unit.²⁹ The diversity of display reflected the diversity of the potential uses of the works. Hence, Gilardi moved from envisioning the *Tappeti* as a needed element of the contemporary dwelling to allowing the audience to make their own decision about what was best to do with them.



1.7. Piero Gilardi plays with a polyurethane seagull while adding the final touches to his installation at *Eurodumus* (1968)



1.8. Piero Gilardi adding the final touches to *Sassai*, 1967

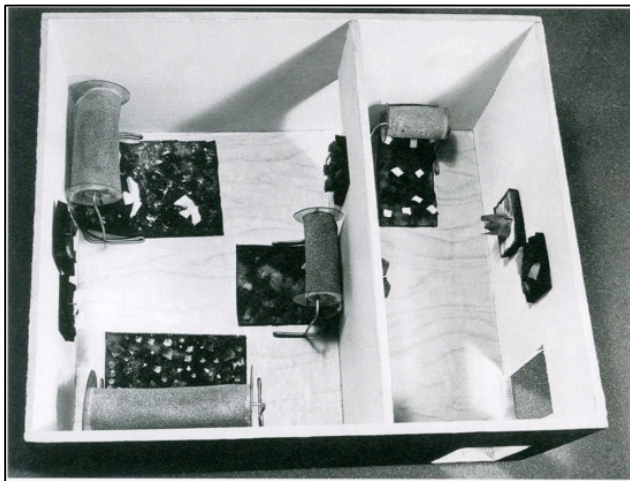
²⁷ Henry Martin, “Technological Arcadia” (1968), in Bovier, Dirié, and Porcher, *Gilardi - Collaborative Effects*, 58.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁹ Documentary photographs of Paris and New York are published in: Bovier, Dirié, and Porcher, *Gilardi - Collaborative Effects*, 21-27



1.9. View of part of Gilardi's exhibition at the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris, 1967



1.10. Model for Gilardi's display at the Fischbach Gallery, 1967



1.11. Piero Gilardi, Roll of *Sea-Tappeto natura*, 1967

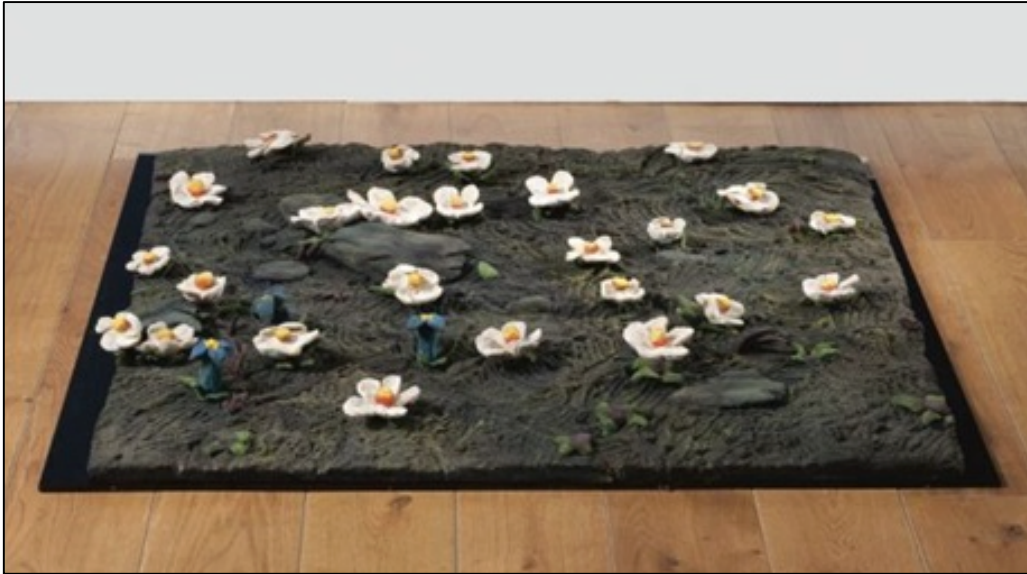
In addition to the artist's openness to individuals' preferences, the artist started to insist on the artisanal production of his works, thus differentiating them from the contemporary industrially produced serialised commodities.³⁰ Contradicting their industrial appearance, Gilardi's *Tappeti* were carved, painted and manually assembled. Documentary photographs, such as the ones of the *Eurodomus* fair (Turin, 1968) published in *Domus* and those in the exhibition catalogue of his solo show at the Galleria Sperone in Milan (1967), which portray the artist giving the final touches to his works, appear to respond to this intention.

By 1967, Gilardi's faith in the possibility of standardised industrially-produced commodities as socially equalised had faded, and the *Tappeti* testify the artist's gradual shifting perspective. Despite their industrial appearance, Gilardi's practice dismantled the industrial imagery his works conveyed from within. Underlying the artisanal nature of his creations, allowing a free-from-prescription use of the art objects, and playing with the audience about the possibility of choosing the size of the carpets suggests that the artist realised the limit of standardisation and slowly endorsed the value of individualised and personalised forms of object design and use. His *Oggetti poveri* clearly marked the end of this transition phase, and only when the artist abandoned the art market altogether did his position become clear he refused the art object as commodity. His critical position towards the industrial production and the consumerist culture it encapsulates, however, was still far from being resolved in the *Tappeti*. This ambiguity is reflected in the controversial image of nature they present.

³⁰ It has recently led to a publication of an artist's book on polyurethane craft: Piero Gilardi and Andrea Bellini, *The Little Manual of Expression with Foam Rubber* (Zurich: JRP | Ringier, 2013).

What Nature? Gilardi's (Un)Natural-Rural Visual Imagery

The roughly one-hundred and fifty *Tappeti* that Gilardi produced between 1965 and 1968 could be chosen in size, but also in a variety of different patterns, which represented different kinds of natural environments, ranging from stony riverbeds and sea-like surfaces, to cultivated patches of land and mountain meadows [1.12].



1.12. Piero Gilardi, *Prato montano*, 1967

Gilardi declared his choice of subject to be one of addressing aspects of nature not overloaded with humanistic associations. In the interview that followed his exhibition at the Fischbach Gallery in New York City in September 1967, he repeatedly stated that he was willing to 'flee from typified images of nature.'³¹ He wished to represent what anyone would encounter while taking 'a walk in the fields or in the mountains', aiming at a more direct and unmediated experience with the art object and the organic forms it represented.³² The iconographies of the *Tappeti*, which will be discussed in this section on the basis of their degree of verisimilitude, reflects the artist's controversial engagement with the contemporary commodification of the natural environment.

³¹ Benson, Muresu, and Gilardi, "Interview with Piero Gilardi", 435.

³² *Ibid.*

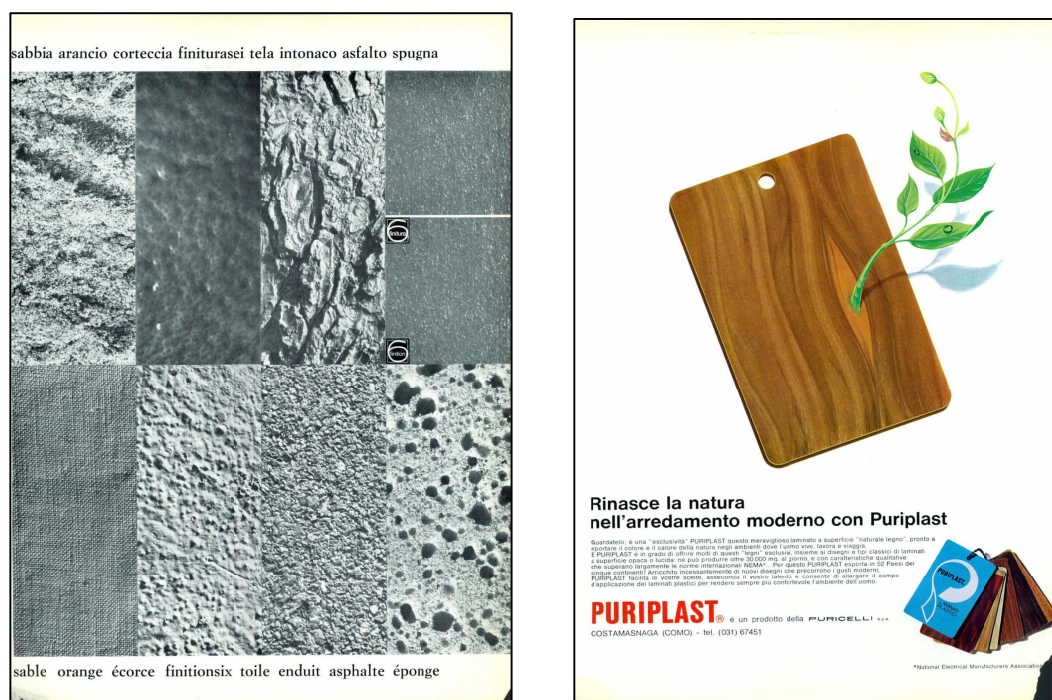


1.13. Piero Gilardi, *Sassaia*, 1967 (Foligno, 1967)



1.14. Piero Gilardi, *Sassaia - Tappeto natura roll*, 1967

Reflecting this idea of offering the viewer an atypical, unmediated experience of nature, the first *Tappeto* recreated a stony riverbed, a subject named *Sassaia*, and repeatedly pursued on various scales until 1968. The artist transformed carved foam rubber into accurate reproductions of pebbles and gravel.³³ As Gilardi repeatedly recalls, his riverbeds were the results of a meticulous analytical study of an actual riverbed, which is a fact that makes his work similar to that of the British artists Mark Boyle and Joan Hill.³⁴ The degree of verisimilitude achieved by Gilardi's work, associated with the softness and lightness of the foam rubber, made his *Sassaia* a three-dimensional *trompè l'oeuil*. Its visual trickery also facilitated an association with Pino Pascali's deceptive use of materials, which will be discussed later in this chapter.³⁵



1.15. Print Laminati Plastic and Puricelli S.p.a, Advertisement (*Domus* 449)

The artificial reproduction of natural elements using industrial materials also reflected the more generalised logic of the contemporary plastic industry. Although invented in the early 1900s, plastic became widespread only in the postwar period.³⁶ At the time, a number of Italian firms, such as the *Print Laminati* (today *Abet*, in Bra, near Turin),

³³ Gilardi belongs to a family of artists, whose roots are in Merisio (Switzerland) since the XVII century.

³⁴ Robert Lumley, *Habitable Art: In and Around Piero Gilardi*, <http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/writing/lumley>, accessed on 3rd April 2016.

³⁵ Teresa Kittler's "Living Sculpture and the Art of Living", at the 'Collaborative Effects' symposium at Nottingham contemporary: <http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/event/collaborative-effects-symposium>, accessed on 3rd April 2016.

³⁶ About the impact of plastics in the past sixty years, see: Roland Geyer, Jenna R. Jamberck, Kara Lavender Law, "Production, Use, and Fate of All Plastics Ever Made", *Science Advances*, vol. 3, n. 7, 19th July 2017, 10.1126/sciadv.1700782, accessed on 20th July 2017.

and *Puricelli Spa* in Costamasnaga (Como), were experimenting with and producing new polymers.³⁷ Possibly reasoning with the consumers' taste, these companies advertised plastic laminate, a surface made of compressed paper layers previously deepened in a polyurethane solution, promoting its natural appearance. The advertisement underlined the ways in which the material was 'capace di riportare il calore e il colore della natura dove l'uomo vive, lavora, e viaggia', or for their adaptability to the visual surfaces of natural things: 'Alle cose naturali ci adattiamo; il laminato plastico è adatto a noi. Gli oggetti naturali hanno una superficie; il laminato plastico è una superficie'.³⁸ Particularly, the *Print Laminati* produced a series of plastic claddings faithful to natural surfaces (sand, orange skin, tree bark, sponge was reproduced). Advertised on the pages of *Domus*, the rows of samples that accompanied the text also resonated with the superficial textures of Gilardi's several version of *Sassaia*. The verisimilitude of Gilardi's *Sassaia* participated in the contemporary discourses about the blurred boundaries between natural and artificial discussed in Gillo Dorfles's 1968 publication *Natura e artificio*, eliciting reflections about the role that nature plays in the domestic material landscape.³⁹

Not all of Gilardi's patterns, however, pursued the same degree of verisimilitude. The representation of ephemeral natural elements, such as the sea surface in his various versions of *Mare* (1966), was not as effective as in the previous series. Unlike the riverbed, which displaced the audience's experience of a walk over a stony ground, in the *Tappeti* with marine subject, and in the following series referencing the agricultural world, fewer attempts were made to hide the man-made appearance, and thus the artificiality of the artist's operation. This explicit artificiality was a crucial aspect of the experience of these pieces itself.



1.16. Piero Gilardi, *Mare*, 1967

³⁷ About the history of Abet, see: <http://abetlaminati.com/en/storia-e-designer/>, accessed on June, 13th 2017.

³⁸ *Domus* 449 (April, 1967).

³⁹ Gillo Dorfles, *Natura e artificio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), especially Chapter Two, titled "Oggetto naturale e oggetto artificiale".

Gilardi's cut-on-demand representations of the sea and of rural nature demonstrate a different role played by the subject of the *Tappeti* within the ecosystem of the work itself. Despite the artist's attempts to use contingency to represent these environments realistically, the *Tappeti*'s became progressively detached from nature. Not only Gilardi's *Mare* was far from a verisimilar representation. The delocalised vision of the marine environment, avoiding any references to an existing location, and the absence of ties between the iconography of the works and the contemporary topographic, social and cultural changes in the country reinforce the degree of idealisation in the representation of nature.⁴⁰ The several *Mare* evoked the myth of the summer holiday at the Italian seaside, which was well established since 1963.⁴¹ Celebrated by pop songs and at the same time sharply analysed and criticised in Italo Calvino's *La speculazione edilizia* (1963), and in Antonio Cederna's polemical writings in the magazine *Il Mondo*, the effects of these unprecedented touristic trends manifested themselves in the heavy urbanisation of the coastline, above all in Liguria, Tuscany and Romagna.⁴² Gilardi's works avoided explicit references to the transformation of the Italian coastline and to the modifications of marine landscapes, thus leaving his *Tappeti* seemingly uncorrupted by human presence.

Similarly, his *Tappeti* that refer to an agricultural world did not record the contemporary changes occurring in the countryside. The countryside was undergoing an industrialisation and urbanisation process that impacted greatly on the land, which will be discussed further in relation with Pino Pascali's work later in this chapter. These changes did not figure in Gilardi's *Orticello* (1966), *Campo di cavoli e neve* (1966), and *Pesche cadute* (1966) [1.17; 1.18; 1.19; 1.20]. These works were later followed by *Angurie* (1967), *Campo di grano* (1967), *Mele cadute con scala* (1967), *Granturco* (1967), and *Stalla* (1967) which reflected a similar attitude [1.25; 1.24; 1.21; 1.27; 1.26]. Following his aims of bringing a non-typified nature to the living environment of the modern urban dweller, Gilardi produced these works, which portrayed the domesticated nature of small-scale agriculture.

⁴⁰ Only in the 1980s, the *Tappeti* began to have references to geographical locations in their title.

⁴¹ Crainz, *Il paese mancato*, 6.

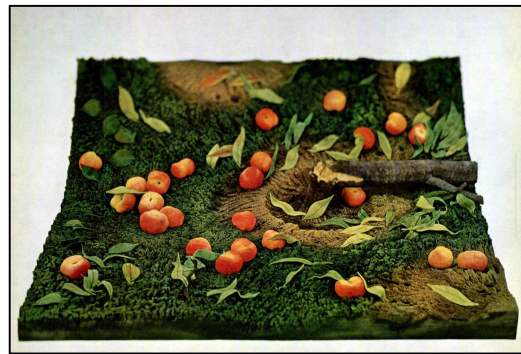
⁴² Italo Calvino, *La speculazione edilizia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963). About this short novel, see: Seger, *Landscape In Between*, 24-49; Antonio Cederna, *La distruzione della natura in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975); about Antonio Cederna, see: Roberto Balzani, "La difesa dell'ambiente nelle pagine del "Mondo", in *Storia dell'ambiente in Italia tra Ottocento e Novecento*, ed. Angelo Varni (Bologna: il Mulino, 1999), 213-228.



1.17 - 1.18. Piero Gilardi, *Orticello*, 1966 (Left: frontal view; Right: view from above)



1.19. Piero Gilardi, *Cavoli e neve*, 1966



1.20. Piero Gilardi, *Pesche cadute*, 1966



1.21. Piero Gilardi, *Mele cadute e scala*, 1967

In these *Tappeti*, patches of vegetable gardens, orchards, and maize, watermelon and cabbage fields represented man-made nature. Gardens represent a highly humanised space of cultivation.⁴³ Vegetable gardens in particular embody the most utilitarian human relationship with the environment. Gilardi's representation of the rural world, however, expresses very little of this essentially necessary relationship. Despite his attempts to pursue verisimilitude through details that convey an idea of temporality and passage of time, the rural-*Tappeti* offered an idealised, and traditional view of agriculture and of the rural world.

As with many of the contemporary inhabitants of Turin who had moved from rural areas of the country to find a job in the industrial sector, Gilardi had spent his younger years in the countryside. Connecting his artistic inspiration with his childhood, the artist appealed to an experience of rural nature reflecting the ingenuous and sharp curiosity of a child.⁴⁴ Yet, both the iconography and the stylistic features of the work betray the artist's detachment from nature.

As with the most recent *Tappeti*, such as *Cipolle carote e uva* (2003), *Pomodori e coste* (2004), juicy and colourful seasonal vegetables crowd the surface of the 1960s *Tappeti* [1.22; 1.23]. In *Campo di grano* (1967), the wheat fields grow lavishly and abundantly. Its elements, those of a summery wheat field sprinkled with poppies and bluebottles, crowd and overflow the surface of the work itself. Similarly, *Angurie*, a watermelon field, is represented with ripening juicy fruits, one of them even open to show the inner fresh pulp ready to be eaten.



1.22. Piero Gilardi, *Cipolle carote e uva*, 2003



1.23. Piero Gilardi, *Pomodori e coste*, 2004

⁴³ Michael Pollan, *Second Nature. A gardener education*, (New York: Grove Press, 1991), 49; Noël Kinsbury, and Tim Richardson, eds., *Vista. The culture and politics of gardens* (London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2005).

⁴⁴ Benson, Muresu, and Gilardi, "An interview with Piero Gilardi", 1968, 435.



1.24. Piero Gilardi, *Campo di grano*, 1967

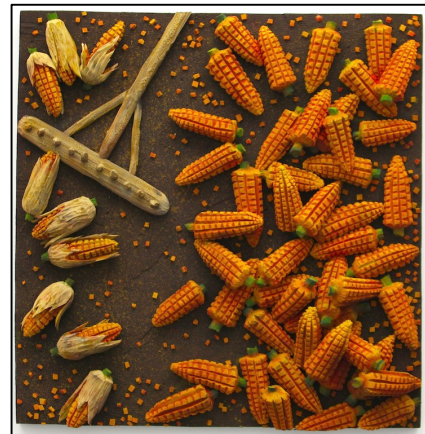


1.25. Piero Gilardi, *Angurie*, 1967

These cultivations require plenty of tending by farmers, yet in Gilardi's *Tappeti* are deserted of human presence. If *Orticello* expresses the attentive presence of a farmer looking after his piece of land, a number of other *Tappeti* presents peasant's traditional tools abandoned at the scene. In *Mele cadute e scala* (1967), a wooden ladder runs all the way through a meadow covered in fallen apples, and two woven wooden baskets are abandoned nearby. In *Stalla* (1967), two buckets full of milk and an empty one have been left on the barn floor covered in hay. In *Mais* (1967), a wooden rake is left on the soil near by a pile of corn that has already been husked. These rural tools are deliberately represented as abandoned, visually underpinning the horizontal vocation of the artworks. At the same time, they help to trigger a narrative around the rural world.



1.26. Piero Gilardi, *Stalla*, 1967



1.27. Piero Gilardi, *Granturco*, 1967

These abandoned or forgotten tools respond to *topoi* of the *Golden Age*, the long-standing myth rooted in ancient rural Greece.⁴⁵ Hesiod's agricultural treatise *Work and Days* is seminal in the dissemination of the idea of the *Golden Age* in Western culture, up to today.⁴⁶ Referring to an *aureas species's* lost past of modest but effortless life, Hesiod tells us that: 'the grain-giving soil bore its fruits of its own accord in unstinted plenty, while they at their leisure harvested their fields in contentment amid abundance.'⁴⁷

Gilardi's *Tappeti* encapsulated aspects of this myth. In Gilardi's work, it was merged with the contemporary idealised visual imagery of nature broadcasted by mass-media. Gilardi himself admitted that, after his initial concern with a realistic image of nature expressed in his *Sassaia*, he was engaging with mass media imageries of nature.⁴⁸ He revealed to have been inspired by Disney, and, as recalled by Zorio, he himself used to define his nature in similar terms to those that were offered by the American firm.⁴⁹ We could even consider - in this context - the American audience's playful engagement with his work during his exhibition in New York in 1967, which could be explained through the visual similarity of Gilardi's *Tappeti* with the Disney visual imagery of nature.⁵⁰ Disney animations, live action movies and naturalistic documentary *True Life Adventures* were imported in Italy, and were accompanied by the distribution of *Topolino*, a comic that has been published in Italy since 1949 and proved popular among the wider public and intellectuals.⁵¹ In Turin, on the occasion of *Italia 1961*, Walt Disney's company had presented *Circarama*, a 360°-degree screen and project installation, financially supported by the FIAT company [1.29].⁵²

Walt Disney's movies embodied the moral values of everyday middle-class Americans since 1931⁵³ As Ronald Tobias has noticed, Disney contributed to a peculiar notion of nature. Despite having grown up in the countryside of Minnesota, the director proposed a simplified and idealised image of the natural world, aiming at educating his

⁴⁵ On the Golden Age, see: Raymond Williams, "Pastoral and Counter-Pastoral", in *The City and the Country* [1973], (London: Vintage Classics, 2013). On the *Golden Age* as conceived at the time of Hesiod, see: H. C. Baldry, "Who Invented the Golden Age?", *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1/2 (Jan. - Apr., 1952), pp. 83-92; J. Gwyn Griffiths, "Did Hesiod Invent the "Golden Age"?", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Jan., 1958), pp. 91-93.

⁴⁶ Peter G. Bietenholz, *HISTORIA AND FABULA. Myths and Legends in Historical Thought from Antiquity to the Modern Age*, (Leiden; New York; Köln: E.J. Brill, 1994), 207-220.

⁴⁷ Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days* (Oxford Press, 1988), 40.

⁴⁸ Benson, Muresu, and Gilardi, "Interview with Piero Gilardi", 1968, 432.

⁴⁹ Bandini, 1972. *Arte Povera a Torino*, 98.

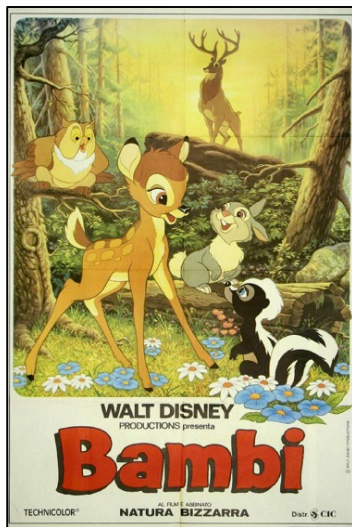
⁵⁰ Benson, Muresu, and Gilardi, "Interview with Piero Gilardi", 1968, 432.

⁵¹ Marco Spagnoli, *Walt Disney e l'Italia: una storia d'amore*. Video documentary, 2014.

⁵² <http://www.lastampa.it/2014/02/01/cultura/walt-disney-e-litalia-una-lunga-storia-damore-NN9PcPM44lfGGAaRIWAtxj/pagina.html>, accessed on 25th July 2017.

⁵³ Ronald B. Tobias, *Film and the American Moral Vision of Nature. From Theodore Roosevelt to Walt Disney* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2011), 184-185.

audience, but also at entertaining and amazing it. In Disney's narratives, such as *Bambi* (1942), natural, moral and social order coincide in a realm whose cycles are always restored, despite the threats that humans pose to the environment [1.28].⁵⁴ Not only is animal behaviour humanised and read through socio-political issues at the time: the clear order of things expressed by the story of the animations is reflected in the stylistic features of the work. Even though accurate in the representation of fauna and vegetation, characters and their environment cast no shadows, neither in their moral characterisation, nor in their visual feature: they were portrayed brushed clean.⁵⁵



1.28. Poster of *Bambi*, 1961



1.29. Disney's *Circarama* in Turin, 1961

Gilardi's *Tappeti* offered a similar visual rendering of the natural environment. The use of polyurethane foam ironically responded to needs of a comfortable and hygienic way of living, which was considered an essential aspect of the modern urban environment in Italy, as the mentioned contemporary advertisement campaigns for new plastic materials demonstrate. In the catalogue accompanying Gilardi's exhibition at Ileana Sonnabend Gallery in Paris in 1967, Jérôme Peignot underlined the strength and resistance of polyurethane.⁵⁶ At the time unaware of the conservation issues that these works face today, the longevity of the artwork was guaranteed. Even though aspiring to move beyond an idealised and stereotyped way of portraying nature, the image of it materialised in Gilardi's *Tappeti natura* was simplified and partial. It was far from the kind of non-typified nature that he declared to be willing to represent, and the artist's use of foam allowed an

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 187-189.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Jérôme Peignot, *Gilardi* (Paris: Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, 1967), np

objectification of nature and of its imagery similar to the one conveyed by Disney's representation.

Crafted at the intersection between an art and a design object, Gilardi's *Tappeti natura* mimicked contemporary commodities, becoming more personalised for the user over time. The diminished degrees of verisimilitude of marine and agriculture-themed *Tappeti* suggests that Gilardi realised the problematic issues raised by his art objects as forms of commodification of nature. The use of foam supplies an incorruptible, hygienic and indestructible flora, which gives the illusion of an eternal recyclable natural environment, and the visual style of the works resonated with the mass media simplified image of nature, more than with the experience of nature itself, as in *Sassaia*. The physical manifestation of this imagery was left for the audience's diverse consumption. With his foam carpets, Gilardi sarcastically commodifies the rural imagery as a consumer good, sellable and usable in everyday life: a domestic amulet against the dreaded urbanisation of the country.

Pino Pascali and the Industrialised Rural Landscape



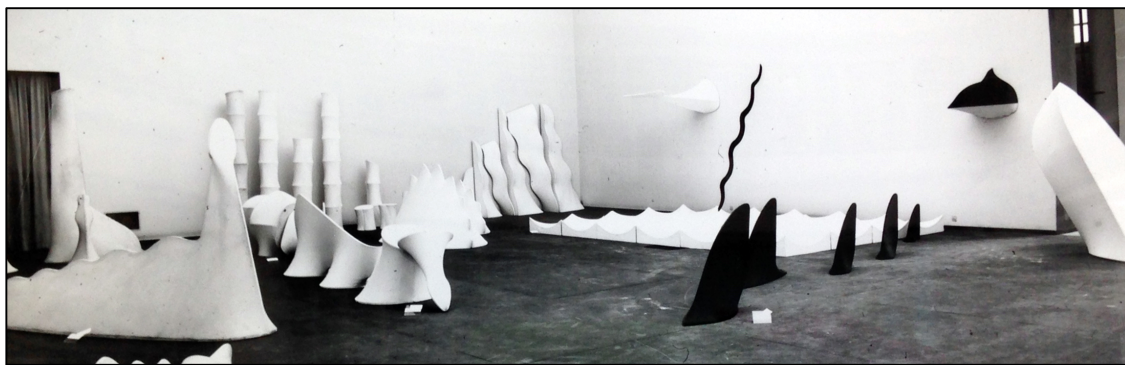
1.30. Pino Pascali, *Cornice di fieno*, *Balla di fieno*, *Attrezzi agricoli*, 1968

Unlike Gilardi, Pascali was not attracted by the possibilities of new technologies, but engaged with the repertoire of visual and narrative stimuli that he could draw from the contemporary urban and mass-media culture. Originally from Apulia, Pascali moved to Rome in the late 1950s to pursue his career in scenography at the Accademia delle Belle Arti di Roma. His work found immediate international critical recognition, but his career was interrupted by his sudden death in 1968. His rural-themed works, *Cornice di fieno* (1967) and his floor installation *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione* (1967), have been explained as the artist's decisive reaction against urban reality.⁵⁷ Read through a monolithic interpretation of the dualistic *topos* of rural-urban dichotomy or through the idea of *genius loci* since the 1980s, this body of works have been interpreted as the artist's nostalgia for the archaic world of cyclical time and rituals of Apulia.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Attrezzi agricoli* (1968) and *Balla di fieno* (1967), found in the artist studio after his death, are excluded from this analysis because they appear to have been used in his 1968 performances, and not conceived as independent works. They were instead exhibited on the artist's first retrospective in 1968 at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome. Marco Tonelli, *Pino Pascali. Catalogo generale delle sculture* (Rome: De Luca, 2011), 83 [1.30].

⁵⁸ Achille Bonito Oliva, "Pascali e la scena mediterranea", in *Pino Pascali*, ed. Anna d'Elia (Milan: Electa, 2010), 229-234; Pietro Marino, "Pascali: un pugliese negli anni della crisi", in D'Elia, *Pino Pascali*, 52-63; Pietro Marino, "Pascali tra mare terra e acqua", in *Pino Pascali: Ritorno a Venezia*, eds. Rosalba Branà, and Giusy Caroppo (Modugno-Bari: Di Marsico Libri, 2011), 33-38; Antonella Soldaini, Introduction to *Pino Pascali: la ricostruzione de la naturaleza 1967-1968* (Valencia: IVAM, 1992); *Pino Pascali: la reinvenzion del mito mediterraneo. 1961-1968* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2001).

This chapter overturns this pastoral reading of these works, which are arguably the less investigated works of his production. This section advocates for Pascali's engagement with the changing topography of the country, occurring not only through the urbanisation of the landscape but also through the industrialisation of agriculture, and not with his native landscape. The next section instead will draw on the way in which Pascali described his artistic production to Carla Lonzi in 1967: as a multitude of soap bubbles created to fill a void, both symbolic and physically, in the city where he lived.⁵⁹ Underlying the ephemerality of his artworks, Pascali pursued an enquiry into the contemporary representation of the city without offering definitive statements, yet suggesting critical reflection.



1.31. Pino Pascali, *Finte sculture*, 1966

Complementing his series of *Finte sculture*, Pascali presented his agriculture-themed works at Alexandre Jolas's gallery in Milan in November 1967 [1.31].⁶⁰ The *Finte sculture* were three-dimensional shaped canvases, technically associable with contemporary works by Enrico Castellani and Agostino Bonalumi. They represented anatomical parts of animals similar to hunting trophies (*Trofeo bianco*, 1966), landscape fragments, mainly from the marine world (*Mare*, *Scogliera*, *Cascate*), but also from the African savannah (*Decapitazione delle giraffe*, 1966; *Decapitazione del rinoceronte*, 1966), prehistory (*Ricostruzione del dinosauro*, 1966), and Japanese culture (*Bamboo*, 1966). Animals were not only considered for the aesthetic value of their shapes, but also for their alienating presence in the man-made, urban or rural environment: 'A me piaciono le bestie perchè mi sembrano degli intrusi, una cosa che non appartiene alla nostra razza, una cosa che si muove, delle volte in campagna, delle volte in città [...] Un animale, per me, è un cosa stranissima. È già un fenomeno veder passare delle pecore vicino a delle case oppure vicino a un uomo, c'è già uno scarto che non fa parte di quello che è organizzato.'⁶¹ The aura of extraneousness of the animal from the urban also characterised the body of rural-themed

⁵⁹ Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, (Milan: Et al., 2010), 9.

⁶⁰ Galleria Alexandre Jolas, ed., *Pascali*. (Milan: Alexandre Jolas, 1967), np.

⁶¹ Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, 15.

works presented on this occasion, and whose iconography will be analysed in relationship with the contemporary context to demonstrate that Pascali's work was far from a nostalgic representation of his native southern Italian homeland.

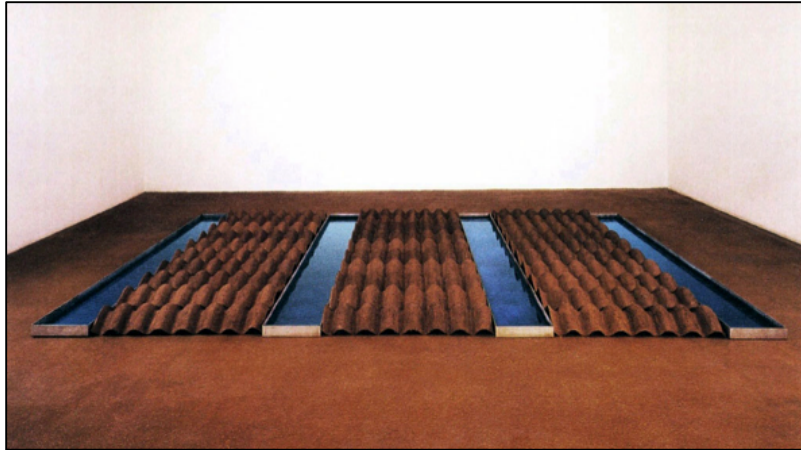
On the occasion of the exhibition at Alexander Iolas's gallery, the artist presented his *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione*, a floor installation denoted by an explicit reference to agricultural landscape, together with *4 pezzi di terra* (1967), *9 metri quadrati di pozzanghere* (1967), and *Cornice di fieno*.⁶² The most well-known display of the work is in a rectangular cluster of modules of asbestos tiles simulating ploughed soil alternating with tanks filled with blue-coloured water forming channels [1.32].⁶³ However, the organisation of the pieces presented at Iolas's gallery in Milan (1967) was rather different, and closer to the current setting at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome [1.33; 1.34]. The documentary photograph of the installation on its first display shows that it consisted of a less compact structure than the one often purposed, with a number of modules slightly shifted forward from the rectangular display. The colours of the modules were different as well. Originally, the soil covering the tiles was brownish, and the channels were filled with a green-coloured water that 'conferisce innegabilmente un aspetto imbarazzante ed enigmatico,' as reported Dino Buzzati in the pages of the *Corriere della Sera* at the time.⁶⁴

In Pascali's work, the geometrical distribution of the furrows which came about from the use of asbestos tiles gives a highly geometricized, unnatural representation to the field. The use of synthetic and modular shapes is the result of Pascali's creative process, that will be discussed primarily in the next section. A contemporary body of photographs, such as those depicting cobblestones or stacks of wooden cases, manifests the artist's interest in modular and repetitive geometrical patterns, which were a constant element in his works with primary elements [1.36 - 1.37]. Yet, in this feature of *Campi arati e Canali d'irrigazione*, we can identify no references to the South, only a more generic reference to a modern agricultural landscape.

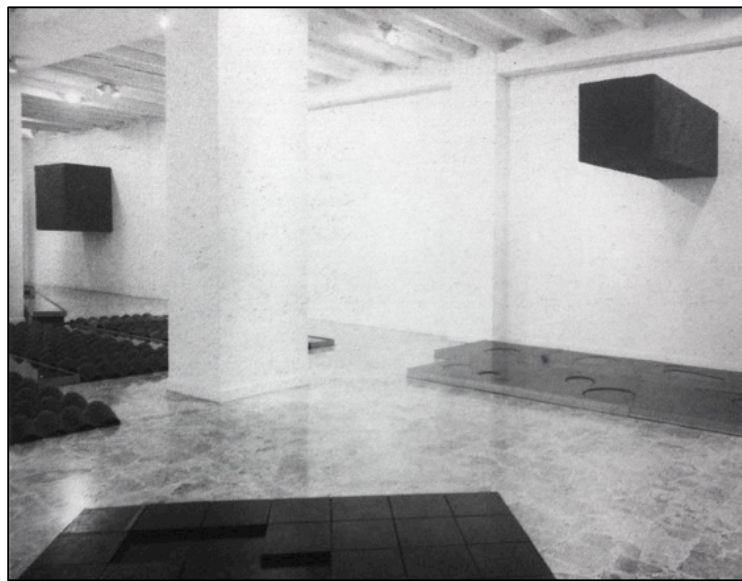
⁶² This exhibition was one of the two shows organised at Jolas Galleries (one in Paris and one in Milan), the second one, in Paris, presenting his *Finte sculture*. The catalogue presents both bodies of works. See: Galleria Alexandre Jolas, ed., Pino Pascali (Milan: Alexandre Jolas, 1967).

⁶³ Pascali's general catalogue counts three versions of this installation: one in Strasbourg (Musée de la Ville), one in Rome (Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna), and one in Otterlo (Kröller Müller Collection). See: Tonelli, *Pascali. Catalogo generale*, 135.

⁶⁴ Dino Buzzati, "Mostre", *Corriere della Sera* (30.11.1967).



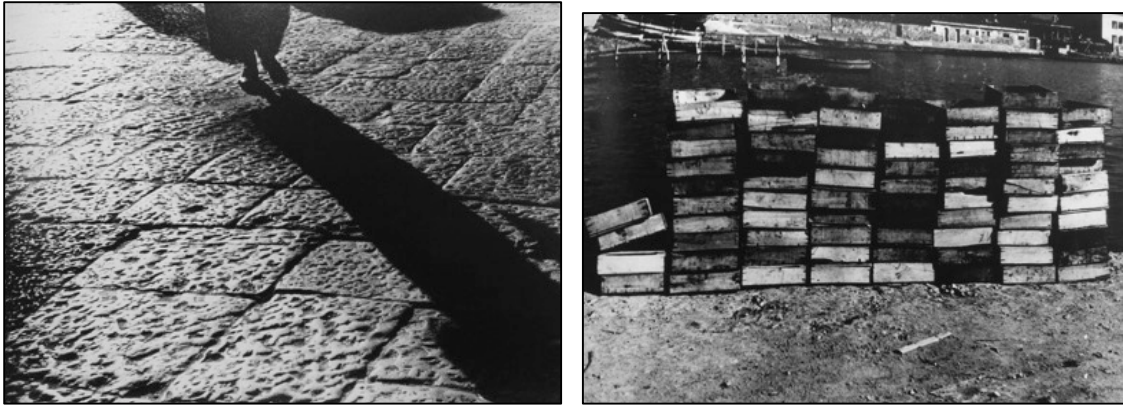
1.32. Pino Pascali, *Campi arati and Canali d'irrigazione*, 1967



1.33. Pino Pascali, *Campi arati and Canali d'irrigazione*, 1967



1.34. Pino Pascali, *Campi arati and Canali d'irrigazione*, 1967



1.35 – 1.36. Pino Pascali, *Photographs*, 1965-196

As Gianluigi Della Valentina has noted, the use of chemicals and the spread of mechanisation in agriculture started to affect agricultural production heavily in Italy from the 1950s onwards.⁶⁵ The number of tractors can be a relevant indicator of this trend: there were about seventy tractors across Italy in 1914, around 37,000 in 1938, 50,000 in 1947, and an estimated 460,000 by 1966.⁶⁶ These technical innovations affected the productivity, as well as the visual appearance of the land. While in the eighteenth century, the features of the land determined the organisation and the forms of production, the introduction of chemicals and new technologies contributed to the transformation of rural labour and the topographical features of rural areas.⁶⁷

It is interesting to consult in this context the photographs of Mario Giacomelli, who had been capturing these changes in black-and-white photographs since 1954.⁶⁸ Originally from Senigallia in the Marche region, Giacomelli portrayed his native land throughout his life. His black-and-white photographs represent the landscape vertically, thus reversing Pascali's interpretation of a cultivated landscape.⁶⁹ As the topography of the country, the work transformed over time: from the first photographs, almost neutral documentation of the marks left by human labour on the land, to more graphic elaborations that echo Alberto Burri's plastic use of materials.⁷⁰ This gradual shift mirrored the detachment of man from the land, following the abandonment of the countryside, and the spread of tractors, and

⁶⁵ Gianluigi Della Valentina, "Meccanica agraria e motorizzazione dell'agricoltura italiana", in *Studi sull'agricoltura italiana. Società rurale e modernizzazione*, eds. Pier Paolo D'Atto and Alberto De Bernardi (Milan: Fondazione Feltrinelli Editore, 1993), 403-438.

⁶⁶ Della Valentina, "Meccanica agraria e motorizzazione", 404.

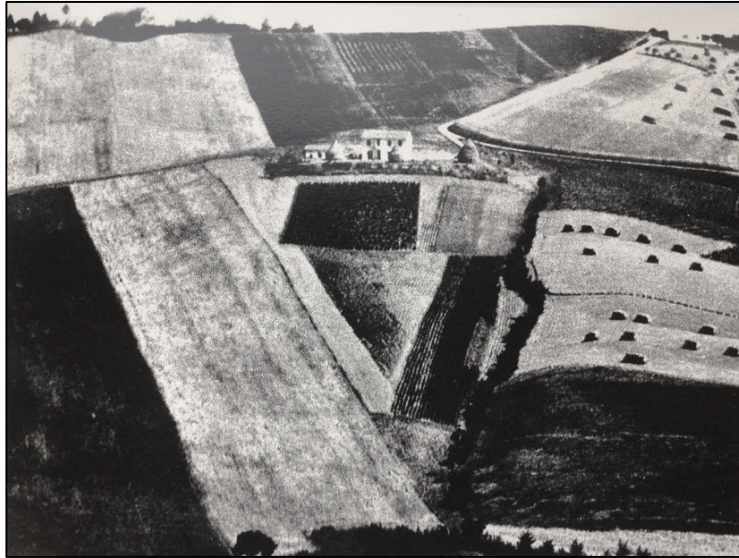
⁶⁷ Emilio Sereni, *Storia del paesaggio agrario italiano* (Bari: Laterza, 1974), 439-484.

⁶⁸ About Mario Giacomelli, see: Alessandra Mauro, ed., *Mario Giacomelli. La figura nera aspetta il bianco* (Rome: Contrasto Editore, 2016); Simona Guerra, ed., *Mario Giacomelli: La mia vita intera* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2008); Carlo Emanuele Bugatti, ed., *Mario Giacomelli: Civica raccolta* (Ancona: Regione Marche, 2001); Alistair Crawford, *Mario Giacomelli* (London: Phaidon, 2001); Carlo Arturo Quintavalle, ed., *Mario Giacomelli* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980). On Giacomelli's landscapes: Giorgio Gabriele Negri, ed., *Storie di terra* (Milan: Città studi, 1992).

⁶⁹ Giacomelli, *La mia vita intera*, 61.

⁷⁰ Quintavalle, *Giacomelli*, 11-20.

other machines.⁷¹ *Metamorfosi della terra* narrates the changes through a series of images of the same location taken between 1955 and 1975.⁷² The progressive effects of the abandonment of land can be acknowledged first by the disappearance of the subsistence cultivation of the farmer's family, followed by the disappearance of the barn and haystacks next to the main buildings. The final stage of this transformation resulted in the run-down appearance of the flooded fields, and in the appearance of electricity pilons on the top of a hill in the background [1.37; 1.38].



1.37. Mario Giacomelli, landscape from the series *Storie di terra*, 1955

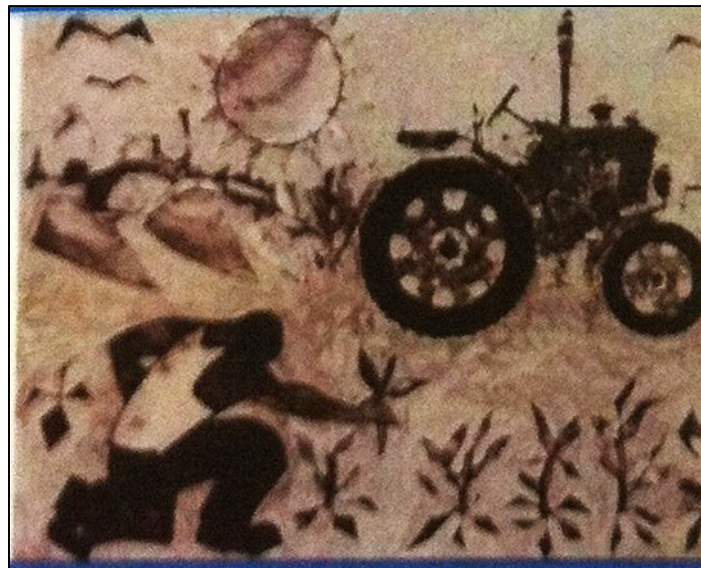


1.38. Mario Giacomelli, landscape from the series *Storie di terra*, 1980

⁷¹ Giacomelli, *La mia vita intera*, 56-63.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 60-62

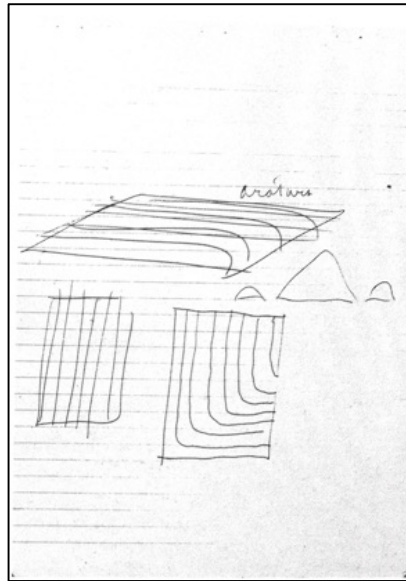
Pascali's floor piece lacks the careful topographical scrutiny of Giacomelli's observations. While Giacomelli followed the effects of the abandonment of land, one way of making sense of the visual homogeneity of Pascali's *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione* installation is the way in which they visually resonate with the standardization of the agricultural topography and industrialization of the countryside. The artist was certainly familiar with agricultural motorized machinery. In 1965 he realized five panels for a decorative mosaic cycle for the Roman headquarters of the FAO, the *Food and Agriculture Organization* of the United Nations [1.39].⁷³ According to the idea of agriculture expressed in the institution's statute, Pascali designed five panels: one themed around fishing, one with a forest, one with cattle, a traditional still-life of vegetables and fruits, and a scene of agricultural labour in the field. In the background of this last scene, there is a tractor. In the artist's treatment of space, the machinery is the same size as the man in the foreground. While the agricultural technological advancement was one of the main aims of the organization, the precision and the detailed representation of the tractor infers Pascali's interest in the machinery itself, easily associable with his personal interest in motorbikes.⁷⁴



1.39. Pino Pascali, *Decorative mosaic* at the FAO agency in Rome, 1964

⁷³ Claudia Lodolo, *32 anni di vita circa. Pino Pascali raccontato da amici e collaboratori*. (Siena: Carlo Cambi Editore, 2012), 85. Thanks to Claudia Lodolo for clarifying the story of the mosaics to me.

⁷⁴ See the artist's graphic works. Not to talk about the artist's premature death by motorbike accident.



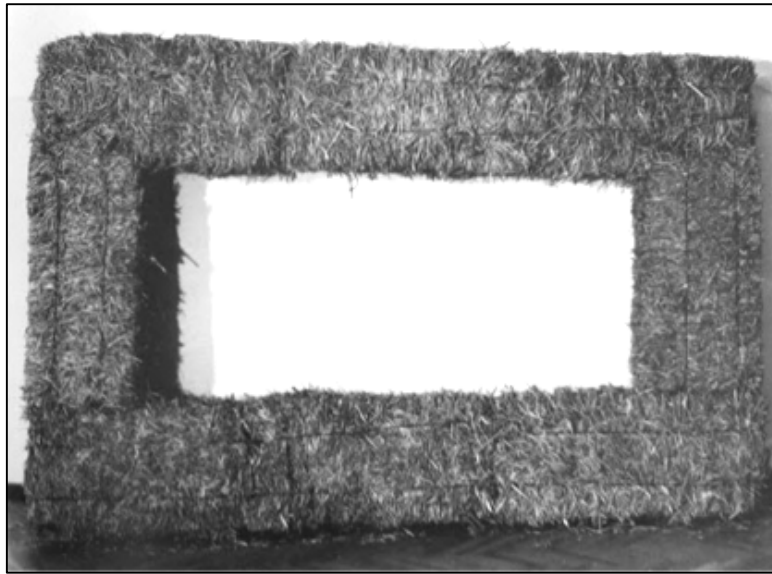
1.40. Pino Pascali, *Drawing*, 1967

Clues of the artist's reference to mechanised ploughing activities can also be found in the preparatory sketches of the installation itself.⁷⁵ Pages nine and twelve of his sketchbook published by Simonetta Lux represent traces of multiple ploughing [1.40]. Two features of this drawing suggest that Pascali was investigating different typologies of ploughing activities, with a focus on modern ones: the multiple and parallel furrows, depicted as distinctive curves traced on the paper [1.40]. Animal-driven ploughs require the oxen or horses to be moved to the other side of the tool for proceeding in the operation and for not wasting any cultivable piece of land. In contrast, the use of tractors forced the farmer to leave the corners of the field unploughed, as we can see in Pascali's sketch.

Even *Cornice di fieno* refers to an industrialised type of agriculture. It consists of a structure simulating parallelepiped hay bales [1.41]. As such, these hay bales are not a result of a primitive and traditional agricultural, but the consequence of the introduction of industrial machinery and mechanised processes in agriculture in the postwar period [1.42].⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Published and commented on by the art historian Simonetta Lux since 1983: D'Elia, *Pascali*, 85

⁷⁶ Conversation with a Piedmontese farmer at the local *Festa del grano* in Fossano (Cuneo), July 8th, 2017.



1.41. Pino Pascali, *Cornice di fieno*, 1968



1.42. Torquato Zambelli, *Campo coltivato, raccolta di fieno* (Italy), 1921

The standardisation of the cultivation process in the *Campi arati* is accompanied by *Canali d'irrigazione*. Irrigation channels do not belong to the Mediterranean landscape, with which the work has often been associated. The rural territory of Apulia, Pascali's homeland, is mainly characterised by vineyards, olive groves, citrus orchards, and pastures.⁷⁷ In addition, the southern Italian landscape is rather arid, and the fluvial landscape, necessary for a fully functioning system of irrigation channels, is characteristic of

⁷⁷ Mario Agnoletti, ed. *Italian Historical Rural Landscape. Cultural Values for the Environment and Rural Development*. (Dordrecht, New York: Springer, 2013); 467-468.

the northern Padana Plain, especially in Lombardy but also in Sardinia, where a wide network of channels built in the Fascist period runs across the landscape.⁷⁸

The absence of any references to the southern Italian landscape in his Pascali's floor piece *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione*, and to traditional agriculture in his *Cornice di fieno*, two pieces presented on the same occasion, suggests that Pascali was not interested in evoking the southern Italian landscape. Furthermore, the actual interest in motorised machineries, as expressed in his 1965 mosaic and in his preparatory drawings, and the ambiguous palette of the installation infer that Pascali was engaging with the changes that were shaping the countryside, and asking his audience to do the same. How he achieved this, will be discussed in the next section.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ About the northern Italian agrarian landscape see: *Ibid.*, p. 232. About the *Bonifica integrale*, or large scale land reclamation in Sardinia, *Ibid.*, 532.

⁷⁹ Sandra Pinto, *Pino Pascali nella storia dell'arte italiana dal 1956 ad oggi* (Milano: D'ARS, 1969), 16.

Questioning the Rural Landscape

Already in 1965, Pascali clearly stated: 'Per noi scrittori e pittori di Revort 1, la Pop-Art è quindi un fenomeno tipico e niente altro, come per noi lo sono I luoghi comuni del sesso, della cultura di massa, e della nostra stessa storia dell'arte. La nostra scultura e pittura, a differenza di altri giovani italiani, è critica oggettiva, al di fuori di problemi estetizzanti ed analizza quei fenomeni della nostra società con la presentazione oggettiva dell'immagine.'⁸⁰ In this section I argue that such assertions owe much to Umberto Eco. Pascali's writings suggests his familiarity with contemporary semiotic themes, especially Barthes's *Mythologies* (1962), and express the artist's purpose to address the value of mass-media images through his work. When discussing the organisation of the exhibition of his *Armi* in Turin, he wrote to Pistoletto that 'in una civiltà di consumo le immagini assurgono (falsamente) a simboli e creano un fenomeno tipico che definisco (per) RETORICA DELL'IMMAGINE', and that the aim of his work was one of dismantling the mythical, historically-situated, construction of signification behind these images.⁸¹

Pascali pursued his personal enquiry into contemporary mass-media culture, working on both sides of the communication industry: its production and its critique.⁸² He was employed as illustrator for an advertising company, whilst questioning the epistemological value of these same stereotypical images through his production for art galleries. In his artworks, Pascali not only embraced ambivalence. He magnified it. His unorthodox use of materials, the incongruences between the descriptive titles and actual materiality of the works, and the size of his pieces dismantled the modernist paradigm of sculpture. Considering the secondary importance that the artists attributed to technical (artistic) research aims, we can argue that these features respond to a two-fold aspiration: making the viewers question the image represented (in other words, fostering critical viewing), and understanding contemporary critical phenomena beyond the visual imagery provided by mass media. In *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione* as for his previous works, Pascali's aspirations found expression in two intertwined levels, which correspond to two different moments of the artistic process: the creation of the object itself, and its staged display and reception.

⁸⁰ Pino Pascali, "Speech draft". Artist's statement presented at Revort 1, September, 1-6, 1965. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (archivio), Rome. Pino Pascali (cat. 51c - 118).

⁸¹ Capital letters in the original text. Pascali's letter to Michelangelo Pistoletto, published in *Inoltre. Letterature e Materiali*, n. 2 (1988), 158-160.

⁸² Ludovico Pratesi, and Daniela Ferraria, eds. *L'altro Pascali. Un itinerario attraverso le opere per il cinema e la televisione* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2012); Anna Lovecchio, ed., *Boom! Pino Pascali e il gioco delle armi* (Genoa: Villa Croce, 2014).

For several exhibitions, the artist created a series of art objects that engaged with the ontology of typified reality. For instance, his early shaped canvases represented synthetic sculptural images of Rome (*Muro di pietra; Ruderì su prato; Colosseo*), known for their touristic appeal, and oversexualised female bodies (*Labbra rosse; Omaggio a Billy Holiday; Gravida; Grande bacino di donna*), resonating with the representation of the body in magazines. In creating these works, he nonetheless asserted his identity as an artist through the creation of personalised images, which expressed his ownership of reality. In a convincing analysis of Pascali's later notebooks, the Italian art critic Simonetta Lux reconstructed the creative processes of the artist.⁸³ Even though never properly abstract, she argued, Pascali's works encapsulate sensorial perceptions and visual memories, filtered through a geometrical structural rule that tended towards synthetic abstraction.⁸⁴ The artist's epistemological drive is still imbued with an idealistic concept of the artwork as an expression of the artist's individuality. Thus, the work of art serves as an antidote to the homologation of imageries and images produced and made available by contemporary society.

Once his visual synthesis was completed in the production of a figurative art object, Pascali staged it in the gallery and anticipated a specific reaction from the public. In an interview with Carla Lonzi, Pascali admitted that he did not wish his works to be objects of aesthetic appreciation, but to provoke the viewers' critical engagement. He confessed:

L'uomo che viene in Galleria viene perchè si vanno a vedere le cose in Galleria, perchè vuole mettere una cosa su una sedia o un divano, oppure vuole sembrare stravagante qualche volta o un'altra volta vuole sembrare serio e tradizionale, ma niente altro. Però, se uno mi dice 'che cosa meravigliosa, questo quadro mi fa pensare a..' a me quello interessa. [...] E' come quanto uno legge una cosa che non l'interessa e pensa ai propri fatti, oppur quando sente una cosa talmente interessante che scorda la cosa interessante perchè in quella cosa c'era un piccolo punto che ha fatto scattare duemila raggi in diverse direzioni nel proprio pensiero.. uno segue tutti questi raggi e si disperde alle fine, magari, no?⁸⁵

In other words, the artist hoped that the visible features of his art objects would have elicited curiosity in the beholder, but would also lead to enquiry into the imagery conveyed.

⁸³ Simonetta Lux, "Tutta la storia da creare", in *Pino Pascali* (Milan: PAC, 1997), 15-20.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-21.

⁸⁵ Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, 113.

Even though Pascali does not call upon the socio-political responsibility of the viewer in questioning his work, this aspect of his poetics resonates with Umberto Eco's 1967 manifesto 'Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare', which anticipated Celant's 'Arte Povera: Notes for a guerrilla' manifesto, published later that year.⁸⁶ In his text, Eco, a founder of Gruppo '63 in the early '60 and socio-politically engaged in the contemporary cultural changes, expressed his concerns about contemporary mass-media communications. Fundamental to the contemporary counter-information movement, the Manifesto states the importance of the critical reception of messages transmitted via mass media, beyond its content and its medium. Going over McLuhan's arguments, and restating the importance of all the various elements of the communication chain, Eco called for groups of communication guerrilla, of scholars and educators, utilising forms of non-industrial communication to make people aware of the variability in the interpretation of a given message, and of the ambiguities, present but ignored, inherent in mass-media communications.⁸⁷

Despite resonating with this text, Pascali did not endorse Eco's purposes, but pursued his enquiry into typified images through this varied range of deceitful riddles in his artistic production, in a similar manner to other artists, such as Aldo Mondino and Alighiero Boetti, also associated with Arte Povera.⁸⁸ More recently, the varied range of visually deceptive riddles offered by the artist's art objects has been widely explored within the scholarly literature.⁸⁹ Besides the constant reference to Pascali's playfulness, the artist's work has been defined as doubly-deceitful, its size responding to a staged theatricality, when interpreted through the modernist paradigm. In *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione*, these visual trickeries make the viewer both reflect on the specific phenomenon of the industrialised rural landscape, and on its mythical representation.

The use of dyed water, asbestos tiles and soil in the installation mirrors the merging of different environments, and appear to participate in the artist's enquiry into the contemporary city-countryside hybridisation of the Italian topography. As Palma Bucarelli noticed in 1968, his creativity was driven by the physical and visual possibility of materials

⁸⁶ Eco's essay resulted from a talk delivered at the New York conference *Vision '67* in October 1967, and was included in the collection *Il costume di casa. Evidenze e misteri dell'ideologia italiana* (Bompiani, 1973). Umberto Eco, *Faith in Fakes*. Translated by William Weaver. (London: Vintage, 1998), 135-144.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

⁸⁸ Barilli rejected Pascali's work, as tautological as other *Arte Povera*'s ones. Renato Barilli, "Un informale tecnologico?", in Galleria De' Foscherari, ed., *La Povertà dell'arte*, (Bologna: Quaderni De' Foscherari, 1968) np.

⁸⁹ Alex Potts, "Disencumbered Objects", *October* 124 (2008): 169-189; Christopher G. Bennett, "Mimesis as a Double Concept: Pino Pascali in 1968", in "...A Multitude of Soap Bubbles which Explode from Time to Time ...": *Pino Pascali's Final Works, 1967-1968*, Camden Art Centre, ed. (London: Camden Art Centre, 2011), 31-39; Claire Gilman, "L'Arte Povera a Roma", in Guercio and Mattiolo, *Il confine evanescente*, 43-73.

pertaining to the cultural environment in which he lived.⁹⁰ Pascali himself declared in an interview with Marisa Volpi: 'Ho l'orrore della tecnica come ricerca... L'industria? Certo molto importante io sono molto attento a tutto ciò che vedo per utilizzarlo. Tutto si può utilizzare, trasformare.'⁹¹ Living and working at the outskirts of Rome, Pascali was possibly inspired to use cement fibre and asbestos tiles in his works because of his familiarity with ephemeral constructions spread around his studio. Lodolo Film had its offices in Cinecittà, an area at the south-east edge of the city that partly overlaps with the *Parco degli acquedotti*. Until the intervention of the local authorities in the early 1970s, this region was a paradigmatic example of the coexistence of spontaneous huts, often placed against the ruins of ancient Roman aqueducts, as well as new residential buildings.⁹²

Beside the materials used to synthesize the image of fields and of irrigation channels, the horizontality and spatiality of *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione* play a crucial role in conveying questions to the viewer. Often associated with an anti-modernist paradigm and as a response to Minimalist art, these features can also be considered in relation with a generalised interest in Zen, as discussed by Umberto Eco in his *Opera aperta* (1963), and Zen Gardens.⁹³ Pascali cultivated an interest in Japanese culture in his school years, but it appears that his early interests were fostered by further confrontation with discourses surrounding this eastern philosophy and its relationship with art.⁹⁴ In this respect, Pascali's reference to Gillo Dorfles's 1966 text, and to the scholar's reference to Ryoanji garden near Kyoto, is particularly significant [1.43].⁹⁵

Considering the highest expression of Zen aesthetic, Dorfles's notation on the spatiality of Zen gardens appears particularly relevant in relation to Pascali's practice. They are abstract and figurative at the same time, and are composed of elements, which participate in the micro and macro symbolic meaning of the composition.⁹⁶ Dorfles underlined the role that the void has in determining a space, a role more crucial than its physical boundaries (floor and ceiling), positively charged of spiritual potential.⁹⁷ The erection of protective walls to enclose these spaces also finds reference in Pascali's floor pieces. Mentioning the Garden of Ryoan-ji near Kyoto, the critic described the way in which the walls enclose the garden and make it a space not to be used but to be contemplated from

⁹⁰ Palma Bucarelli, *Mostra di Pino Pascali* (Roma: De Luca, 1969), 10-12.

⁹¹ Carla Lonzi, Tommaso Trini, and Marisa Volpi Orlandini, "Materiali e tecniche", in *Marcatré* (1967), 73.

⁹² Franco Ferrarotti, *Roma da capitale e periferia* (Bari: Laterza, 1973), 139-150.

⁹³ Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta* (Milan: Bompiani, 1963), especially "Lo Zen e l'occidente".

⁹⁴ *Tesina di scenografia*. Unpublished document. Polignano a Mare. *Fondazione Museo Pino Pascali*, consulted in January 2015.

⁹⁵ Gillo Dorfles, *Simbolo, produzione, consumo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1962), 223-240.

⁹⁶ François Berthier, *Reading Zen in the Rocks: the Japanese Dry Landscape Garden* (Chicago: The university of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁹⁷ Dorfles, *Simbolo, produzione, consumo*, 231.

above.⁹⁸ They affect the viewer's interaction with the enclosed space, acting as a permeable visual boundary that guides the viewer to differentiated visually experiences of the garden. Avoiding its violation and practice, the wall facilitated the viewer's acquisition of an outsider, contemplative physical position looking over it. In the light of this interpretation of the Ryōanji garden, we can cautiously consider Pascali's horizontality and spatiality in *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione* as a strategy to make the viewers reflect on the ambiguities of the artist's work.



1.43. Ryōan-ji's Rocks Garden, Kyoto

This display strategy had already been used in previous occasions. The first two examples of floor installations, *Il mare* (1966), and *32mq di mare circa* (1967), encumbered the rooms where they were displayed, leaving little space for the audience to see the work, apart from at the rooms threshold [1.44; 1.45].⁹⁹ In rural-themed piece, it was not the scale of the work in relationship with the gallery that mattered the most. It was instead the proportional scale of the installation compared to the actual physical rural landscape, and its position on the floor that signified the artwork. These two elements offered an unusual image and viewpoint on the cultivated landscape, as in the case of Gilardi's *Tappeti*. If the traditional representation of landscape, and of rural landscape, has been organised according to a perspectival grid since the Italian Renaissance, perspective played no role in Pascali's installation as in Zen gardens. Shrinking it in a corner of the gallery space, the artist created the conditions for the viewer to walk along his piece. He also translated the frontal

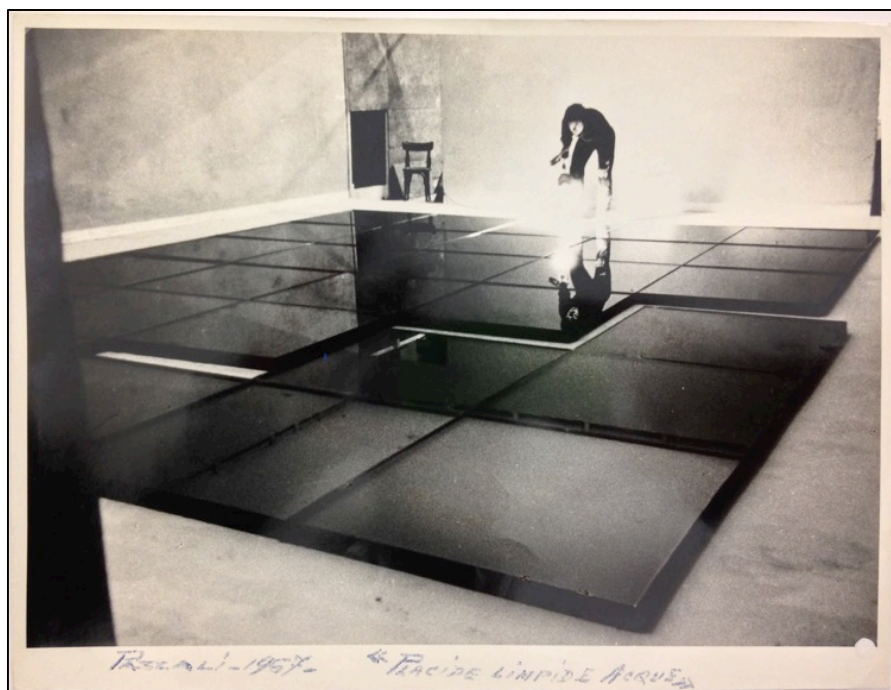
⁹⁸ *Ibid.* See also: Allen S Weiss, "The Limits of Metaphor: Ideology and Representation in the Zen Garden", in *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 54, (SUMMER 2010): 116-129.

⁹⁹ Claire Gilman refers Sargentini's testimony about *Il Mare* ('Visitors were expelled from the huge *Mare*'). See: Gilman, "Arte povera a Roma", 53.

eye-level view of a landscape paintings into the experience of the horizontality of a floor installation from above. This representation, at a time when aerial photography had been used only for military and topographical purposes, unsettled the viewpoint of landscape genre, and aimed at instilling a viewer's reflection on its traditional systems of depiction.



1.44. Pino Pascali, *Il mare*, 1966



1.45. Pino Pascali, *32 mq di mare circa*, 1967

Posing the viewer in an outsider and privileged position in relation to his work, Pascali was questioning the modes of representation of such effigies, but not only this. He was operating a deconstruction of contemporary topical phenomenon, or myths, that we have seen materialised in Gilardi's work. As Dorflès again testifies in his 1965 writings, the study of myth attracted considerable attention from different disciplines in the postwar period.¹⁰⁰ Pascali proved himself to be familiar with the semiological theory on myth, meaning that Roland Barthes's theories on myth offer an enlightening point of entry onto Pascali's artistic operation. Within the disciplinary realm of semiology as a science of forms, Barthes defines myth as a form of speech, historically and culturally constructed.¹⁰¹ The myth is the signification of a form (in Pascali's case, the ploughed fields and irrigation channels), resulting from the association of a mythical concept to it (the rural, pastoral idyll). Such concepts are neither abstract nor fantastic, but convey 'less reality, than a certain knowledge of reality,' which is the result of culture and history (the transformation of the rural-urban relationship in postwar Italy, and a tendency for escapism and nostalgia).¹⁰² Thus, while the mode of presence of form is spatial, the mythical concept is a nebulous condensation, which has the power to distort and alienate the original meaning of an image.¹⁰³

Pascali starts his deconstruction of the rural myth from the mythical form. Discussing the ambivalent iconography of *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione* we have already noticed and disentangled the ambivalences implicit in the image installation. Providing an unusual viewpoint on the cultivated landscape, the artist appears to suggest a contemplative distance of the subject that allows the viewer to reconsider his own thoughts in respect to the subject represented, in a period of the Italian history that saw the countryside endangered by the spread of industrialisation and urbanisation, and, at the same time, mythicized as a space of reconnection with nature, as in Gilardi's work. Together, the iconography and the spatiality of the work contribute to create an unsettling image of a cultivated landscape. Through his installation and the experience of *Campi arati* and *Canali d'irrigazione*, Pascali hoped that the viewers would have questioned the visual features of the artwork as well as the phenomena represented by the artwork itself.

Without providing a definitive image and challenging the traditional representation of a rural imagery, Pascali triggered reflection on the possibility of regression into a mythical rural world. His rural-themed exhibition suggests that, for the

¹⁰⁰ Gillo Dorflès, Introduction to *Nuovi miti, nuovi riti* (Milan: Skira, 2014).

¹⁰¹ Annette Lavers, ed. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1991), 109-130.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 120.

artist, the modernisation of the country was unfolding beyond the traditional edges of the city, and that traditional rural myth was nothing but a product of the city. Considered as a cultural product, and fortified by the urban mass-media culture, the rural idyll possibly never existed for Pino Pascali.

Both Gilardi and Pascali's floor pieces engage with the topographical changes of the country whilst expanding the fields of art. The following chapter will instead discuss the way in which two more artists, critically associated with their native rural origins, used the land and its natural and cultural elements as a sculptural material to furnish their very distinct conceptual practices.

Chapter Two

Two Artists and their Distinct Rural Heritage: Giuseppe Penone, Antonio Paradiso and the Rural Topography as Sculptural Material

Invited by Anna Zavoli to discuss his favourite artwork on the national television in 1974, Pasolini presented the form of the town as a form of art, through a documentary about the towns of Orte and Sabaudia, in Lazio:

Quando dico di aver scelto come oggetto di questa trasmissione la forma della città, il profilo della città, la struttura della città, voglio proprio dire questo: voglio diferendere qualcosa che non è sanzionato, che non è codificato, che nessuno difende. Che è opera del popolo, dell'intera storia del popolo di una città, di un'infinità di uomini senza nome, che però hanno lavorato all'interno di un'epoca, che ha prodotto i frutti più estremi, più assoluti nelle opera d'arte d'autore¹

According to Pasolini, modernisation and late capitalism had led to the incoherent spread of the city outside its traditional boundaries – the city walls. In this way, 'il problema della forma della città e il problema della salvezza della natura che circonda la città sono un problema unico.'² His denunciation of modern, consumerist society and his appeal for the protection of the traditional city was grounded in an understanding of the form of the city as a collective artwork.³ In the circumscribed shape and coherent style of the traditional Italian town enclosed by walls, Pasolini believed he had found the aesthetic coherent expression of centuries of human history, as he had done in local dialects at an earlier stage of his career.⁴ In Pasolini's work, 'descriptions of cities and landscapes are not casual. They are materialisation of a culture', writes Gianni Biondillo in his study of Pasolini's vision of the city.⁵ In other words, Pasolini based his aesthetic judgement on the premise that the traditional city and its surrounding are shaped by their dwellers as well as by socio-cultural circumstances over time. This historical understanding of the land is also the underlying premise for two very different artists, Giuseppe Penone and Antonio Paradiso.

Emilio Sereni's *Storia del paesaggio agrario italiano* (1961) had contributed significantly to promoting an understanding of the history of agrarian topography of the country.⁶ Only recent studies are doing justice to the legacy of Sereni's studies, although the importance of his work had

¹Pier Paolo Pasolini, *La forma della città* (10'12), <http://www.teche.rai.it/2015/01/pasolini-e-la-forma-della-citta-1974/>, accessed on 24th July 2017.

² *Ibid.*, (8'24").

³See: Gianni Biondillo, *Pasolini e il corpo della città* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli Srl, 2001); Vincenzo Trione, *Effetto città. Arte/Cinema/Modernità* (Milan: Bompiani, 2014), especially *Pasolini e la forma della città*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43-47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶ Emilio Sereni, *Storia del paesaggio agrario italiano* (Bari: Laterza, 1961).

already been acknowledged at the time⁷. Thanks to the EU's interest in landscape (European Landscape Convention, 2000), new studies on rural traditional landscapes have been developed over the past decade under the coordination of professor Mario Agnoletti.⁸ In the early 1970s, Eugenio Turri argued for notions of landscape not to be seen as a background for aesthetic contemplation, but as lived and acted upon by humans, and in which the traces of history and the physical manifestation of individual and collective action were legible (*Antropologia del paesaggio*, 1974).⁹ Turri's contribution was timely. At the time, the Italian legislation about landscape and environment was beginning its slow shift from a purely aesthetic appreciation of natural beauty, to the current ecological understanding of the environment, both natural and human.¹⁰

In her *Sculture della speranza* (2012), Anna Detheridge has noticed the way in which these texts, and wider discourse about landscape that were developed in geography 1960s and 1970s, contributed to the Italian artists' imagery about their native landscape.¹¹ This interest in the land was also nurtured by the contemporary circulation of documentary images of American earthworks in the pages of art and architecture magazines, especially in *Domus*, and *Casabella*. Earthworks were exhibited in Turin, at the local Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna later in 1970.¹²

The work of land artists appealed to the imagination of Giuseppe Penone and Antonio Paradiso, whose practice will be discussed in this chapter. Unlike Gilardi and Pascali, their work engaged with the rural topography and not with its representation. Both artists have rural, agricultural backgrounds and their biographies informed the reception of their works: Giuseppe Penone grew up in Garessio, a mountainside village in the Alpi Marittime between Piedmont and Liguria, from a family of wood and land-owners; Antonio Paradiso was himself a shepherd in the Murgia Materana, in the southern rural area of Basilicata. This chapter discusses their works, and the distinct ways in which the artists interpreted the Italian topography as a sculptural material. Their engagement with the historical topography of their homeland implies opposite aesthetic

⁷ Renato Zangheri, "Gli studi di storia dell'agricoltura nell'ultimo ventennio," *Studi Storici* 4 (Oct-Dec 1967): 669-695.

⁸ See: Mario Agnoletti preface to *Italian Historical Rural Landscapes. Cultural Values for the Environment and Rural Development* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013).

⁹ Eugenio Turri, *Antropologia del paesaggio* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1974).

¹⁰ See: Gianfranco Tamburelli, *Evoluzione della disciplina a tutela del paesaggio*, <http://www.sbpap-pr.beniculturali.it/getFile.php?id=78>, 2004, accessed on 14th September 2016; Alberto Clementi, *Interpretazioni di paesaggio: convenzione europea e innovazioni di metodo* (Rome: Melteni, 2002).

¹¹ Anna Detheridge, *Scultori della speranza. Arte nel contesto della globalizzazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), 74-137, especially pages 74-80.

¹² Tommaso Trini, "Imagination Takes Command," in *Domus* 471 (1969): 49-50; Tommaso Trini "Prodigal Maker's Trilogy," in *Domus* 478 (1969): 46; Germano Celant, "La natura è insorta," *Casabella* 339-340 (1969): 104-107; Germano Celant, ed. *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art* (Turin: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, 1970). About the circulation of American land art in US magazine, and the connected issues, see: Federica Stevanin, "La fotografia, il film e il video nella land art tra documentazione e sperimentazione", PhD diss. Università di Bologna, 2013), 21-39. Land artists presented their works in Italy before, for instance, Richard Long in Amalfi ('Arte Povera+Azioni Povere', 1968) and Robert Smithson in Rome (*Asphalt Rundown*, 1969), but the Turin exhibition was the first formal show.

concerns, and differing degrees of political engagement. Furthermore, it also documents the different land-related issues between the North and the South of the country.

Giuseppe Penone is a well-known artist living and working between Turin, Garessio and Paris, whose career had started within Celant's Turin-based Arte Povera contingent.¹³ The first section of this chapter focuses on his early works, especially those created with trees in the rural area of his hometown, and discusses them within the art scene of Turin at the end of the 1960s. Despite his first-hand experience of nature, however, his work reflects an idealised view of the local rural area.

The second section analyses a selection of works by a lesser known artist, Antonio Paradiso, whose production has received, with few exceptions, little scholarly interest and public attention since the extraordinary notoriety he achieved by his performance *Paesaggio antropologico in evoluzione* (*Anthropological Landscape in Evolution*) at the Venice Biennale 1978.¹⁴ The chapter focuses on a selection of works dated between 1965 and 1975, a period during which the artist shifted from sculpture to a conceptual practice indebted to anthropology, especially to the work of the Italian anthropologist Ernesto De Martino (1908-1965). The section explores the way in which these works relate to the socio-political issues surrounding the southern Italian city of Matera, and its topography. It demonstrates that the artist's works reflect on the persistency of stereotypes associated with the southern Italian peasant culture, which the artist rehabilitated and used to pinpoint an alternative to the hegemonic culture.

¹³ Penone's most important retrospective was held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2014 (Catherine Grenier, ed., *Giuseppe Penone* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2014); among the recent exhibitions, it is important to notice the one held at MART in Rovereto because it approached the artist's work from the perspective of his sculptural research: Gianfranco Maraniello, *Giuseppe Penone. Scultura* (Milan: Electa, 2016).

¹⁴ Paradiso's conceptual practice is analysed by Sara Fontana: Sara Fontana, "Ricerche antropologiche e utopie ecologiste nel segno/sogno di alcuni artisti italiani", in *Anni '70: l'arte dell'impegno. Nuovi orizzonti culturali, ideologici e sociali nell'arte italiana*, eds. Casero and Di Raddo, 113-132. Recent retrospectives were organised by Lidia Carrieri, one of Paradiso's supporters in the 1970s, in Martina Franca, in 2012, and Fondazione South Heritage of Matera in 2007. [Anna D'Elia and Lidia Carrieri, eds., *Antonio Paradiso. Arte + Antropologia - Antropologia + Arte* (Martina Franca: Fondazione Noesi, 2013)].



2.1. Postcard from Garesio (early 1900)

Giuseppe Penone and the Creative Energy of the Countryside

A farmer is a liberator of the energy in the earth, ceaselessly creating what is good, and adding on a vast scale to the beauty of the world.
J.S. Collis, *The Worm Forgives the Plough*, 1973¹⁵

'Per me, a priori, non esiste il problema dell'arte. Esiste semplicemente il problema di aderire alla realtà,' Giuseppe Penone replied to Mirella Bandini in 1973, when asked about the relation between his artistic production and his rural, agrarian, origin.¹⁶ After clarifying that the motivation for his work was greater than a pure aesthetic quest, the artist enumerated his family's agricultural activities on the land of Garessio, in the Piedmont Alps between Piedmont and Liguria, as examples of art. He recounts:

Il mio nonno paterno, per esempio, faceva degli splendidi lavori d'arte. Eccone alcuni: strada scavata nella roccia per 500 metri, seguendo il percorso del rio del Manico per congiungere un bosco alla strada comunale; rimozione e interrimento di grandi massi per adibire un terreno a prato; innesti di circa 1500 alberi; deviazione del Rio del Manico per ottenere un'area coltivabile; mietitura annual di circa 16000 metri quadrati di terreno; mungitura a mano di una media di circa diciotto mucche al giorno; taglio dei boschi eseguito nel periodo invernale; trasporto del legname come carrettiere; costruzione di una casa colonica di circa quindici camera; concimazione di alberi.¹⁷

This narrative, which reflects an expanded avant-garde definition of art, connected rural activities, the artist's practices and his family tradition. This was not the first time that he had articulated this story, which still permeates the critical reception of his work today. Already in the exhibition catalogue of Germano Celant's *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art* (Galleria Civica D'Arte Moderna, June-July 1970), Penone accompanied his *Pane alfabeto*, *Lavoro su gli alberi*, and *Progetti per Leonardo* with a detailed history of his family's use of a piece of land bought in Garessio in 1881.¹⁸ These accounts complemented the imagery of Penone as an artist-farmer that emerges from the photographic documentation of *Alpi Marittime*, and from the later projects with trees and agriculture.¹⁹

¹⁵ John Stewart Collis, *The Worm Forgives the Plough* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 35.

¹⁶ Bandini, *Arte Povera a Torino*, 66.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ The titles of the works are those originally reported in the index of Celant, ed. *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art*, np.

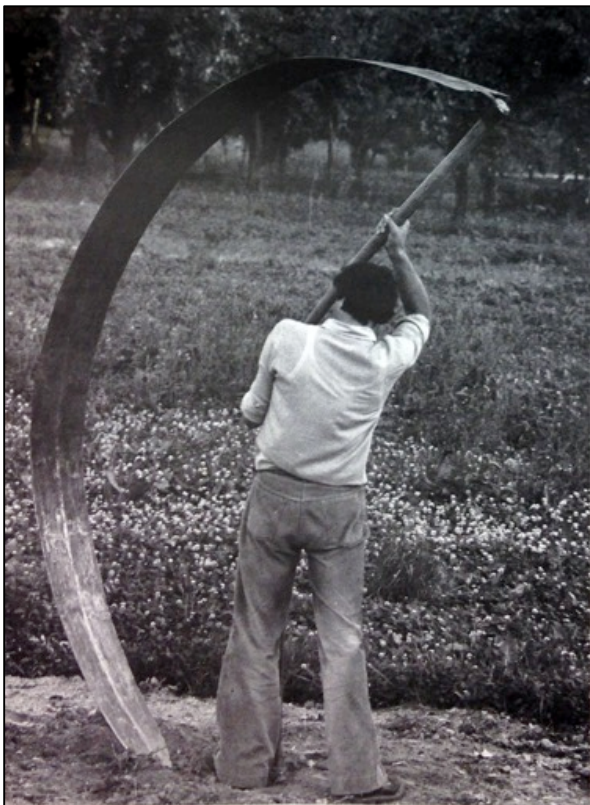
¹⁹ Celant, *Art Povera*, 168-173.



2.2. Giuseppe Penone, *Alpi Marittime*, 1968



2.3. Giuseppe Penone, *Scrive legge ricorda*, 1969



2.4. Giuseppe Penone, *Zappa*, 1980



2.5. Giuseppe Penone, 1967/1968/1969, 1967

Alpi Marittime is composed of six actions/installations, documented through photography.²⁰ Five out of six were performative actions are recorded on trees, and belong to his larger body of works installed in the woodland of Garessio between 1968 and 1971. Among *Alpi Marittime*, especially in *Ho intrecciato tre alberelli* (1968), Penone is pictured while braiding young tree-trunks together in the snow [2.2]. Similarly, in the visual documentation of the *Scrive legge ricorda* series (1969), the artist is striking a wedge into a tree [2.3]. This long-term project aimed at inscribing the alphabet in the trunk of trees for a future humanisation and education of the plant.²¹ More recent documentary photographs portray the artist hoeing with *Zappa* (1980), a sculptural work that consists of a deformed hoe with an elongated blade, and reflects on the sculptural potential of working the land, and its metaphorical implications [2.4].²²

Penone's repeated reference to his rural origin, however, does not appear disingenuous. In the *Il giardino delle sculpture fluide* catalogue, Jean-Christophe Bailly wrote: '[Nel lavoro di Penone] non si distingue tra un atteggiamento estetico e retaggio contadino. Tra pensiero riflessivo, speculativo e i mezzi e le tecniche della messa in opera.'²³ Reconsidering Bailly's statement, this section reassesses the role that the rural world plays in *Alpi Marittime* within the ecosystem of Penone's early artworks. Exploring the research ground of Sperone's artistic circle, especially Gilberto Zorio's (b. 1944) and Giovanni Anselmo's (b. 1934), it discusses the ways in which rural practices and agricultural knowledge participated in the construction of Penone's artistic persona, influencing the critical reception of his work as a partial filiation of his rural origins, and were seminal in the construction of his biography as an artist within the art context of the late 1960s.²⁴

Soon after Penone left his home town, and began his studies at the Fine Art Academy in Turin, Gilberto Zorio introduced him to the community of artists that had gravitated around Gian Enzo Sperone's art gallery.²⁵ Running the gallery as a centre for international art exchanges between Turin, New York, and Düsseldorf, Sperone introduced Turin's cultural *milieu*, imbued with French artistic influences, to North American influences of Pop Art, Minimalist and

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10; 168. The nature of the work, ambiguously between performance and sculpture, will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

²¹ Celant, *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art, 1970*, np.

²² This work was created during the artist's residence in Zürich (Ink. Halle für internationale neue Kunst).

²³ Jean-Christophe Bailly, "Il tempo visibile", in Ida Giannelli, ed. *Il giardino delle sculpture fluide* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2007), 61.

²⁴ Both Jessica Bradley and Germano Celant discuss Penone's work as emerged from the cultural context of Garessio. In their text, Garessio is presented as a town of archaic, animistic culture, where man is integrated in, if not identified with, nature. See: Jessica Bradley, "Giuseppe Penone: the Poetics of Representation", in Jessica Bradley, editor, *Giuseppe Penone* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, c1983), 10-11; Germano Celant, "Intrecci di metamorfosi", in Germano Celant, *Giuseppe Penone* (Milan: Electa, 1989), 8- 27.

²⁵ Ida Giannelli, and Giorgio Verzotti, eds., *Giuseppe Penone* (Milan: Fabbri editore, 1992), 187. On Penone's biographical information, see also the artist's account in Giovanni Lista, *Arte Povera. Interviste curate e raccolte da Giovanni Lista* (Milan: Abscondita Srl, 2011), 115. About Zorio's role in Penone's introduction to the Sperone's circle, see Bandini, *Arte Povera a Torino*, 110.

Conceptual.²⁶ His gallery was a cultural hub where Italian artists, especially those later connected with Celant's Arte Povera, could present their works.²⁷ Hence, the Turin-based artists Michelangelo Pistoletto, Aldo Mondino, Piero Gilardi, Gianni Piacentino, Marisa Merz, Giovanni Anselmo, and Gilberto Zorio had the chance to exhibit alongside Roy Litchestein, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, Tom Wesselmann, Andy Warhol, Robert Morris, Carl Andre, and Sol Le Witt.²⁸

When, in May 1969, Penone had his first solo exhibition at the Sperone Gallery, he presented the photographic documentation of *Alpi Marittime*, which had just been published in Celant's 1969 *Art Povera*.²⁹ His previous exhibition at the artist-run space Deposito dell'arte presente in the spring 1968 consisted of unconventional sculptural objects, such as *Scala d'acqua (Ladder of Water, 1968)*.³⁰ Although these earlier works anticipated aspects of his future research, it was the 1969 show that inaugurated the critical fortune of his artistic practice: in other words, his career was seen to have begun in the woodlands.³¹ Stating that he was investigating a reality that he used to daily see and use, Penone was himself associating his artistic practice with agricultural activities, and more generally with the daily routines of the mountainside area of Garessio.³² In so doing, the artist was not only offering biographical details, but, more importantly, he was participating in a virtual dialogue with the artists nurturing Sperone's creative environment, especially with those involved with Celant's Arte Povera.

The 1966 exhibition *Arte abitabile*, discussed in the previous chapter, had already enlarged the field of art outside the fine art tradition. The term 'realtà' had entered the shared language of artists later associated with Arte Povera (among whom were Pistoletto, Gilardi, Penone, Zorio, Anselmo, Marisa Merz, and Boetti) as Mirella Bandini's interviews between 1972 and 1973 show.³³ 'Reality', or better 'the ownership of reality' was one of the main concerns of Celant's Arte Povera group as outlined in exhibition journal of the 1968 exhibition held at the Foscherari gallery in Bologna.³⁴ This urgency did not have anything to do with ownership as a

²⁶ The vitality of the art gallery system in Turin in the 1950s and 1960s, and the role played by the Sperone Gallery, is discussed in: Michel Bourel, "Le gallerie d'arte a Torino, 1950-1970: nascita di una capitale artistica", in *Un'avventura internazionale: Torino e le arti 1950-1970*, eds. Germano Celant, Paolo Fossati, and Ida Giannelli (Milan: Charta, 1993), 126-127.

²⁷ For an overview of the exhibitions held at the Sperone Gallery in Turin, see: Anna Minola, ed. *Gian Enzo Sperone: Torino, Roma, New York: 35 anni di mostre tra Europa e America* (Turin: Hopefulmonster, 2000).

²⁸ Celant, Fossati, and Giannelli, *Torino e le arti 1950-1970*, 389-401.

²⁹ Celant, *Art Povera*, 168-173

³⁰ See Giannelli and Verzotti, *Giuseppe Penone*, 188. On the Deposito dell'Arte Presente, see: Robert Lumley, "Arte Povera a Torino: l'intrigante caso del Deposito d'arte presente, in *Marcello Levi: Ritratto di un collezionista. Dal futurismo all'arte povera*, eds. Francesco Manacorda and Robert Lumley (Turin: Hopefulmonster Editore, 2005), 89-107.

³¹ The Italian art historian Daniela Lancioni, expert on Penone's work, clarify Penone's early chronology in: Daniela Lancioni, "Cinque percorsi attraverso le opere di questa mostra", in *Giuseppe Penone*, ed. Daniela Lancioni (Paris: Hazan; Rome: Académie de France à Rome, 2008), 92; 108.

³² Bandini, *Arte Povera a Torino*, 65.

³³ Mirella Bandini, "Prefazione" to Bandini, *Arte Povera a Torino*, 9-21.

³⁴ Germano Celant, "Arte Povera", in Galleria De' Foscherari, ed., *La povertà dell'arte*, Quaderni De' Foscherari Bologna, n.1 (Bologna: Galleria de'Foscherari, 1968), np. In the same catalogue, the Bolognese intellectual Pietro Bonfiglioli,

property right explicitly, but with an epistemological enquiry into various aspects of the surrounding world. It aimed at achieving a more grounded level of understanding, beyond intellectual, scientific and cultural conventions. Echoing aspects of the contemporary cultural discourse, as already noted by Pietro Bonfiglio at the time, Celant's proposed an art that would achieve a fuller, individualised, and more conscious level of physical and mental existence.³⁵ Each of the artists involved expressed a different idea of what specific reality needed investigation. For instance, Piero Gilardi's reality was the socio-political context in which he lived and operated, Pistoletto's was instead concerned with the ideas that his mirror paintings conveyed.³⁶ Penone's statement clarifies that he was engaging with the rural reality of Garessio, his hometown in the western Alps (the *Alpi Marittime*), which lie between Piedmont and Liguria. Penone's works resonated with a number of installations and objects by other artists gravitating around Sperone, whose work had little to do with the rural world. A comparison with Gilberto Zorio (b.1944), and Giovanni Anselmo (b.1934) suggests that Penone shared with these artists an interest in similar aspects of reality. His references to agriculture was a strategy for expressing his individuality as an artist.

discussed the urgency of this research in the socio-political culture at the time, and in relation to Celant's statements about *Arte Povera*. Pietro Bonfiglioli, "Arte e vita", in *La povertà dell'arte* (Bologna: Galleria Foscherary, 1968), np.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

Penone in Conversation with Zorio and Anselmo



2.6. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Sacra conversazione* (Anselmo, Zorio, Penone), 1973

Considering Penone's work alongside Gilberto Zorio's and Giovanni Anselmo's is not a novelty.³⁷ As early as 1973, Michelangelo Pistoletto portrayed the three artists immersed in a discussion in one of his mirror paintings, titled *Sacra conversazione* (*Sacred Conversation*, 1973) [2.6].³⁸ This artwork does not simply stand as an historical document of the actual interaction between the three artists beyond the official end of Celant's *Arte Povera* in 1972. It resonates with 'Anselmo, Penone, Zorio e le nuove fonti di energia nel deserto dell'arte', a text by the art critic Tommaso Trini published in the same year that Pistoletto completed his mirror painting, which praises the artists' works within the contemporary art scene of Turin, describing their practices as 'arte in processo, dove la scultura è insieme azione, situazione, evento.'³⁹ On the basis of this interpretation, Trini connected the works of the three artists to Pistoletto's mirror paintings,

³⁷ Elisabeth Mangini has recently discussed the works of the three artists together with Mario Merz's in her doctoral dissertation: Elizabeth Mangini, *Arte Povera in Turin 1967-1978. Contextualising Artistic Strategies during the Anni di Piombo*. Unpublished thesis. (New York: The City University of New York, 2010). Mangini triangulates the artistic strategies of these artists, the philosophical interests in phenomenology that emerged within the University of Turin at the time, and the contemporary socio-political turmoil.

³⁸ Carlos Basualdo, ed., *Michelangelo Pistoletto: From One to Many, 1956 - 1974* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 264-265.

³⁹ Tommaso Trini, "Anselmo, Penone, Zorio e le nuove fonti di energia nel deserto dell'arte", *Data* (Summer 1973): 62.

which Trini considered the starting point of European process art.⁴⁰ We could also suggest that this encounter immortalised by Pistoletto was fruitful in terms of their reciprocal creative exchanges. However, we cannot forget Penone's more cautious position on art communities, as expressed in a recent interview with John Bentley.⁴¹ According to Penone, an artists' community discusses shared problems, with each finding individual solutions. As Trini noticed, in Penone's, Zorio's and Anselmo's respective works, we can only find concerns with a shared, and rather vague interest in 'energy'.⁴²

Energy, or the lack of it, has been at the core of modernity and modernist art since Futurism.⁴³ In the Italian avant-garde, energy was equated with existential fullness, in the spirit of Nietzsche's philosophy. It was linked with a celebration of the modern, industrial city, and with a rejection of traditions and traditional culture, in favour of a society revitalised by war, as Marinetti wrote in the 1909 *Manifesto*.⁴⁴ On the contrary, in 1966, entropy, or the loss of energy in a thermodynamic system, was the feature associated with contemporary North American expanding cities. In his essay *Entropy and the New Monuments (Artforum, 1966)*, Robert Smithson (1938-1973) associated dullness and vapidness with contemporary urbanization and consumerist culture in New York, and indicated these features as the source of inspiration for a number of New York artists, such as Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Sol Le Witt, among others.⁴⁵

Unlike the Futurists, and as noted by Penone himself in an interview with Giovanni Lista, the three artists did not want to represent energy, but to create works that could encapsulate energetic processes.⁴⁶ Even though the artists' understandings of what 'energy' diverged over time, Penone's 1969-1970 works on trees involved an exploration into natural endogenous or exogenous phenomena and reasoned with contemporary works by Anselmo and Zorio. Unlike them, however, the artist did not develop his research in Turin, during the socio-political protests that defined that Autumn; instead he was engaged with the inner vitality of the rural topography of the Western Alps.

In the appendix of the 1970 catalogue *Land Art, Conceptual Art and Arte Povera*, Penone calculated the labour dedicated to the land as a form of humanisation of the landscape to introduce the series of works (*Scrivere legge ricorda*) that aimed at humanising trees over time: 'Ogni anno penetrano circa 160-170 ore di lavoro in questa terra. In 88 anni sono penetrate circa

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Germano Celant, John Bentley Mays, Didier Semin, *Giuseppe Penone. The Hidden Life Within* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), 75.

⁴² Trini, "Anselmo, Penone, Zorio e le nuove fonti di energia nel deserto dell'arte", 62.

⁴³ Renato Nicolini, "Futurismo e città", in Crispolti, *Futurismo 1909-1944*, 129-143; and 410-411. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifest of Futurism", in *Art in Theory. 1900-2000*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Woods (Malden, MA: Blackwell publishing, 2012), 146-149.

⁴⁴ Tommaso Marinetti, "*Manifesto del Futurismo*", in *Art in Theory. 1900-2000*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), 146.

⁴⁵ Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments" (https://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/entropy_and.htm, accessed on 24th June 2017), originally published in *Artforum* (1966).

⁴⁶ Lista, *Arte Povera. Interviste*, 107.

14520 ore di lavoro. Questa terra ha accumulato una forza animale incredibilmente alta e con altre 11160 ore di lavoro della stessa natura acquisterà senza dubbio la capacità di capire e di agire umanamente'⁴⁷ Later in 1977, Penone explicitly acknowledge the cultural nature of the European landscape: 'Nature and the landscape surrounding us in Europe is artificial, man-made; a cultural landscape. The actions of man have altered the pre-existing nature, creating a new one by his actions and art.'⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the early works engaged with energy on the small scale of trees devoid of these later socio-cultural implications.

Among the *Alpi Marittime* series, *Crescendo innalzerà la rete* demonstrates one way in which Penone tackled gravity, the force that attracts a body towards the center of the earth, or towards any other physical body having mass.⁴⁹ As Penone himself recalls, it was Morris exhibition held at the Sperone Gallery in 1967 works that raised his interest in investigating the role of gravity in determining sculptural shapes.⁵⁰



2.7. Giuseppe Penone, *Verso il centro della terra* (*ha più possibilità di una pietra di penetrare nella terra*), 1969

Possibly inspired by the imagery created by space exploration, which had populated magazines and television earlier in the 1960s, in Penone's reflection on Morris's work and in *Solleverà la gabbia*, gravity is invisible, yet visible in its result, and is associated with weight and the force that keeps us on the ground [2.9]. Later in 1969, Penone created *Verso il centro della terra* (*ha più possibilità di una pietra di penetrare nella terra*), a metallic wedge inserted in a floor

⁴⁷ Celant, *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art*, np.

⁴⁸ Maraniello and Watkins, eds. *Giuseppe Penone: Writings*, 173.

⁴⁹ The original title of this work is: '16-20 December 1968. I have [sic] enclosed the top of a sapling in a cube of metal net (opened [sic] at the bottom) and on the net I have leaned [sic] a cauliflower, a slice of pumpkin and two peppers that I then covered with chalk and cement; the growing tree will raise the net.' Celant, *Arte Povera*, np.

⁵⁰ Celant, Bentley Mays, Semin, *The Hidden Life Within*, 77.

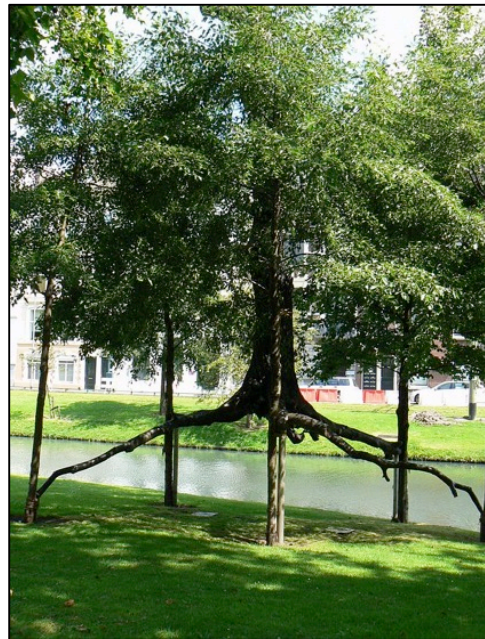
crack in the Galleria Sperone, with a direct reference to gravity as an attraction to the center of the earth, and thus as a force that brings materials downwards to the ground (and beyond) [2.7].



2.8. Giuseppe Penone, 1967/1968/1969, 1967-1969



2.9. Giuseppe Penone, *Solleverà la gabbia*, 1968



2.10. Giuseppe Penone, *Elevazione*, 2001

In contrast, *Solleverà la gabbia* refers to gravity as a force that plants counteract through their growth. This installation appears as a development of his earlier 1967/68/69 project, in which the growth of a tree lifted a wire wrapped around the tree trunk at the artist's height [2.8]. It also precludes to more recent works by the artist in which the growth of the tree acts as an elevator for more complex installations that appear in precarious balance, such as *Elevazione* (2001) in Rotterdam [2.10].⁵¹ In *Solleverà la gabbia*, the artist installed a cage on the top of the tree.

⁵¹ Giuseppe Penone, *Rovesciare gli occhi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 24; <https://www.sculptureinternationalrotterdam.nl/en/collectie/elevazione-en>, accessed on 24th July 2017.

The organic force of the growing tree, opposing the weight of the cage and of the plaster covered vegetables lying on its top, would have lifted the cage upwards. As underlined in a poem about this work, Penone's work attempted to cage the vegetal energy, as an updraft force able to lift weights, and thus to counteract gravity.⁵²



2.11. Gilberto Zorio, *Untitled*, 1967



2.12. Giovanni Anselmo installing *Scultura che mangia*, 1969

A similar *idea* of gravity was expressed in the works of both Zorio and Anselmo. In his *Untitled* (1967) presented at his first solo exhibition at Sperone's, Zorio balanced an asbestos column on air chambers [2.11]. In so doing, the artist played with the unsettling opposition between full and void, between the weight of the column and the unsteady contact with the soil, and, as Celant phrased it, between the mass (meaning weight + gravity) and the opposing pressure of the air in the plastic container.⁵³ In Giovanni Anselmo's production, this interest initially manifested itself in *Untitled* (iron, wool, gravity, 1966), a thin straight vertical iron cable in a wood base that lists 'gravity' among its materials, and *Direzione*, a block of stone with a needle compass mounted in it, lying on the ground and indicating magnetic north. It is Anselmo's *untitled* (*Scultura che mangia*, 1968-1969), however, that appears closer to Penone's *Solleverà la gabbia* in its premises [2.12]. In Penone's installation, the tree opposes and counteracts the weight of the cage and lifts it. Likewise, in *Scultura che mangia*, the lettuce, an organic element and its inner vital energy constituted by water, prevents the smaller piece of rock from falling, and preserves the sculptural work in its first physical status.⁵⁴

⁵² Gianfranco Maraniello and Jonathan Watkins, eds. *Giuseppe Penone: Writings 1968-2008* (Bologna: MAMbo-Museo dell'Arte Moderna di Bologna; Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 2008), 37.

⁵³ Gilberto Zorio, Germano Celant, Rudi Fuchs, and Mario Bertoni, *Gilberto Zorio: Saggiointervista con Germano Celant*, (Florence: Hopefulmonster, c1998), 13.

⁵⁴ Anselmo's *Scultura che mangia* is usually discussed in relation to entropy. See: Rosalind Krauss, "Giovanni Anselmo. Matter and Monochrome", in *October*, vol. 124 (spring 2008): 125-136.

A heavy snowstorm in the winter 1968-1969 tore down the installation of *Solleverà la gabbia*. This event brings to our attention the role that the surrounding environment, and especially weather conditions, played in Penone's installations in the woods near Garessio. In 1968, two of the artist's projects were concerned with the influence of weather conditions, especially changes in temperature, on the shape of the work: *Pelle/Corda/Ramo/Sole - Pelle/Corda/Ramo/Pioggia* (1969) and *Pietra/Corda/Albero/Sole - Pietra/Corda/Albero/Pioggia* (1968) [2.13]. Both artworks are suspended structures. The first consists of two ropes linking the opposite slopes at the edges of a rural path, supporting a long tree branch balanced at the middle. The second is composed of a stone, possibly a *losa* (a stone traditionally used for building mountainside cottages roofs), kept lifted from the ground by a rope that links it to a nearby tree. In this installation, the artist presents the influence of environmental, climatic changes through its influence on the appearance of the art object.



2.13. Giuseppe Penone, *Pietra/Corda/Albero/Sole - Pietra/Corda/Albero/Pioggia*, 1968

In Penone's outdoor installations, rain, sun, and the resulting air humidity affect the different degrees of tension in the rope that determine the suspended structure. Zorio and Anselmo also tackled similar issues within the space of the art gallery. Zorio's *Rosa/Blu/Rosa* responds to changes of humidity concentration [2.14]. The work consisted of an asbestos semi-cylinder covered in cobalt chloride, which is an inorganic compound sensitive in colour to the changes in its hydration. Thus, changes in the atmospheric conditions in the gallery manifested through different shades of blue, purple and pink. Anselmo's 1966-1967 works balance structures, but also *untitled (Scultura che respira, 1968/69)* and *untitled (Scultura che beve, 1968/1969)*, resonate with Penone's installations. Anselmo's sculptural objects were susceptible to imperceptible changes in the condition of the surrounding environment over time. First presented

in April 1967, *Untitled* (polyurethane bulb, iron, wooden cube) is an object whose sculptural presence is determined by an unstable balance. In *Scultura che respira*, two steel bars are separated by a sponge, which determines their reciprocal distance, and a loss of adherence in *Scultura che beve*, in which layers of cotton wool soaked in water were left drying and falling from a Plexiglas surface [2.15].



2.14. Gilberto Zorio, *Rosa/Blu/Rosa*, 1968

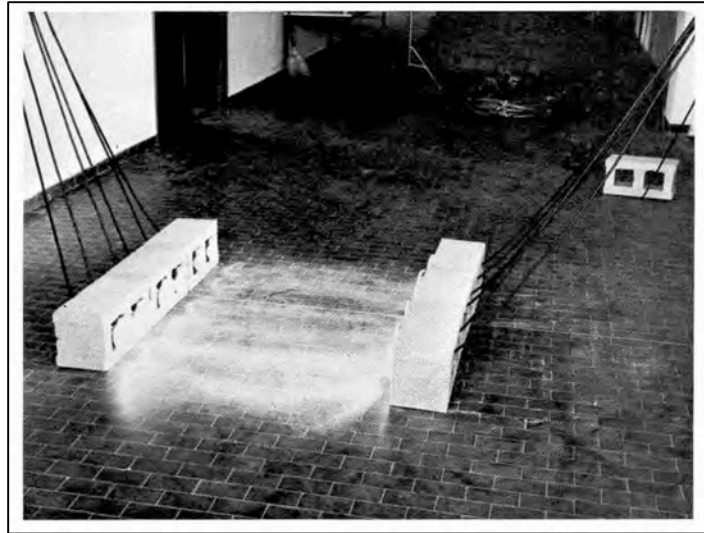


2.15. Giovanni Anselmo, *Untitled (Scultura che beve)*, 1968

These and Penone's works on trees informed Celant's 1968 text about Arte Povera, as well as Zorio's statements about his work *Luci* (1968) [2.16]. Germano Celant described the art practices of Arte Povera as efforts in communicating an intuition, an idea about reality through an unambiguous media.⁵⁵ Echoing Celant's statement, when asked if there was an anti-technological undertone in his use of materials in a conversation with Jole De Sanna in 1972, Zorio made clear the functional choice of the material to present a natural phenomenon: his aim was primarily one of returning 'light' to its original, natural function of providing warmth.⁵⁶ Lying the lightbulbs on a piece of metal, the warmth produced by the electrified metallic filament in the bulb would have heated the underlying metallic surface. He insisted that his work was concerned with the translation of an intuition about natural phenomena, more than with making a statement through the way in which the light bulbs were used.

⁵⁵ Celant, *Arte Povera*, 1968, np

⁵⁶ Jole Da Sanna, "Gilberto Zorio: Corpo di energia", *Data* (April 1972): 16-23. About Zorio, see also: Catherine David, ed., *Gilberto Zorio. Opere 1967-1984* (Modena: Edizioni Panini, 1985); Germano Celant, ed., *Gilberto Zorio* (Florence: Hopefulmonster, 1998).



2.16. Gilberto Zorio, *Luce*, 1968

Both Celant's and Zorio's statements distinguish two phases in the creative process of the works, even though this distinction tends to be collapsed when Arte Povera is discussed as a tautology: the ideational (or the intuition about reality) and the creational (or the presentation in a suitable medium). The process of sensorial apprehension of reality, and of natural phenomena, is essential in both the ideational and creation phase of Penone's early sculptures. In a 1968 poem describing his experience in the woodlands, Penone considers this same process as sculpture itself:

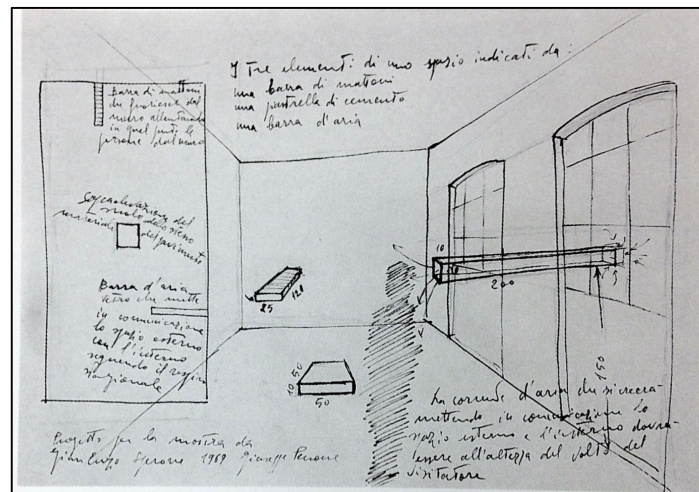
Per realizzare la scultura è necessario che lo scultore si adagi, si sdrai per terra lasciandosi scivolare, senza scendere in fretta, dolcemente, a poco a poco e finalmente, raggiunta l'orizzontalità, concentri l'attenzione e gli sforzi al suo corpo che premuto contro il terreno gli permette di vedere e sentire contro di sé le cose della terra; può poi allargare le braccia per potersi godere interamente la frescura del terreno e raggiungere il grado di quiete necessaria al compimento della scultura [...] Lo scultore penetra... e la linea dell'orizzonte si avvicina agli occhi. Quando si sente con la testa finalmente leggera, il freddo della terra lo taglia a metà e gli rende leggibile con chiarezza e precisione il punto che stacca la parte del suo corpo che appartiene al vuoto del cielo e la parte che è del pieno della terra. È allora che avviene la scultura.⁵⁷

This process of bodily apprehension of his surroundings found materialisation in his second exhibition at the Sperone gallery in December 1969 [2.17].⁵⁸ On that occasion, together with *Albero di quattro metri* (1969) and *Gli anni dell'albero più uno*, Penone positioned an *Indicazione di pavimento*, *Indicazione di muro* and *Indicazione d'aria* (also known as *Barra d'aria*). The first two

⁵⁷ Gianfranco Maraniello, ed., *Giuseppe Penone: Scritti 1948-2008* (Bologna: MAMBo, 2009), 56.

⁵⁸ I was made aware of the works exhibited in this exhibition in a conversation with Giuseppe Penone's archivist, Paola Tartaglino (19.03.2015). Penone discussed this exhibition in the mentioned conversation with Bandini (Bandini, *Arte Povera a Torino*, 68).

Indicazioni are two wooden beams, the first lying on the floor and the second perpendicular to one of the walls of the gallery, at around waist height. *Barra d'aria* was instead a hollow Plexiglas tube inserted in a hole made in the glass of a window, protruding both in the exhibition room and the outdoors. Considering the window as a threshold between two different environments, the work connected the outside with the inside of the exhibition space through the physical properties of air, in a way that both noise and wintery cold could enter the space of the gallery from the street. In this exchange, the silence and possibly milder temperature of the room might have been noticeable. Even though it has been described as an intervention to alter the habitual movement and in the gallery, the show was primarily the manifestation of the artist's personal process of apprehension of the sensorial boundaries of the gallery space.⁵⁹ This experience was conveyed to the public without the mediation of the artist's body.⁶⁰



2.17. Giuseppe Penone, preparatory drawing for show at the Galleria Sperone, 1969

The series *Alpi Marittime* expresses similar bodily intuitions, but these are about natural phenomena, namely the growth of plants. As we previously discussed, works such as *Solleverà la gabbia* refers to the force of plant. *Continuerà a crescere tranne che in quel punto* and other actions/installations that involve the interaction of the artist's body with the tree appear to focus on tree growth, as an inexorable, expanding material force [2.18; 2.19; 2.20].

⁵⁹ Giannelli, and Verzotti, eds., *Giuseppe Penone*, 188.

⁶⁰ Penone, *Rovesciare gli occhi*. Daniel Soutif, "Giuseppe Penone's Inverted Look", in *Giuseppe Penone 1968-1998* (Santiago de Compostela: Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporanea, 1999), 23-43.



2.18



2.19



2.20. Giuseppe Penone, *Continuerà a crescere tranne che in quel punto*,
(action and installation) and 1968

In Penone's works, tree growth is made visible by the opposition of two elements: an active one (the tree) and a quiescent one (the cage, the human body represented by an iron-cast, wire). Didier Semin and, more explicitly, Elizabeth Mangini have interpreted this opposition of materials, natural and industrial, as a reflection of the contemporary socio-political turmoil in Turin at the time.⁶¹ I suggest instead that this opposition was due more to his artistic research than to political motivations. This is also because Penone does not appear to invest the materials with such metaphorical meanings, considering that he preferred to use bronze instead of iron in later versions of this installation.

⁶¹ Mangini, *Arte Povera in Turin 1967-1978*, 116-117.

As Penone himself suggests, Yves Klein was a source of inspiration for his work.⁶² ‘Yves Klein non mostra mai il processo dell’energia. Prende tuttavia il colore blu come energia,’ the artist said to Giovanni Lista, but ‘tratta sovente una cosa come contrappunto a un’altra.’⁶³ Klein’s impact on the Italian artist allows us to reflect on his strategy of visualisation. As for the French artist, the confusion between the performative and the sculptural aspects of works, such as *Continuerà a crescere tranne che in quel punto*, collapses the distinction between the moment of intuition and artistic creation. The interaction of the artist’s body with trees in the performative action, later perpetuated by the metallic installations, is primarily a work about the action-apprehension of the reality of the tree [2.18]; secondly, it is the artist’s way of materialising over time the sculptural growth of the three through comparison with a steadier material [2.19].

Hence, working with trees, tree growth and with elements of his native woodlands was Penone’s artistic exploration into, and presentation of, inorganic and organic natural phenomena in the expanded field of art. This dialogue with the Turin-based Anselmo and Zorio unfolded at a distance, considering that Penone was working in an Alpine Valley.

⁶² “Yves Klein tratta Spesso una cosa come contrappunto ad un’altra. Prende tuttavia il colore blue come energia [...] non ha mai mostrato il processo d’energia”, in Lista, *Arte Povera. Interviste*, 110. Italian critic Michele Dantini briefly indicates Penone’s reference to Klein, in review to Busine’s 2011 catalogue about Penone’s work (<http://www.doppiozero.com/rubriche/82/201304/giuseppe-penone-la-mano-che-resiste>, accessed on 5th June 2016), mentioned by the artist in his interview with Buchlon (in Busine, ed. *Giuseppe Penone*, 2011). Giuliano Martano, *Yves Klein: Il mistero ostentato* (Turin: Martano, c1970); Claudio Passoni, ed. *Yves Klein* (Turin: Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna, 1970).

⁶³ Lista, *Arte Povera. Interviste*, 110.

Penone, Grafting and Garessio

This section discusses the degree to which Penone utilized agricultural techniques in his works on trees, in order to explore the way in which he adopted the countryside as sculptural material. In a 1994 text, the artist defines his earlier works on trees as ‘graftings’:

Ho fatto un lavoro con il bosco, uno studio all’aperto,
un coltivo di opere, l’ho seminato di idee, pensieri,
lavori a venire, produce.
Sono piccolo cose, sorprese, ricordi che lascio nel tronco
di un frassino, su un noce, un castagno, un ciliegio
come fosse un innesto, con la cura
e la delicata precisione di un innesto che aiuto a formarsi.⁶⁴

Although the use of grafting in this poem appears metaphorical, Penone associated his work with horticultural interventions. This elicits questions about the degree to which the artist’s installations shared technical elements that relate to woodland management.

Grafting (or *graftage*) is a century-old technique used to domesticate fruit trees. It is defined as a ‘natural or deliberate fusion of plant parts so that vascular continuity is established between them and the resulting genetically composite organism functions as a single plant.’⁶⁵ There are infinite types of grafting, but they all aim at increasing the resistance and productivity of the tree. Generally, we can divide them in two categories. The first category comprises those practices in which adjacent intact plants, or different branches of the same plant can become naturally or intentionally merged together; instead, deliberate grafting involves the insertion of a previously cut shoot (*cyon*) into an opening in the bark of another plant growing on its own root system (*stock or rootstock*).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Maraniello, *Penone: scritti*, 113

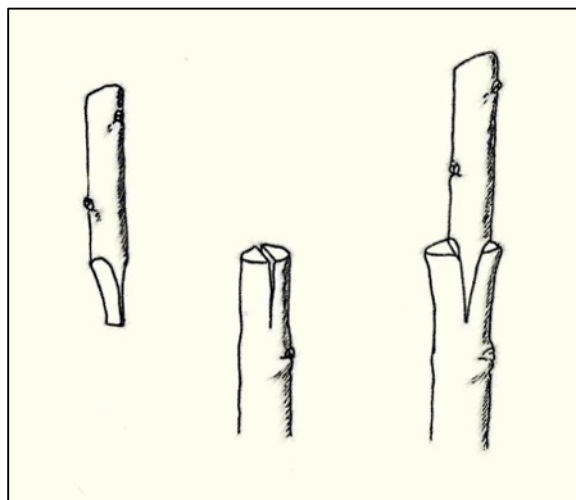
⁶⁵ Natural grafting of fig, olive, grape and pomegranate was first introduced between 3000 and 4000BCE; only in the first millennia BCE, apple, plum and pear trees were grafted and domesticated.

<https://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/janick-papers/c09.pdf>, accessed on 4th December 2014.

⁶⁶ Franco De Francesco, ed. *Enciclopedia dell’agricoltura*, vol. 1 (Milan: Fabbri editore, 1965), 145-147.



2.21. Giuseppe Penone, *Omaggio a Malevich*, 1968

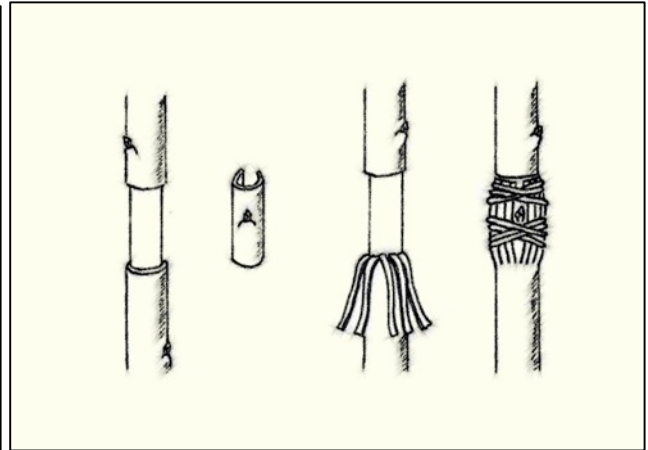


2.22. Illustration of an *Innesto a spacco pieno*

Both natural and deliberate grafting appear to be used in Penone's work. In *Ho intrecciato tre alberelli* (one of the five actions of *Alpi Marittime*), an action that aimed at merging three individual plants in a single process of vertical growth and expansion, he literally applied natural grafting. In other works, Penone appeared inspired by several deliberate grafting techniques: *innesto a spacco pieno* (the insertion of a *cyon* in a fracture of the stock); the *innesto a incastro* (the technique applied to graft big branches); and *innesto a zufolo* (used for chestnuts, it consists of the exchange of tree bark between trees). In *Omaggio a Malevich* (1969), the artist's intervention on the tree follows the *innesto a spacco* [2.21; 2.22]. To symbolise the art's shift after Malevich's *Black Square* (1915), Penone inserted a wooden cubic wedge in the stock, to change the direction of growth of the tree. *Gli anni dell'albero più uno* (1969) appears inspired by the *innesto a zufolo* technique [2.23-2.24]. This work consists of a sapling coated in a layer of wax, a material largely used both in sculpture, for models, and in horticulture, as an insulator against bacteria and the cold. As trees grow in concentric rings - a ring added every year, the artist metaphorically gifted an additional year of life to the tree. In all these examples, however, the technical references are vague, and the similarity between Penone's artistic intervention and agricultural practices consists more generally in the contraposition of active-quiescent materials, as discussed in the previous section.



2.23. Giuseppe Penone, *Gli anni dell'albero più uno*, 1969



2.24. Illustration of *Innesto a zufolo*

In addition, the actions and installations on trees demonstrate Penone's sagacity as a farmer, and his familiarity with handling plants according to their natural cycles. The documentary photographs that record the work (but also the original title) not only document the artist's action, but also that the installations of *Alpi Marittime* were made in winter, in accordance with woodsmen's annual routines. Grafting operations have to be applied during the dormant stage of the tree, which is during winter and early spring, so as not to cause any damage to the growing plant.

These allusions to his rural origin were sufficient for Penone to be associated with a culture different from other artists exhibiting at Sperone. 'Non ha dovuto svincolarsi da un certo tipo di cultura, perchè già ne possedeva un'altra; ha quindi trasportato i suoi pensieri sul linguaggio che era il più adatto,' stated Zorio in 1973, after praising the creative qualities of Penone's father, a reserved and wise farmer. 'Questo incontro [with Penone] mi ha dato una grande carica; è stata veramente una conferma che da diverse origini si può giungere a questo punto.'⁶⁷ Thus, despite not being the only artist in Sperone's circle to be originally from a rural or mountainside area (for instance, both Pistoletto and Zorio were from Biella, another mountainside city), Penone was still considered to belong to a cultural background that allowed him a more direct way to produce artworks that would present the transformative processes of nature.

⁶⁷ Bandini, *Arte Povera a Torino*, 109-111.

Penone himself declared that his work would have been redundant in a rural setting, as farmers are already familiar with the processes that he explored in his practice.⁶⁸ Yet, according to Zorio's words, Penone belonged to a culture closer to natural cycles. It was also a matter of language: he owned the most adequate language, the empirical one of plants and natural elements. Zorio explained that in his work, he de-contextualised and de-functionalized an object that related to the urban, technological environment (the light bulb) in order to present a natural phenomenon (light). This operation subtracted the cultural values associated with the objects utilised, and turned them into pure signs. In a similar way, Penone's work and his use of trees were arguably interpreted as absent of cultural associations, and thus as tautological in respect to the kind of process (tree growth) he was representing. In other words, the trees and techniques used in his installation were adopted without accounting for their cultural and anthropological relevance. Thus, in Penone's work the countryside was interpreted not only as a place where the contact with nature and its phenomena was easier, but it was also considered a place in which the materials that constitute the landscape and that are available for the sculptor's use are differently (and less) culturally connoted than the urban ones.



2.25. Advertisement of the vacation season in Garessio

Garessio lies in the Alpi Marittime between Piedmont and Liguria. Despite his careful narrative revolving around his family as farmers in the area, critics have often given the artist's

⁶⁸ Lista, *Arte Povera. Interviste*, 115.

experience of the area paradigmatic value for understanding the cultural context in which Penone spent his youth and acquired his early education. Garessio has been associated with an archaic, animistic, primitive culture in which men and nature live in a paradigmatic balance that could have inspired the pantheistic implications of Penone's works with nature.⁶⁹

However, Garessio, like other mountainside villages in the Alps, relied on economic activities other than agriculture, which is still practiced today. As late as 1976, the Touring Club guide of Piedmont still describes Garessio as a vacation resort as well as a centre of agricultural, artisanal and agricultural activities [2.25].⁷⁰ Alpine tourism and industry were two of its inhabitants' main sources of income. The urban centre of Garessio features architectural remains that date back to the Middle Ages and an imposing architecture of late Piedmontese Baroque (Francesco Gallo, Parish church of St Catherine). In addition, since the early 1960s, a modest ski resort opened not far from the town, thus enlarging touristic provision for the village. However, its artistic beauties were not the main reasons for its appeal to visitors.⁷¹ From a description in the 1934 *Guida pratica ai luoghi di soggiorno e di cura d'Italia – Le stazioni Alpine*, Garessio appeared a relatively modern, touristy town at the time, with a hospital, a postal service, a cinema, and five hotels. Beside the beauty of the place and its clear air, the town was known for the salubrious qualities of its water from the San Bernardo spring, which had been marketed by a bottled water company of that same name since 1926.⁷² In addition, the chemical industry offered employment opportunities at the local factory of Lepetit, Dollfuss & Gansser.⁷³ The company, active between 1894 and 1964, was involved in the extremely polluting activity of tannin extraction from chestnuts, of which the valley was rich. Thus, Penone, neglecting to mention Garessio's invasive industrial activities, offered a partial and idealised view of the rural world of his hometown, through his practice as an artist.

In the investigation of natural energies shared with Zorio and Anselmo, Penone chose the familiar topography of the Alps of Garessio and of its rural material landscape of woods and non-urbanised land because they were considered suitable to express his poetical ideas on natural phenomena. Despite being aware of the cultural matrix intrinsic to the land, Penone's life-long exploration of sculpture manifests itself in his early works through his engagement with trees as disposable matter stripped of their symbolic and cultural values. In so doing, the countryside became his sculptural material, whose creative potential was made visible by his hand as through

⁶⁹ In texts by, respectively, Jessica Bradley and Germano Celant, Garessio is presented as a town of archaic, animistic culture, where man is integrated in, if not identified with, nature. See: Jessica Bradley, "Giuseppe Penone: The Poetics of Representation", 20-22; and Germano Celant, "Intrecci di metamorfosi", 11-13.

⁷⁰ Touring Club Italiano, *Piemonte - Torino non compresa* (Milan: Touring club, 1976).

⁷¹ Touring Club Italiano, *Guida pratica ai luoghi di soggiorno e di cura in Italia*. Vol.1, part1 (Milan: Turin Club Italiano, 1934), 15-16.

⁷² <http://www.sanbernardo.it/qualita-dal-1926/>, last accessed on 5th June 2016.

⁷³ Ernst Homburg, Anthony S. Travis, and Harm G. Schröter, eds, *The Chemical Industry in Europe: 1850-1914. Industrial Growth, Pollution and Professionalization*. (Berlin: Springer Science + Business Media, 1998), 53; Giovanni Romolo Bignami and Attilio Salsotto, *La civiltà del castagno* (Cuneo: L'Arciere, 1983), 116.

those of a farmer. At the same time, it also allowed the artist to participate in the discourses of the artists of the Turin-based Sperone's circle.

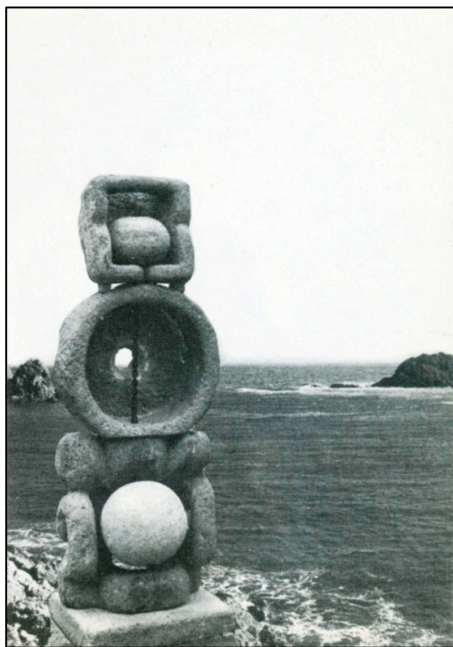
Antonio Paradiso and *Usura*: From Sculpture to Cultural Forms

Stone is the earth's crust.
There is a condition in one's appreciation
of sculpture when for deeper understanding
one must look at the lands, at mountains and valleys.
Adrian Stroke, *The Stones of Rimini*, 1934⁷⁴

Like Penone, Antonio Paradiso's work was interpreted through his rural origins.

Pastore lui stesso, da ragazzo, Paradiso, di Sant'Eramo (Bari), adopera una fulva e scabra pietra pugliese che sa di sole e di grano e ne trae forme primordiali molto espressive: evocano i giganti del mito, la solitudine del sud, i sonni pomeridiani, i tesori nascosti, i rincotcchi barbarici per annunciare l'inizio dei sacrifici umani, i ripostigli segreti dei draghi, il canto delle cicale.⁷⁵

With these words, the Italian writer Dino Buzzati reviewed Antonio Paradiso's solo exhibition of sculptures at the Pagani Art Gallery in Milan, in January 1968. This account best synthesises the generalized reception of Paradiso's early works between 1967 and 1970. In the northern Italian greyness and fogginess of Milan, at the time the most technologically innovative industrial centre in Italy and the city where the artist has been based since the mid-1960s, critics received Paradiso's early sculptures as an embodiment of his Mediterranean southern Italian origin, through the theoretical framework of modernist sculpture.



2.26. Antonio Paradiso, *Scultura*, 1966



2.27. Antonio Paradiso, *Fiore*, 1966

⁷⁴ Stokes, *Stones of Rimini*, vol. 1, 190.

⁷⁵ Dino Buzzati, "Mostre - Antonio Paradiso", *Corriere della Sera* (24th January 1968), 13.

Paradiso's sculptures formally ranged from organic to geometric abstraction, and drew attention to his affiliation with Constantin Brancusi (18-1957).⁷⁶ This association was made on the basis of the rural origin of both artists, considered quintessential of their sculptural inspiration. In Paradiso's case, his roots in Matera added a further connotation to the appreciation of his work. The art critic Luciano Caramel (1935) wrote about Paradiso's native and primitive need to sculpt. Similarly, the gallerist Massimo Valsecchi explained the artist's practice through his peasant origins in the south of Italy.⁷⁷ Resonating with Buzzati's review for the references to the southern Italian landscape but without any romantic undertone, Mario Perazzi considered them as a 'taste of poverty' of the topography of Lucania.⁷⁸ The triangulation of sculpture, rural origins and the south of Italy appeared a constant element in the early reception of the artist's sculptures.

In his 1969 monograph about the artist, the art historian and critic Enrico Crispolti developed this critical reception further and created a theoretical framework for a more complex understanding of Paradiso's practice, which, I suggest in this section of the chapter, proved crucial for the following developments of the artist's work, and for his use of the topography of his region as a plastic material for his works, both sculptural and conceptual. Later in the 1970s, Crispolti became one of the most prominent figures in the critical discourses about the *Arte nel sociale* (art in the social sphere), that will be discussed in the next chapter.⁷⁹ When Crispolti wrote Paradiso's monograph, he was an extremely prolific critic on the Italian scene, who had published studies on Futurism and Pop Art, beside his numerous writings on contemporary painters and sculptors.⁸⁰ In his text about Paradiso, Crispolti grounded the artist's sculptural identity in Lucania, and in its socio-cultural *milieu*, and suggested a connection between the sculptor's practice and the complex socio-political issues around the Sassi of Matera. The Sassi of Matera (their name literally meaning 'stone') are dwellings, part-caves carved in the tufa rocks of the Murgia Materana and part-constructed houses, occupied since Neolithic times.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Enrico Crispolti, *Antonio Paradiso* (Milan: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1969), np.

⁷⁷ See Luciano Caramel's and Massimo Valsecchi's interpretations summarised in Enrico Crispolti's review of Paradiso's reception, in *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Antonio Paradiso, *Storia naturale del Quaternario* (Milan: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1972), np.

⁷⁹ Enrico Crispolti, *Arte visiva e partecipazione sociale*. Milan: De Donato, 1978.

⁸⁰ For a complete bibliography of the critic, see: <http://www.archivioCrispolti.it/fNewsDettaglio.asp?idNews=31>, accessed on 15th October 2016.

⁸¹ For an overview of the history of the Sassi, see: Pietro Laureano, *Giardini di pietra. I sassi di Matera e la civiltà mediterranea* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993).



2.28. View of Matera, 2015

Matera, the peasant city *par excellence*, had been at the centre of long-lasting and complex political and cultural debates since the unification of the country, a century earlier.⁸² The analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural features of the South by Giustino Fortunato, Sydney Sonnino, Leopoldo Franchetti, Francesco Saverio Nitti, and later Antonio Gramsci (the so called *Meridionalisti*, because ‘Meridione’, in Italian, is a synonym for the South) denounced, among other aspects, the dramatic living conditions of the southern peasants.⁸³ This was referred to as ‘the Southern Question’. In these surveys, no specific attention had been given to Lucania, and to the area of Matera. Following the publication of Levi’s *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* in 1945, Italian politicians of the most prominent parties visited the city, and expressed publicly their concerns for the living conditions of the Sassi’s inhabitants.⁸⁴ Matera became the emblem of the overall ‘Southern Question’ and of the Government’s measures to tackle it, and the socio-economic issues connected with the Sassi’s dwellers, such as poverty, hygiene and illiteracy, became a case of

⁸² Riccardo Musatti defines Matera “città contadina”: Riccardo Musatti, “Matera, città contadina”, in the journal *Comunità* (n. 33, 1955). The article has been recently published in Federico Bilò, Ettore Vadini, eds. *Matera e Adriano Olivetti. Conversazioni con Albino Sacco e Leonardo Sacco*. (Rome-Ivrea: Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, 2013), 167-179.

⁸³ For an overview of the Meridionalisti’s works, see: Alessandro Galante Garrone, *Meridionalisti italiani fra Ottocento e Novecento* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1986).

⁸⁴ For an introduction on Carlo Levi, see: Daniela Bartalesi-Graf, *Voci del Sud: A Journey to Southern Italy and his Christ Stopped at Eboli*. (New Haven, Conn. ; London : Yale University Press c2011); The role played by Levi in the notoriety of Matera is universally recognised. Anna Parly Toxey reads Levi’s book as political propaganda for the Partito d’Azione (Action Party), at the 1946 elections, and in the 1948 ones. Anna Parmly Toxey Materan, *Contradictions: Architecture, Preservation and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2011), 82-85.

national concern.⁸⁵ In order to tackle the circumstances of the peasant population of Matera, De Gasperi's ruling government took action in two directions: land redistribution, on a national scale, and urban planning, in the local territory. Two agrarian reform laws (*Legge Sila*, and *Legge stralcio*) were approved in 1950 for the expropriation of landowners' uncultivated land. Beside these national law, the Parliament approved a *Legge speciale per il risanamento del Sassi* (n. 619) on May 17th 1952 to address the specific local urban issue of the peasants of Matera.⁸⁶ The measures taken to tackle these circumstances, that will be discussed further later on in the chapter, proved inconclusive. When Antonio Paradiso started to showcase his sculptures in 1965, the socio-political and cultural issues of Matera were far from being resolved. New as well as old disputes were surfacing, partially connected to the consequences of the 1950s urban interventions and intertwined with the emergence on the national scale of the notion of heritage preservation.⁸⁷ As the intellectual Leonardo Sacco wrote in his 1973 study about the city in the early 1970s 'Le maggiori organizzazioni democratiche e popolari del nostro paese riaffermano l'impegno meridionalista e l'appoggio qualificante alle nostre regioni.'⁸⁸

In this context, referencing the dwellers of the Sassi could not have been impartial, nor without socio-political and cultural connotations. The Sassi, both as neighbourhood and dwellings, encapsulated an ideological, architectural and cultural conundrum that was difficult, actually impossible, to ignore. When Antonio Paradiso, himself originally from the area of the Murgia Materana, had his monograph published, he appeared informed about the culture of the Sassi peasants but only vaguely aware of these socio-political debates. Nonetheless art critics, and especially the militant ones, could not have allowed Paradiso to ignore these themes within his practice.

Like the previous interpretations of Paradiso's sculptural practice, Crispolti constructed his critical framework around the medium and the materiality of the work, and linked it to the culture of Lucania. With very few exceptions, Paradiso used two yellowish dusty types of stone: the *carparo* and the *Pietra di Trani*. These are, respectively, a limestone and a carbonate rock, and they are both liable to erosion. These types of rocks are common in the Murgia Materana, where they are the primary, geomorphological elements of the topography.⁸⁹ In this sense, Paradiso's

⁸⁵ See: Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*, 85-91. Patrick Christopher McGauley, *Matera 1945-1960. The History of a 'National Shame'*, PhD diss., University College London, Department of Italian Studies, 2013.

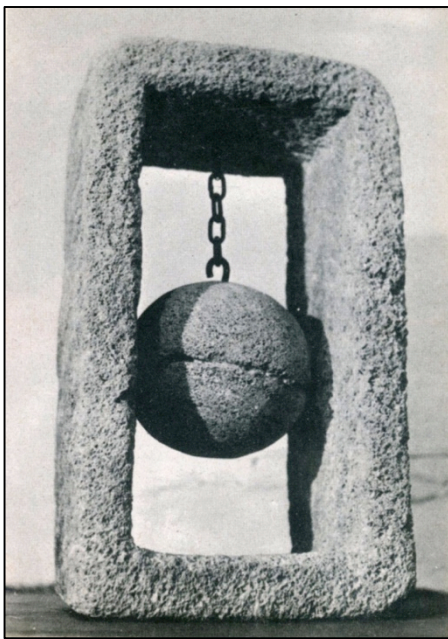
⁸⁶ Michele Valente, *Evoluzione socio-economica dei sassi di Matera nel 20 secolo*. (Potenza: Consiglio regionale della Basilicata, 2007), 91-96; Alfonso Pontrandolfi, *La vergogna cancellata - Matera negli anni dello sfollamento dei Sassi* (Matera: Edizioni Altrimedia, 2002).

⁸⁷ For an account of the discourses on this matter on a national scale, see *Il patrimonio storico e il mondo moderno: aspetti italiani* in the dedicated 1967 issues of *Casabella*. (Casabella, n.314, June 1967), 12-52. About Matera specifically, see: Francesco Francione, *La Martella. Il borgo più bello d'Italia*. (Matera: Antezza Tipografia srl, 2009), 33; Pietro Laureano, *Giardini di pietra. I sassi di Matera e la civiltà mediterranea* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993), 156-176; Toxey, *Materan Contradictions*, 151-189.

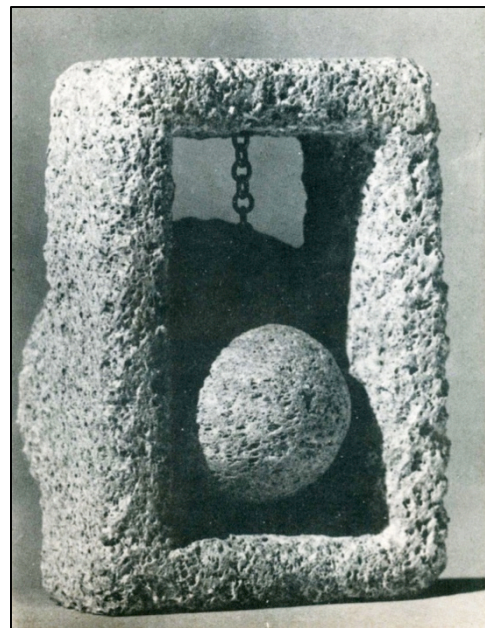
⁸⁸ Leonardo Sacco, *La questione materana* (Matera: Edizione Basilicata, 1973), 6.

⁸⁹ For the geological composition of the Murgia, see: https://www.lacittadelluomo.it/pagina_sez01_08.htm, accessed on

sculptures were not only inspired by the topography of the area, they were actually made of its substance. Yet, as Crispolti pinpointed, Paradiso preferred to use these materials in their cultural form.⁹⁰ The *carparo* was, and still is, widely employed both in urban centres, as building and decorative material, and in the countryside. In the hilly area of Murgia, this stone was used to carve water troughs for horses, or piled to form dry stone walls marking property boundaries. *Carparo* was also used as building material for rural dwellings, these being Sassi, and traditional vernacular farms, known as *Masserie* [2.35-2.36]. Since 1966, Paradiso himself used to collect these items in the area surrounding Matera, and reused them in his several versions of *Fiore* (1966), *Trono* (1966), *Trono* (1966) *Scultura* (1966) [2.26; 2.27; 2.29; 2.30].



2.29. Antonio Paradiso, *Trono*, 1966



2.30. Antonio Paradiso, *Trono*, 1966

Crispolti's interpretation of Paradiso's use of elements of the cultural landscape of the *Murgia materana* becomes clear when we compare *Trono* with the photographic documentation presented in Paradiso's exhibition at the Galleria Toselli in 1970, later published in *Storia naturale del Quaternario* (1972).⁹¹ This series primarily opened his 'archives of aesthetic research', as Renato Barilli defined it at the time, to the public.⁹² *Trono* is one of several assemblages with this title made in 1966. It is composed of chains, a *carparo* sphere, and a water trough of the same material. Whilst the artist himself recalled the sphere to be a decorative element of a gate, the trough finds precise illustrative reference in a photograph in *Storia naturale del Quaternario*

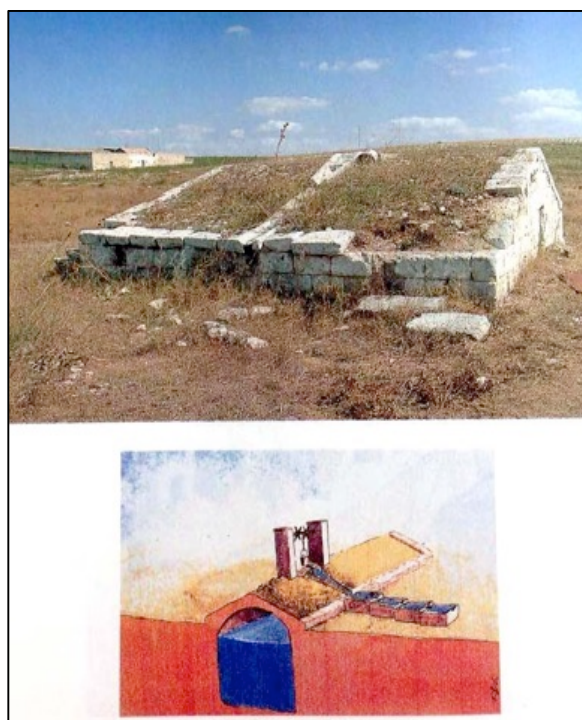
20th April 2017.

⁹⁰ Crispolti, *Paradiso*, 1969.

⁹¹ Paradiso, *Storia naturale del Quaternario*, np.

⁹² Renato Barilli, in Paradiso, *Storia naturale del Quaternario*, np.

[2.31].⁹³ This photograph, published horizontally but nonetheless still legible, documents a row of stone containers and the connected reclined wall, covered by a layer of moss and weeds. This structure is the aboveground part of a subterranean hydraulic system, the *cisterna a tetto* (roof tank). Considered as a form of adaptation to the environment of the Murgia, it was designed with the intention of collecting, preserving and distributing water, and was in use until the end of the eighteenth [2.32].⁹⁴



2.31. Antonio Paradiso, *Paesaggio culturale antropologico*, 1972

2.32. Hydraulic System (*Cisterna a tetto*), after Laureano, 1993

Crispoliti's interpretation of Paradiso's work as using cultural elements of the historical topography of the Murgia Materana influenced the artist's research directions of the following years [2.33-2.36]. On the one hand, the critic associated Paradiso's sculptures with the inhabitants of the Sassi of Matera.⁹⁵ He wrote: 'Quando paradiso mi descrive la dimensione di rapporti, e la dimensione mentale –pienamente autosufficiente- degli abitanti dei Sassi di Matera [...], quando mi fa intravedere con un'ottica non facilmente acquisibile per un "cittadino" tale dimensione, nel suo atavico perpetuarsi perfetta in ogni rapporto, mi sembra d'intravedere anche un'area di contenuti filtrati nella poetica della scultura di Paradiso.'⁹⁶ On the other hand, Crispolti described Paradiso's reused materials as encapsulating a history of *usura umana* (human wear).⁹⁷

⁹³ Paradiso, *Storia naturale del Quaternario*, illustration 14. Paradiso, *Storia naturale del Quaternario*, np.

⁹⁴ Laureano, *Giardini di pietra*, 110-111; 140.

⁹⁵ Crispolti, *Paradiso*, np. Later in 1972, Guido Ballo repurposed this statement (Guido Ballo in Paradiso, *Storia naturale del Quaternario*, np). However, Ballo suggests that his sculptures allude to the mystical culture of the Sassi of Matera.

⁹⁶ The catalogue comprises both an Italian and English version of Crispolti's text, but they are slightly different. Crispolti, *Paradiso*, np.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*



2.33 View of the *Sasso Caveoso* in Matera, 2015



2.34 Villaggio Saraceno (Gravina valley of Matera), 1993



2.35. Masseria Rupestre, Murgia Timone, 1993



2.36. Masseria Radogna, Murgia, 1993

Since Crispolti's 1969 observation, *usura* became central to the artist's practice until the early 1980s, and it was synthetized in Paradiso's self-published catalogue, *Teatro antropologico* (1981).⁹⁸ In Italian, the noun *usura* has two meanings: it means 'usury', the practice of lending money at high rates of interest, and 'wear', in the sense of being destroyed or eroded away through repeated use.⁹⁹ Both acceptations of *usura* presuppose a temporal dimension (respectively, the time span of a loan, and that of the utilisation of an object), and imply a degree of quantitative and qualitative change in the object over time (accumulation of interests, or abrasion of surfaces by use). Paradiso adopted the second meaning of the term, which was first mentioned in the 1974 exhibition catalogue, *Atemporale*.

In his sculptures, Paradiso operated in small scale, using individual elements of the Murgia, by carving or simply assembling stones. Drawing on Duchamp's action of the ready-made, in his mind, he brought the temporal dimension enshrined in the *carparo* surfaces of his sculptures to the gallery space. This conceptual operation of relocation adopted documentary photography and short experimental films (meaningfully titled *Sculture filmate*) when the scale of the cultural elements to be relocated did not allow the artist to transport them to the gallery space.¹⁰⁰ This was the case of the multiple cultural emergences of the Murgia as well as rural rituals as sculptural elements, shaped by natural agents, human actions and culture over centuries that Paradiso presented at the Galleria Toselli (1970) and at the Galleria Diagramma (1973). Tufa quarries, dried stone walls, caves (Sassi in the ravine of Matera), dunes, *masserie* (traditional farms) and the *Festa dell'Orsa*, a traditional festival held in Matera every year in July, were documented by Paradiso as the visual and sculptural expression of the culture of the inhabitants of the Sassi of Matera on the land.

The artist's practice and his attitude can be clarified by comparing one of Paradiso's works, *Paesaggio culturale antropologico - ulivo* (1977), with Penone's *Continuerà a crescere tranne che in quel punto* (1968) discussed earlier. *Paesaggio culturale antropologico* is a later work by the artist compared with the ones that we have discussed so far, and part of a wider series titled *Paesaggio antropologico (Anthropological Landscape)* concluded in 1978 at the Venice Biennale. Presented at the exhibition space of the Art Fair in Bari in 1977, this work consisted of a ready-made, an olive tree, complemented by a series of documentary photographs of over thirty olive trees from Apulia [2.37; 2.38].

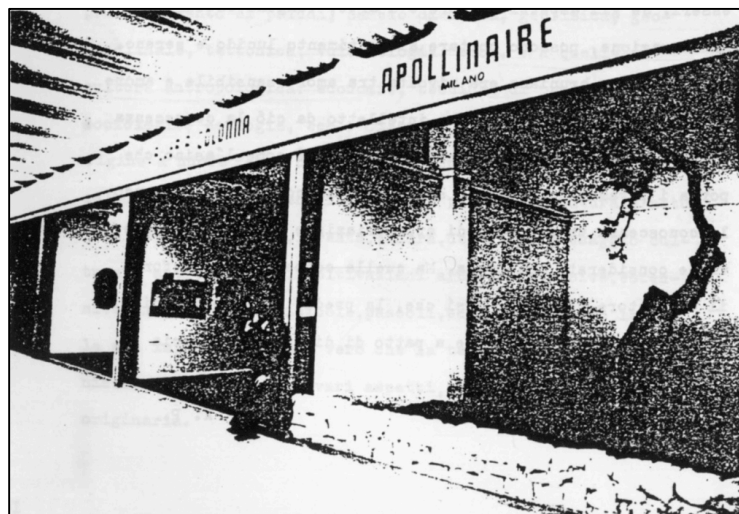
⁹⁸ Paradiso clearly explains the development of his concept of *usura* as the key concept of his artistic practice during the 'Seminario per un' antropologica dell'arte', held at the University of Salerno on April 20th, 1978. Antonio Paradiso, *Teatro antropologico* (Milan: Galleria Apollinaire, 1981), 28.

⁹⁹ Manlio Cortelazzo and Michele A. Cortelazzo, eds. *DELI: Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana* (Bologna : Zanichelli, c1999), 1775.

¹⁰⁰ About the development of Paradiso's short movies, especially the early production, see: Paolo Campiglio, "Pellicola di pietra. Tutti i film di Antonio Paradiso (1969-1979)", in Fondazione Mudima, ed., *Antonio Paradiso* (Milan: Fondazione Mudica, 1994), 66-71.



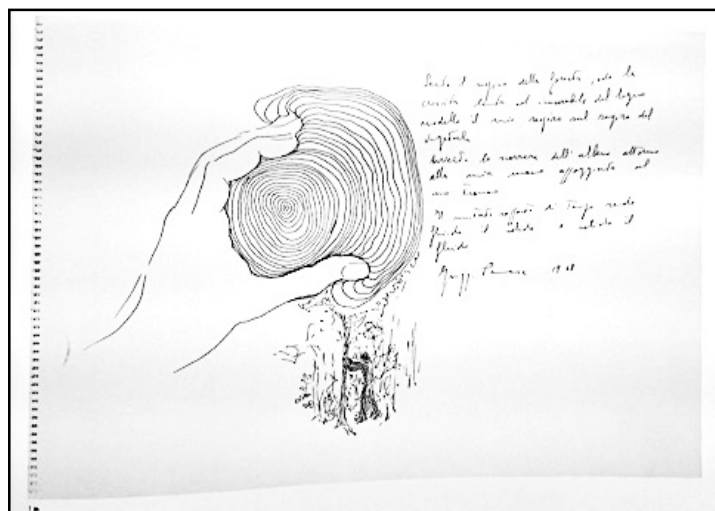
2.37. Antonio Paradiso, *Paesaggio culturale antropologico*, 1977



2.38. Antonio Paradiso, *Paesaggio culturale antropologico*, 1977

Paradiso and Penone shared a critical engagement with earthworks.¹⁰¹ Penone never made direct statements about American land artists, but his writings, which mention interventions in the land, suggest that he had a clear idea in his mind of the works developed in the States. Paradiso was much more explicit. He praised Smithson and De Maria for venturing outside the gallery space, but he considered their work to be action paintings on a large scale. In his judgement emerges a tendency that underestimated the relationship between the art's intervention and its context, a tendency common to other Italian artists at the time.¹⁰² Nonetheless, land art provided a counterpart for Paradiso's practice in and on the land, as it did for Penone.

In *Continuerà a crescere*, Penone himself played the role of the farmer in relation to the trees. Even though Penone shared the 'authorship' of the final sculptural form with the native trees of the Piedmont, he did not renounce the traditional sculptor's demiurgic role of moulding a material. The fluid growth of the tree follows its own rhythm and directions. Yet, he had already envisioned the final, even if potential, result of his 'collaborative' plastic work in his drawings that inspired the work and in the title of the work itself [2.39].



2.39. Giuseppe Penone, *Sento il respiro della foresta...*, 1968

Paradiso's field of interest was the cultural shape that resulted from foliage pruning (forming the traditional 'vase shape'), and the way these activities had shaped olive trees, but not of action. Paradiso exclusively intervened on the olive tree presented at the art fair to reproduce the shape of the olive trees as he had observed in the Murgia and documented in his

¹⁰¹ A relationship between Paradiso's works about the topography of the Murgia and earthworks was remarked by critics. See: Daniela Palazzoli, "Antonio Paradiso", *Domus* 522 (May 1973); Eugen Tienemann and Antonio Paradiso, *Antonio Paradiso: Arte+Antropologia/Antropologia+Arte* (Dortmund: Museum am Ostwall Dortmund, 1975), 9. About earthworks and landscape, see: Suzaa Boettger, *Earthworks. Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

¹⁰² Paradiso, *Atemporale*, np.

photographs.¹⁰³ These trees owed their shapes to the traditional agricultural knowledge of local peasants, and to their efforts to domesticate the tree in the specific environmental conditions of Apulia, and thus they were the embodiment of a culture.¹⁰⁴ These anonymous human agents, their culturally specific efforts, invisible but visible in the actual form of the tree, were what Paradiso wanted to bring to the gallery space, and what he defined as *usura*. Stepping back from his traditional role as sculptor yet without completely denying his plastic vocation, Paradiso equated sculpture with the trace left by natural and human agency on the land. Unlike Penone and the land-artists he mentioned, as an experimental artist, Paradiso saw his role as one of documenting it.

Thus, Paradiso's conceptual operations consist of the relocation of examples of *usura* within the gallery space. They included individual elements of Murgia initially, but encompassed its natural and socio-cultural landscape from 1969 onwards. The two practices, sculptural and conceptual, however, reflect a partially distinct attitude towards their subject. The rural rocky topography of the Murgia, modified over millennia by natural and human intervention and agency, was turned into an artistic sculptural material. Furthermore, the difference between these two practices is a key to understanding the political relevance of Paradiso's conceptual work. As it emerged from his early critical interpretations, Paradiso's early sculptures suggest a symbiosis between the artist and his region. His artistic intervention on each assemblage positioned the artist within the historical continuity of human and natural agency on the stone enshrined in the surface of the cultural item that he had chosen to use. When photography and video making became Paradiso's means to bring plastic and culturally significant objects to the gallery space, his practice established a distance from his personal relationship with his homeland. Paradiso physically distanced himself from the anthropologically-valuable context of the Murgia. In so doing, he symbolically positioned himself outside the cultural dimension of Lucania, whilst still belonging to it. Unlike Penone, Paradiso's landscape did not encapsulate labour as energy, but labour as anthropologically rich traces of an ancient culture. With the support of anthropology, as we will discuss in the next section, the Italian artist found authoritative sources to support the culture of the dwellers of the Sassi (his own culture) in becoming part of the official art world through his practice. The next section will thus explore the way in which Paradiso's conceptual operations about *usura* participated in the contemporary socio-political discourses about the Sassi.

¹⁰³ It is unclear if Paradiso intervened or not on the olive tree presented at the fair. Anna D'Elia admits the artist's intervention in *Antonio Paradiso. Arte + Antropologia - Antropologia + Arte* (Martina Franca: Fondazione Noesi, 2013), 14. Nonetheless, the cultural and anthropologic value of this peculiar element of the landscape, and not the artist's creative operation, what was central to his practice.

¹⁰⁴ See: Paradiso, *Teatro antropologico*, 20.



2.40 – 2.41. Antonio Paradiso, *Photographs of the Murgia Materana*, published in *Storia naturale del Quaternario*, 1972

Sassi as an Alternative

In 1974, Paradiso exhibited his series of fossils collected during an expedition in Magreb, and projected images of his journey at the art space Studio Palazzoli in Milan as part of a new project about the Sahara desert, its archaic population and culture.¹⁰⁵ Until then and particularly since 1969, the artist's production had dealt mainly with cultural aspects of the Murgia Materana. The exhibition *Atemporale* held at the Galleria Diagramma in Milan in 1973 was a milestone in his work on the subject. In the catalogue published a year later, a programmatic text by the artist makes clear his area of investigation, and the perspective from which he was viewing it. For the first time, Paradiso directly references the peasant dwellers of the Sassi of Matera in his writing: 'Ho fatto questo lavoro sulla cultura dei contadini dei sassi di Matera, che è bloccata, monolitica, monocale come il loro abitacolo, la caverna e il loro pensiero sulla natura e sulla terra.'¹⁰⁶ His approach was informed by his interest in the history of *usura*, and by its anthropological orientation.

This was not the first time that the inhabitants of Matera had attracted the interest of artists and intellectuals (among others, Henry Cartier Bresson in 1951-52, and Mario Cresci between 1974 and 1979), or social scientists and anthropologists, whose work appears particularly relevant in the discussion of Paradiso's practice.¹⁰⁷ Following nineteenth-century ideas of urbanism, social engineering and demography, the agrarian and urban laws applied in Matera in the 1950s tackled the *Questione Materana*, briefly outlined in the previous section, as a matter of urban planning and housing. The proposals envisaged the relocation of a number of the Sassi dwellers to modern houses, which were to be built outside the historic centre of the city and closer to the fields [2.41].¹⁰⁸ On the basis of this *legge speciale*, a PRG – Piano Regolatore Generale (General Urban Development Plan) for Matera was signed by the architect Luigi Piccinato one year later, and adopted, although not without resistances from the local DC party, between 1956 and 1959.¹⁰⁹ According to this postwar plan, the design was conceived to relieve its agriculture-based economy by providing a centre, divided between an upper modern town (*Piano*) and a downtown (*Rione Sassi*), and surrounded by peripheral organic neighbourhoods.¹¹⁰ In so doing, the PRG envisaged seven individual units: three *borghi*, or rural villages (*La Martella*, *Venusio* and

¹⁰⁵ Tommaso Trini, "Antonio Paradiso", *Corriere della Sera* (24th September 1974).

¹⁰⁶ Paradiso, *Atemporale*, np.

¹⁰⁷ Albino Sacco mentions Henry Cartier-Bresson's work in Basilicata, in *Matera e Adriano Olivetti*, 49; Mario Cresci, *Misurazioni. Fotografia e territorio. Oggetti, segni e analogie fotografiche in Basilicata* (Matera: Edizioni Meta, 1979).

¹⁰⁸ See: Cesare de Seta, *Città, territorio e Mezzogiorno in Italia* (Turin: Edizioni Einaudi, 1976), x-xi.

¹⁰⁹ The plan was mainly conceived by Ludovico Quaroni. Because the architect was not appreciated by the Government, the plan was later attributed to Luigi Piccinato. See: Albino Sacco, in *Matera e Adriano Olivetti*, 2013, 43. On the controversial circumstances of the PRG, see: Sacco, *Questione Materana*, 1973, 25-26.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

Picciano); a semirural village (*borgo semi-rurale Agna*); and three neighbourhoods (*Serra Venerdi*, *Lanera*, *Spine Bianche*) [2.42].



2.42. View of the *Rione Sassi*, 1950s



2.43. View of *Quartiere Lanera*, 1950s



2.44. View of *Borgo La Martella*, 1950s

Borgo La Martella was the first of the rural villages built around Matera, inaugurated by the Prime Minister De Gasperi on 17th May 1953 [2.44].¹¹¹ It combined Ludovico Quaroni's and Federico Gorio's functionalist architecture, social engineering and postwar populism.¹¹² This rural settlement was designed on the basis of multidisciplinary research into the Sassi and their inhabitants conducted by the *Commissione di studio per la città e l'agro di Matera* (or *Gruppo studi*), financed by the UNRRA-casas (United Nation Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) and promoted by Adriano Olivetti.¹¹³ The project involved an anthropologist (Friedrich Friedmann), an ethnographer (Tullio Tentori), a psychologist (Lidia De Rita), a demography and hygiene specialist (Rocco Mazzone), a geographer (Giuseppe Isnardi), a historian (Francesco Nitti), two urban planners (Federico Gorio and Ludovico Quaroni), and two economists (Giuseppe Orlando and Giuseppe Marselli).¹¹⁴ Paradiso's artistic practice, that since then has been synthesised with the formula *Arte+Antropologia* or with the name *arte antropologica*, encompasses the research interests and the methodology adopted in this first *ad hoc* research in the field of social science.¹¹⁵

In contrast, Paradiso's research on the peasant culture of the Sassi did not focus on the caves, considered as individual or collective residential units and as the quintessential expression of the culture of the local peasant community. The artist opened his research onto a wider body of cultural aspects and signs, these being sculptural (shape modelled on the territory) or performative (rural rituals), beyond the stereotypical association of the local peasants with cave-dwellings. A conspicuous series of black-and-white images of geomorphological formations typical of the Murgia, such as towers of soil distinctively shaped by wind erosion, are followed by still images from the short movie *Percorsi* [2.45;2.46]. In this earlier movie, dry stone walls demarcating consecutive fields, and tufa quarry walls are documented. Including elements of the Murgia, Paradiso widened the understanding of the vernacular culture of the Sassi dwellers. In the choice of the cultural elements, and in their localisation beyond the boundaries of the urban settlement, Paradiso indicates the peasants' socio-economic relationship with their land.

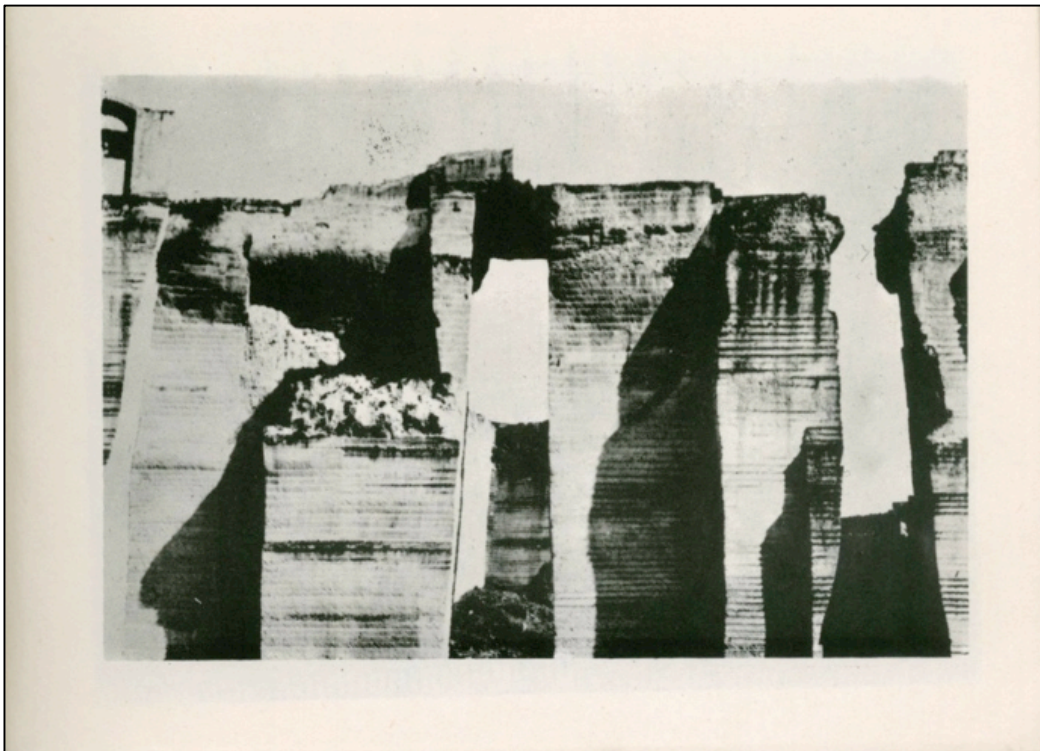
¹¹¹ Francesco Francione, *La Martella*, 19; "Conversation between Friedrich Friedmann and Laura Olivetti", in *Matera e Adriano Olivetti*, 2013, 35.

¹¹² See: Giancarlo de Carlo, "A proposito di La Martella" [1954], in *Matera e Adriano Olivetti*, 147-150; Ettore Vadini, "Laboratorio Matera. La realtà, le utopie urbane e le riflessioni dei progettisti", in *Matera e Adriano Olivetti*, 195-226.

¹¹³ The most recent publication that documents the project is *Matera e Adriano Olivetti*, 2013.

¹¹⁴ See: Federico Bilò, "La luce violenta della realtà" ovvero del metodo antropologico. Il contributo delle scienze sociali nella vicenda di Matera", in *Matera e Adriano Olivetti*, 227-261.

¹¹⁵ Paradiso's retrospective exhibition in Dortmund in 1975 was in fact titled *Arte+Antropologia/Antropologia+Arte*. The same title has been used in the last monographic exhibition about the artist held in Martina Franca in 2013. Since 1978, Paradiso was involved in a series of seminars about *Arte Antropologica*, an artistic practice, which intersected anthropology and ethnology. Discussion on this will continue in the next chapter.



2.45-2.46. Antonio Paradiso, *Sculture filmate*, published in *Atemporale*, 1974

However, *Atemporale* not only comprises culturally meaningful elements of the land. The images that open and close the catalogue refer to magic and religious rituals. The photograph that opens the collection portrays an androgynous woman captured while waving a sickle, an

agricultural tool often used for magic, propitiatory rituals [2.47]. The concluding images in the catalogue portray various elements of the *Festa dell'Orsa* in Matera, a collective feast, ambiguously secular and religious at the same time, traditionally held on July 2nd, and which dates back to the sixteenth century [2.48].



2.47- 2.48. Antonio Paradiso, *Sculture filmate* (left) and *Sacro e Profano* (right), 1974

By including these traditional customs in his work, Paradiso confronted the new trends of the Italian tradition of folklore studies, with emergent interests in cultural anthropology.¹¹⁶ In particular, the artist followed the legacy of the philosopher, historian of religion and ethnographer Ernesto De Martino (1908-1965). Shifting from an education within the idealist tradition of Benedetto Croce to an approach imbued by Antonio Gramsci, Ernesto de Martino dedicated most of his career to the study of the southern Italian peasant culture, with a focus on collective rituals and magic.¹¹⁷ Influenced by the reading of Gramsci as were many other anthropologists at the time, De Martino conceived his historical ethnology methodology, which consisted of the broadening of the historiographical horizon of the anthropological discipline for an 'expanded humanism'.¹¹⁸

In his artistic practice, Paradiso partially shared De Martino's anthropological field of interest, his approach to the anthropological discipline, and political stand. In addition to the rituals included in *Atemporale*, between 1973 and 1981, Paradiso developed video and photographic works on tarantism, magic and funeral rituals, which De Martino had tackled respectively in his *La Terra del rimorso* (1961), *Il mondo magico: Prolegomeni a una storia del magismo* (1949), *Sud e magia* (1959), and *Morte e pianto rituale. Dal lamento funebre al pianto di Maria* (1958). Other professionals in the field of visual production had been working on these

¹¹⁶ Alberto Mario Cirese, "Folklore in Italy: A Historical and Systematic Profile and Bibliography", *Journal of Folklore Institute* (Jun.-Aug., 1974), 36-40; 57-58.

¹¹⁷ See: Clara Gallini, ed., "Ernesto de Martino. La ricerca e i suoi percorsi", special issue, *La Ricerca folklorica* 13 (1986), 1-158.

¹¹⁸ Cirese, "Folklore in Italy", 39.

themes: Franco Pinna, Arturo Zavattini, Ando Gilardi are only just a few of the photographers, whose work complemented or followed De Martino's research on southern Italian rituals [2.49].¹¹⁹



2.49. Franco Pinna, in Ernesto de Martino, *La Terra del Rimorso*, 1961

Unlike these visual practitioners and staged images, Paradiso never attempted documentary photography and video making *per se*. Over time, Paradiso developed a practice that demonstrates self-awareness of the artist's point of view in relation to the object of his observation, and of the limits of anthropological documentation. In so doing, the artist comes to resonate with De Martino, who is considered to have anticipated a shift towards heightened critical reflection about the relationship of observer and observed in the fields of cultural anthropology.¹²⁰

After his first exhibition at Toselli in 1970, the relationship between anthropological content and visual materials in Paradiso's work strived to be more sophisticated, by creating a critical distance between the object of investigation (the ritual, the cultural object) and the means of its documentation. His research about the *taranta*, a form of social hysteria cured with pseudo-religious musical ritual, reflects this approach.¹²¹ It resulted in both an experimental movie (*Teatro antropologico*, presented at the Venice Biennale in 1978), using the artist's footage of the ritual, but editing it to suggest a symbolic and provocative meaning, and in an experimental participatory theatrical piece of the same name proposed at the artist-run space LCM -

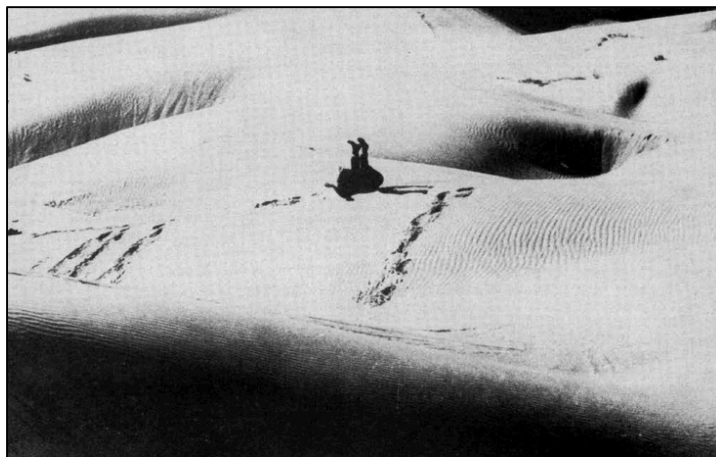
¹¹⁹ Ferdinando Mirizzi, ed. *Da vicino e da lontano. Fotografi e fotografia in Lucania* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010); Clara Gallini and Francesco Faeta, *I viaggi nel sud di Ernesto De Martino* (Bollati Boringhieri, 1999); Francesco Faeta, *Nelle Indie di quaggiù. Fotografie (1975-1995)*. (Milan: Jaca Book 1996); Francesco Faeta, *Arturo Zavattini. Fotografo in Lucania* (Milan: Federico Motta Editore, 2003).

¹²⁰ Gallini, "Presentazione", in Ernesto De Martino, *La terra del rimorso* [1961] (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008), 21-22.

¹²¹ Ernesto De Martino dedicated his study *Terra del rimorso* (1961) to this phenomenon, which still remain the most accomplished work on the topic.

Laboratorio di Comunicazione Militante in Milan in 1978.¹²² In this way, the point of view of the artist was not dissimulated, but made explicit in the construction of a statement through the images.

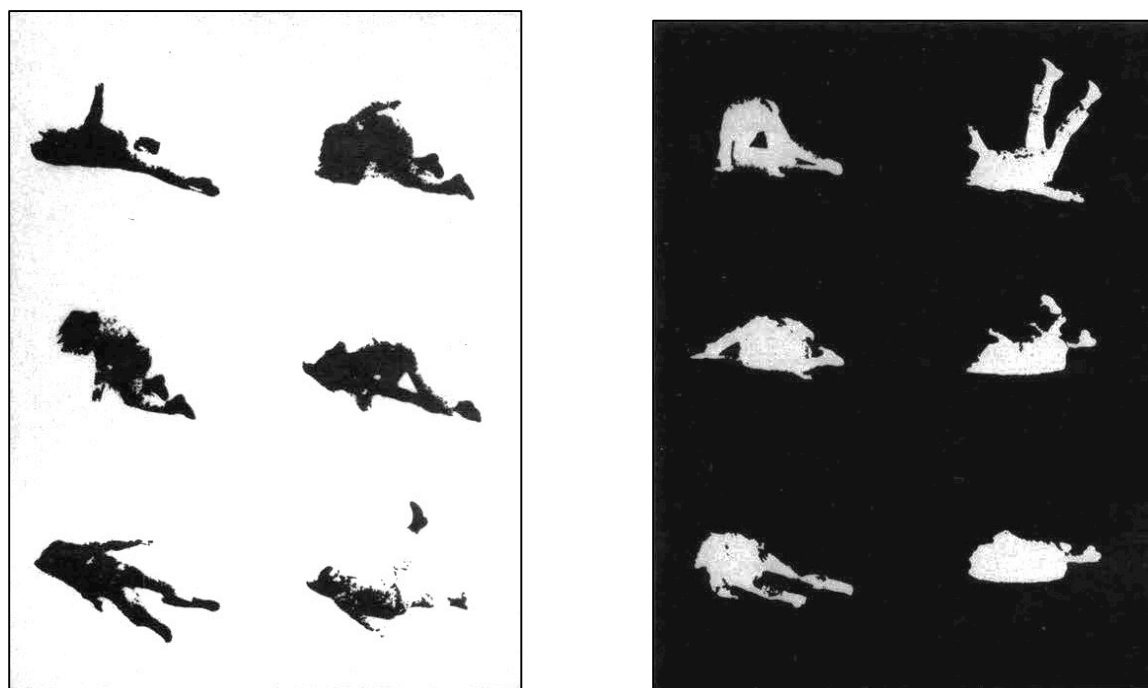
If, in this specific work about the *tarantati*, the detachment from the anthropological contents is taken to its extreme consequence, in the early phases of the artist's work it is a reflection about the representational limits of images. In the catalogue *Atemporale*, he instead included a series of images that elaborate on the idea of de-contextualisation, both temporal and spatial. Applying an excessive exposure to the images, the artist obtains a series of anonymous figures whose movement is blocked, whilst floating on a uniform surface resulting from the annihilation of the original background [2.50; 2.51; 2.52]. Anna Maria Cattaneo commented on the images by saying that 'l'assenza del corpo, il suo essere e non essere sempre in riferimento a una realtà concreta e percepibile è qui annullato da questo essere tramite la macchina che, estremizzando l'estensione visiva, si allontana dall'oggetto guardato fino a trasformarlo da esistenza di vita ad esistenza di stampa.'¹²³ Through this operation, the artist reflects on the process of image making, and gives visual evidence to the distorting potential of images. The lack of references to time and place in his synthetic over-exposure images deflect the viewer's attention from the anthropological subject of the movie. In so doing, they reveal the artificiality of the operation of documenting itself. Associating this series with his own photographs of anthropologic subject matter, Paradiso therefore suggests a critical approach towards the efficacy of documentary anthropological visual materials, distanced himself from this same operation. Simultaneously, through these images the artist expressed his criticism towards the erasure of signs of history with the advent of modern urbanisation and new technologies.



2.50 Paradiso, images from the series *Atemporale*, 1974

¹²² Elisabetta Longanesi reports that Paradiso participated in the Laboratorio: Elisabetta Longanesi, "Chiamata collettiva. Per una storia dell'arte sociale a Milano", in Casero and Di Raddo, *L'arte dell'impegno*, 67. About LCM, see: Laboratorio di Comunicazione Militante, ed., *L'arma dell'immagine: esperimenti di animazione sulla comunicazione visiva*. Milan: Mazzotta, 1977.

¹²³ Anna Maria Cattaneo, "Antonio Paradiso: *corpo faber e corpo ludens* e la loro dialettica con le mediazioni meccaniche: fotografia e cinema", *Data* (1974): 96-97.



2.51 -2.52. Paradiso, images from the series *Atemporale*, 1974

Paradiso's images engage with stereotypes attributed to the Sassi, and more generally associated with the southern Italian peasant culture. The degree of criticality in his documentary images was instrumental in making these stereotypes apparent. Anthropologists as well as Italian intellectuals have constructed an image of the southern peasants since the unification of the country.¹²⁴ According to the recent postcolonial interpretation of discourse, the South was colonised by and its idea constructed in relation to the North, and without the acknowledgment of its cultural, socio-economic and political specificity of the area.¹²⁵ In the postwar period, as studied by Maria Minicuci, anthropologists have pictured the South to be amoral and corrupted, as well as rural and remote, underdeveloped and poor - few studies were dedicated to its cities, or on the effects of industrialisation as in other part of the country.¹²⁶ These stereotypes had already

¹²⁴ Giovanna Griabaudi, "The Mezzogiorno as Seen by Insiders and Outsiders", in *The New History of the Italian South: the Mezzogiorno Revisited*, eds. Robert Lumley and Johnatan Morris (Exeter: University of Exeter Press 1997), 83-113.

¹²⁵ The Southern Question, that could be generally defined as differences between the North and the South of the country emerged after the unification, has been recently reframed as the process of construction of regional diversity, within the process of construction the Italian national identity. Literature on the *Southern Question* and its postcolonial interpretation is extensive, and it is not the aim of this Chapter to provide an overview of this debates. An essential bibliography on the *Southern Question* and on Italian postcolonial studies, comprises: Nelson Moe, "Altroché Italia: Il Sud dei Piemontesi (1860-1861)", *Meridiana* (September 1992): 53-89; Pasquale Verdicchio, "The Preclusion of Postcolonial Discourse in Southern Italy", in *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*, eds Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (Minnesota university press, 1997), 191-212; Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy's "Southern Question". Orientalism in One Country*. (Oxford - New York: Berg, 1998); Derek Duncan and Jaqueline Andall, eds., *National Belongings: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Cultures* (Oxford ; New York : Peter Lang, c2010); Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds. *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York, NY : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹²⁶ Maria Minicuci, "Antropologi e Mezzogiorno", *Meridiana*, n. 47/48 (2003): 139-174.

been denounced by anthropologist Mario Alberto Cirese in 1958: 'Dobbiamo naturalmente contestare la legittimità di una concezione che collochi i contadini del Sud e il mondo ideologico fuori dalla storia e dalla civiltà moderna e la concezione di una storia interamente a sé, di un livello etnologico, cioè delle popolazioni contadine locali.'¹²⁷ Similarly, De Martino was against the mythologizing of peasant world.¹²⁸

Ancientness and timelessness were characteristics associated, explicitly or implicitly, with the culture of the inhabitants of the Sassi as well. Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Vangelo Secondo Matteo*, screened in Milan in October 1964, appears to have contributed to reinforcing this association, albeit with a positive connotation [2.51].



2.53. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (still), 1964

Even though previous movies had evoked the Basilicata as in the case of *Luchino Visconti's Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1960), the visual appearance of topography of the region was mainly known through Carlo Levi's descriptions in *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli*.¹²⁹ It was on September 2nd 1964, with Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo* at the Film Festival in Venice, that Levi's words found a powerful visual counterpart in the Italian public imagery [2.53].¹³⁰ The *Vangelo* divided left-wing intellectuals, who addressed the incompatibility of Pasolini's Marxism with the religious theme of his movie, which was awarded of the *Gran Premio dall'Ufficio Cattolico del Cinema*.¹³¹ Pasolini's movie was not about Matera and the surrounding landscape.¹³² Nonetheless,

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Attilio Coco, *Sguardi d'autore. Visioni ed immagini cinematografiche della Basilicata* (Possidente di Avigliano: Pianetalibro, 2001); Emiliano Morreale, "Il "Cristo" mancato. Note sull'immagine cinematografica della Lucania", *Meridiana* 53 (2005): 218-220.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹³¹ The relationship between Pasolini and Matera has been widely documented in the exhibition *Pasolini a Matera. Il Vangelo secondo Matteo cinquant'anni dopo*, held in Matera (Museo Nazionale d'Arte Medievale e Moderna di Palazzo

the choice of the city and its surroundings as the main setting of the narrative of the Gospel, historic but yet mystical and mythical, projected the contemporary topography of the Murgia Materana in a temporal meta-historical dimension of ancientness.¹³³ After visiting the Holy Land and Assisi in 1963, Pasolini preferred the southern Italian area to the original context of Jesus's narrative. 'Troppe ciminiere, troppi guasti alle case [in quella terra che una volta era Galilea]' commented Pasolini himself when interviewed at the Festival by Angelo Falvo from the *Corriere della Sera*, and continued: 'E le stesse persone non hanno più le facce che ci vogliono.'¹³⁴ The pre-industrial topography of Lucania and its inhabitants belonged to another time: they were stuck in a past that excluded signs of modernity, and their culture was conceived as immutable, both ancient and unchanging.¹³⁵

This idea of timelessness associated with the South appears especially relevant in the case of Paradiso's work, as the exhibition dedicated to the Sassi's culture, *Atemporale (atemporal)*, suggests. Its title implies a suspension of temporality, and resonates with, on the one hand, the stereotypical connotation attributed to the southern peasant culture, and, on the other hand, with the exclusion of a temporal dimension in Paradiso's images.

Like Pasolini, in Paradiso's *Atemporale*, ancientness and archaism are features of the culture of the Sassi's peasants and of their dwellings: 'Ci sono case [Sassi] di un milione di anni fa,' the artist underlined in the exhibition catalogue.¹³⁶ If the stereotypes attributed to South denied peasants and their culture a part in official history, Paradiso provided a framework in which they could acquire one. Drawing on his expanded understanding of landscape as a sculptural material fashioned by both nature and humans, he projected their century-old dwelling in the geological history of their native land. He did so by applying his *Geologia culturale* methodology, an ecological approach to the study of the land that blurred disciplinary boundaries and moved beyond the dichotomy of the humanities and science [2.54].¹³⁷ From this perspective, Paradiso provided both a geological and an archaeological timescale, against which the culture of the peasants of the Sassi could be measured. This methodology found its visual expression in 1975, in his solo exhibition in Dortmund (as well as in his 1977 exhibition in Milan, at the Galleria Apollinaire), when Paradiso's photographic and video documentation of the Murgia Materana and his sculpture were accompanied with diagrams of temporal scales [2.55]. In the catalogue, hand-drawn graphs that detail geological and archaeological eras and the respective flora and fauna variations and climatic fluctuations accompany reproductions of his works. In this way, the

Lanfranchi) between 21st July 2014 and 30th April 2015. A catalogue of the exhibition has not been published.

¹³²Alberto Sala, *Corriere della Sera* (29-30 October 1964):13.

¹³³Similar point is made by Biondillo, *Pasolini*, 74-76.

¹³⁴ Angelo Falvo, "Betlemme con ciminiere", *Corriere della Sera* (5th September 1964): 11.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹³⁶ Paradiso, *Atemporale*, np.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

persistence over time and for his temporal relevance. In Paradiso's work, the geological ancientness of this culture acquires the meaning of resistance against the past hegemonic cultural systems, and to the present, capitalist one, because this civilisation 'è rimasta invicibile col passaggio di tutte le civiltà nel tempo'.¹³⁹ In other words, while Pasolini considers the southern peasants' ancientness as something that will soon be swept away by modernisation, Paradiso considers the southern peasants as a socio-cultural body that have actively resisted modernisation over centuries.

The Sassi's peasants are not only an example of cultural resistance that occurred in the past. In the context of spreading *speculazione edilizia* and of the final phases of the relocation of the Sassi's dwellers in Matera, parallel in time to the protests for affordable social-housing in Milan, the culture they embodied was a model of living that appeared to offer an alternative to the dominant 'mist of competition' of contemporary society.¹⁴⁰ Unlike the contemporary mainstream debates that tried to preserve the Sassi as a touristic attraction, Paradiso supported the locals' right to use the Sassi as dwellings. The artist found positive values in the civilisation these domestic spaces carved in the rock embodied. It was a culture based on usefulness and necessity: here 'dove tutto l'inutile non ha senso, dove il sofismo non ha significato, dove tutto quello che si fa ha uno scopo funzionale ed etico, mai estetico'.¹⁴¹

In addition, he discerned a proto-ecological dimension to their settlement, thus refining his idea of *usura* in terms of utilitarian and necessity-based relationship with the environment. The artist celebrated the Sassi for being the product of a culture that relies on natural cycles, rather than on wealth, ideas that also found distinctive expression in the contemporary works of Claudio Costa and Superstudio, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.¹⁴² Paradiso endorsed the culture of the Sassi as a positive alternative to the contemporary capitalist and consumerist culture: 'questo gruppo etnico non ha niente a che fare con la città e l'uomo moderno' he wrote in *Atemporale*.¹⁴³ In so doing, the artist was not trying to solve the issue of the Sassi and of their inhabitants, whose customs had slowly become erased by the gradual abandonment and the recent urbanisation of the city.¹⁴⁴ With his conceptual practice, Paradiso aimed at rehabilitating their peasant culture, whose history was enshrined in the surrounding topography of Matera and in the traditional rituals.

¹³⁹ Paradiso, *Atemporale*, np.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* About the *speculazione edilizia* in Matera, see: "Matera era la città che aveva resistito assai meglio di tante altre in Italia all'attacco della speculazione"; "poi le cose sono iniziate a cambiare, in peggio", Sacco, *Questione materana*, 25; the Right to housing will be discussed in relation to Ugo La Pietra's work in chapter 4.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Paradiso, *Atemporale*, np.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ In the text of the 1977 *Situazione antropologica: Dall'uomo al paesaggio*, the direct reference to the Sassi di Matera and the socio-political issue, disappeared. Paradiso's interest in anthropology appears to have detached his practice from the more relevant contemporary issues.

Paradiso's sculptures and anthropological investigation of the land of Matera and the Sassi's culture appear to promote a reactionary position towards modernity, when compared to Celant's Arte Povera. Crossing boundaries between different artistic fields, the artists connected to Arte Povera used urban debris (such as Pascali's *Campi arati*), new industrial materials (such as Gilardi's polyurethane foam *Tappeti natura*) and organic matter (such as Giuseppe Penone's use of plants) to create ephemeral installations, sculptural objects and process art installations. However, Paradiso's 1970s practice was not categorically a denial of the values of modernity. In the contemporary circumstances of Matera, his work was an attempt to support a subaltern culture with the potential to be an alternative to the hegemonic socio-economic capitalist system. In his work, the landscape of the Murgia acquires a sculptural value, and the cultural history of its inhabitants an ecological dimension. In his *Sculture filmate*, the land acquires the potential for becoming a collective sculpture, a form of ecologically-valuable collective work of art that, in a way that was similar to what Pasolini did in his 1975 documentary about the traditional city *La forma della città*, the artist brought to the gallery space through his conceptual operations.

Both Penone and Paradiso engaged with their native land. Even though engaging in a different way with the cultural history enshrined in it, both artists considered the tie between the local dwellers and their land as a physical, sculptural one. The next chapter will instead explore the way in which this tie was sublimated in Maria Lai's community-based artistic operation.



3.1. Maria Lai, *La frana*, 2002

Chapter Three

The Mountain, the Ribbon and Maria Lai's Knots

A Ersilia, per stabilire i rapporti che reggono la vita della città, gli abitanti tendono dei fili fra gli spigoli delle case, bianchi o neri o grigi o bianco-e-neri a seconda se segnano relazioni di parentela, scambio, autorità, rappresentanza. Quando i fili sono tanti che non ci si può passare in mezzo, gli abitanti vanno via: le case vengono smontate; restano soltanto i fili e i sostegni dei fili.¹

Ersilia is one of the over fifty-five cities that Italo Calvino describes in *Le città invisibili*. Named after the legendary wife of Romolo, the first king of Rome, who was remembered for her diplomacy, Ersilia belongs to one of the five categories in which the descriptions of cities are organised, that of *Città e gli scambi*.² Ersilia is one of the most accomplished images of lightness and weightlessness in the whole book, together with Octavia, Bauci, Leandra, and Melania, as Calvino himself explains.³ Lightness is critical to the author's poetics: 'la letteratura come funzione esistenziale, la ricerca della leggerezza come reazione al peso del vivere,' as he explicitly stated in his lecture series, *Lezioni americane*.⁴ Lightness reflects Calvino's positive literary attitude against the chaotic and labyrinthine complexity of reality.⁵ This same poetics is adopted to envision the city of the present and the future, among which is Ersilia, the nomadic city, consisting of nothing but the relationship between its inhabitants.⁶

Less than ten years after Calvino wrote *Le città invisibili*, Maria Lai created an installation and performance called *Legarsi alla montagna (To be Tied to the Mountain or Connecting to the Mountain)*, which could be seen as the visual counterpart to Calvino's short story, as Lorenzo Giusti recently noted.⁷ More broadly, it also presents a similar idea of lightness as the embodiment of an ethical, artistic outlook. Lai's intervention took place at the beginning of September 1981, on the occasion of a local festivity dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the small village of Ulassai in Sardinia. With the participation of the entire local community, the artist temporarily made the relational fabric of Ulassai visible, by running

¹ Calvino, *Città invisibili*, 76.

² The Classical world was one of Calvino's sources for the name of his *Cities*. Barenghi, *Calvino*, 259.

³ Italo Calvino, "On Invisible cities", *Columbia: a journal on literature and art*, 40 (October 2004): 182; Letizia Modena. Modena, *Architecture of Lightness*, 155.

⁴ Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), 33.

⁵ Lucia Re, "Calvino and the Value of Literature", *MLN*, Vol. 113, No. 1, "Italian Issue" (Jan., 1998): 121-137.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19; 131-184; Modena, *Architecture of Lightness*, 106.

⁷ Anna Maria Montaldo, Lorenzo Giusti, and Barbara Casavecchia, eds., *Maria Lai. Ricucire il mondo*. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2014), 137.

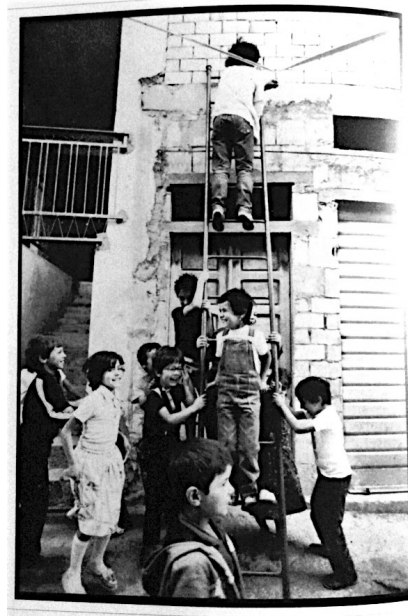
twenty-six kilometres of blue ribbon from house to house. Each length of the ribbon was decorated according to the existing relationship between the family living at the two extremes of the thread, in a similar way to what Calvino imagined for Ersilia. Unlike Ersilia, however, Lai's ribbon did not just connect different buildings. The blue ribbon in *Legarsi alla montagna* linked three fundamental aspects of Lai's operation: the local community, the artist's poetics, and the mountain overlooking Ulassai.

This Chapter discusses the way in which Lai monumentalised the community-land relationship in her performance, in order to make a memorial about and for the community of Ulassai. Gianni Berengo Gardin defined *Legarsi alla montagna* in Bakhtinian terms, as a 'festa come opera d'arte', meaning the shift of the festival from the popular to the cultural realm of high art.⁸ This chapter assumes that the traditional religious celebration was instead a means for Lai's artwork to be created, and the space where the negotiation between the locals and the artist could take the shape of the artistic intervention, as conceived by Lai. It discusses the way in which *Legarsi alla montagna* responded to instances of cultural decentralisation, a position supported already in 1981 by Berengo Gardin.⁹ Only recently, Emanuela De Cecco proposed a reading of Lai's work from a post-colonial perspective.¹⁰ Together with the isolation of Lai as a woman artist, the artist's relationship with her teacher, Arturo Martini, is central to De Cecco's understanding of Lai's attitude towards her own gender and Sardinian cultural heritage. This chapter measures Lai's work against earlier experiences of audience participation, known in Italy as *Arte nel territorio*, in order to discern the cultural components that constitute Lai's view on the relationship between the community of Ulassai and the surrounding topography, and to redefine the political standpoint of the work. In *Legarsi alla montagna*, the conflicts within the local community dissolve in Lai's poetic image of lightness, which becomes a statement about the positive value of art.

⁸ Gianni Berengo Gardin and Luciana Finelli, "Ulassai 1981: Festa come opera d'arte" *Storia della città* 21/22 (1981-1982): 111-132.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁰ Emanuela De Cecco, *Maria Lai. Da vicino, vicinissimo, da lontano, in assenza* (Milan: Postmedia, 2015).



3.2-3.4. Maria Lai, *Legarsi alla montagna*, 1981



3.5. Maria Lai, *Legarsi alla montagna*, 1981 (procession)

Poetry as a Monument

Ulassai is a rather remote rural village in the Ogliastra region of the isle of Sardinia, and it was here, early one morning in September 1981, that the loud noise of a rocket set all its inhabitants into action.¹¹ The rocket was the signal that marked the start of Maria Lai's collective performance and installation *Legarsi alla montagna*. Trained in Venice under the supervision of the modernist sculptor Arturo Martini in the early 1940s, the artist was commissioned in 1979 to create a war memorial by the Council of Ulassai, her hometown.¹² At the time, she was enjoying recognition for her neo-avant-garde artworks. Sceptical about the idea of a war memorial, she proposed *Legarsi alla montagna*, a work that aspired to make history, instead of commemorating the official one. Not without initial resistance, the event took place two years later.

Despite strong initial suspicion towards the project, the artist recalls that all the families in the village agreed to take part in the collective action. *Ulassesi* (this is the Italian word for the inhabitants of Ulassai) of different generations collaborated in running a blue ribbon from house to house, as documented by the photographer Gianni Berengo Gardin and the artist Tonino Casula [3.2 - 3.4].¹³ This 'operation', as the artist called her collaborations, took place on the first morning of a three-day long festivity dedicated to the Virgin. Later in the day, several of the dwellers in their best traditional dress were to take part in a procession, where the statue of Mary was wrapped up in the blue ribbon [3.5]. The most spectacular moment of the whole event was the finale, as Lai herself recalls. Three professional climbers from Cagliari, the main city in the region, climbed up the eighty-metre mountain peak that overlooks the village.¹⁴ Leaving the community breathless for over two hours, they finally connected bundles of the blue ribbon to the mountaintop.¹⁵

Lai's work is now well established in the literature about Italian public art and socially engaged art practices.¹⁶ However, at the time *Legarsi alla montagna* received little critical attention in the art world. In the context of a generalised withdrawal from the public sphere in favour of studio-based and more traditional art practices, the work came at the

¹¹ Maria Lai, "Legarsi alla montagna. Ulassai 1981", in *Ulassai: da Legarsi alla montagna alla Stazione dell'Arte*, ed. Angela Grilletti Migliavacca (Cagliari: AD per Fondazione Stazione dell'arte, 2006), 30.

¹² *Ibid.*, 23-24. The way in which Lai's work is indebted to Arturo Martini is discussed in Maria Luisa Frongia, "Maria Lai: Filogenesi di una ricerca innovativa", in Casavecchia, Giusti, Montaldo, *Ricucire il mondo*, 102-130.

¹³ Gianni Berengo Gardin published his photographs in Italian journal *Storia della città*. See: Berengo Gardin and Finelli, "Ulassai 1981", 111-132. Tonino Casula's movie is available online. See:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rVoN64Fz-o>, last accessed on 3rd November 2016.

¹⁴ Lai, "Ulassai 1981", 30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Lai's work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale (Padiglione dello spazio comune) and in Documenta 14 (EMST - National Museum of Contemporary Arts, Athens) in 2017.

tail end of the participatory practices that pervaded the Italian art scene during the 1970s.¹⁷ One exception to the critics' silence was a 1981 double review by Gianni Berengo Gardin and Luciana Finelli published in *Storia della Città*, an Italian international journal focusing on urban and topographic history.¹⁸ The interpretations provided by the two authors initiated the prevalent socio-political reception of the work. They provided the points of reference for a discussion about *Legarsi alla montagna's* monumental appeal and its function as a memorial. Analysing Lai's work in relation with previous experiences of audience participation in Italy, this section discusses the way in which this artistic operation functioned as a monumental intervention that wove together Lai's poetics, and the locals' collective memory.

Gardin's and Finelli's interpretations of *Legarsi alla montagna* reflected motives which are indebted to architectural and artistic experiences of audience participation in urban public space during the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁹ In one of her few texts dedicated to this work, published in the early 2000s, Maria Lai distanced herself from these same practices and approaches, but in so doing she implied that she had to confront them first. She declared: 'Questa operazione non ha trovato i termini giusti per definirsi, anche se ha analogie con altri avvenimenti in campo estetico. Le Performance e le Operazioni sul Territorio degli anni Sessanta e Settanta avevano lavorato sull'effimero e coinvolto spazi inconsueti per l'arte, ma restavano sempre opere personali dell'autore.'²⁰ The theoretical and curatorial works of the Roman critic and historian Enrico Crispolti (b. 1935) were the most articulate expressions of this that she could think of from the time. Indeed, Crispolti's curatorial works are still considered crucial for understanding the conceptualisation of 1970s public art in the urban space.²¹

In his 1977 *Arte visiva e partecipazione sociale*, Crispolti attempted to give an account and to make sense of heterogeneous artistic practices, which, in a similar way to Lai's *Legarsi alla montagna* in 1981, had been unfolding outside galleries in the public space of peripheral towns, and were engaging with their audiences.²² As the critic himself

¹⁷ A book about this topic, titled *Città e territorio come campo (City and territory as a field)*, by Enrico Crispolti was to be published in 1978. Enrico Crispolti, *Extra Media: esperienze attuali di comunicazione estetica* (Turin: Studio Forma, 1978), 27.

¹⁸ Berengo Gardin, and Finelli, "Festa come opera d'arte", 111-132.

¹⁹ *Legarsi alla montagna* has been Alessandra Pioselli's object of study. See: Alessandra Pioselli, "Arte e scena urbana. Modelli di intervento e politiche culturali pubbliche in Italia tra 1968 e 1981", in *Arte pubblica nello spazio urbano. L'esperienza italiana dal 1968 ad oggi*, eds. Birozzi and Marina Pugliese (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2007), 20-35, and Alessandra Pioselli, *Arte nello spazio pubblico* (Monza: Johan and Levi Editore, 2015), 103-104.

²⁰ Lai, "Ulassai", 23. Although negotiated with locals, the final appearance of the installation was nonetheless conceived by the artist, and not community-led.

²¹ See the studies mentioned in the introduction by Birozzi and Pugliese (2007) Guida (2013), and Pioselli (2015).

²² Enrico Crispolti, *Arti visive e partecipazione sociale* (Bari: De donato, 1977).

underlines, these 1970s artistic events flourished in a peculiar political climate, one in which there was a wider request for participation in public decision-making processes.²³ In the critic's vision at the time, the aim of these heterogeneous artistic practices was one of enlarging the social (and thus cultural) base of cultural production and management.²⁴ Crispolti's Italian Pavilion at the 1976 Venice Biennale *Arte come ambiente* (Art as Environment) was a synthesis of the artworks and art projects which were developed during this crucial moment of social and cultural ferment.²⁵ The first and best documented of Crispolti's experiences in this field is *Volterra '73*.

Volterra'73 was a temporary outdoor sculpture festival. It involved over fifteen visual artists, who each intervened in the public space of Volterra, a medieval town in Tuscany.²⁶ The festival has been associated with a kind of art event popular in Italy at the time. Analogous events for instance had been run across Italy, in Spoleto, Parma, and Fano.²⁷ They functioned both as a tourist attraction for the local municipalities, and, for the artists, as an occasion to create new works and experiment with the integration of modern sculpture into the historic fabric of city centres.²⁸

Unlike the event in Volterra, *Legarsi alla montagna* did not stand on its own feet as an art event, but was woven into an annual religious festival. Despite this crucial difference, aspects of *Volterra'73* are relevant to my discussion of Lai's *Legarsi alla montagna*, which focuses on two distinct but correlated aspects shared by her work in Ulassai: strategies of public engagement, and intervention in the space of the street. Both the art festival in *Volterra'73* and the religious festivity in which *Legarsi alla montagna* was included were preceded by a preparatory phase. During this period, the artists laid out their public engagement strategies.

The locals' participation process in *Volterra '73* was an attempt to empower locals and compel them to participate in the production of culture, and to involve them in the decision-making processes relating to the common spaces of the town. Supported by the local Council, formal meetings and public debates were organised regularly during the

²³ *Ibid.*, 7-12

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-16.

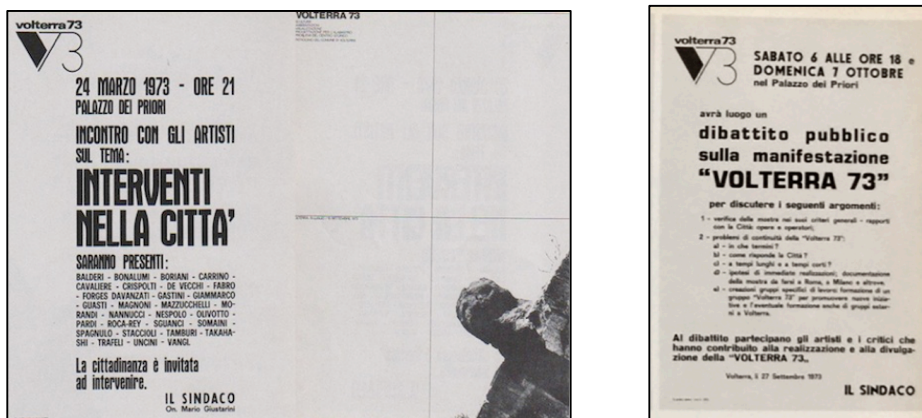
²⁵ La Biennale di Venezia, ed., *La Biennale di Venezia 1976: ambiente, partecipazione, strutture culturali: catalogo generale* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, c1976), 106-113.

²⁶ Enrico Crispolti, *Volterra'73: sculture, ambientazioni, visualizzazioni, progettazione per l'alabastro. Volterra, 15 luglio-15 settembre 1973. Delibera e dibattiti, documenti di apertura, opere, risposte e riflessioni, dizionario bibliografico degli operatori*. (Firenze: Centro Di, 1974). See also: Crispolti, *Arti visive e partecipazione sociale*, 45-56.

²⁷ Pioselli, *L'Arte nello spazio urbano*, 73-78.

²⁸ Celant was very critical of these events, especially summer sculptural festivals, which he considered touristic attractions. He suggested to invest the funds for these events in long-term educational projects. Germano Celant, "Arte turistica", *Casabella* 342 (1969):7.

months preceding the event; these were recorded, and later published in the catalogue.²⁹ Crispolti, the curator, and the sculptor Alik Cavaliere were the most prominent figures, but every element of the event involved collective discussion and decision. Several artists also organised public presentations and discussion events about their individual works [3.6-3.7]. These debates and their democratic premises informed the programme of *Volterra '73*, marking the difference – at least theoretically – between this event and previous festivals of a similar nature.



3.6–3.7. Poster used to promote public gatherings in *Volterra '73*

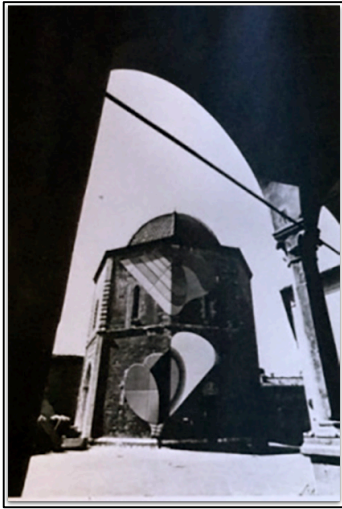


3.8. Still image from Tonino Casula's Documentary video of *Legarsi alla montagna*, 1981 (Video Documentary)

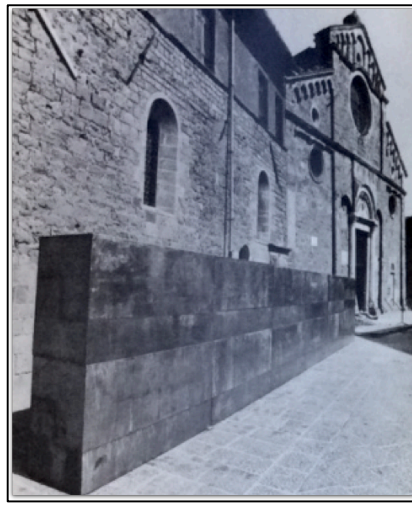
Lai's approach to local involvement was marked by a substantially different attitude. It was intimate and discreet. It was based on word of mouth and mutual friendship [3.8]. When Lai started her project, she had been away from Ulassai for a long time. With the mediation of her cousin, she spent her preliminary research period having one-to-one

²⁹ See the section *Delibere e dibattiti (Deliberations and debates)* for documentation of these participatory processes of the event which follows the introduction in dedicate catalogue: Crispolti, "Delibere e dibattiti", in *Volterra '73*, np.

conversations with the locals, slowly weaving personal relationships based on trust and curiosity.³⁰ Moving beyond the doorstep, she entered the intimacy of the families' homes, if not physically, then at least metaphorically.



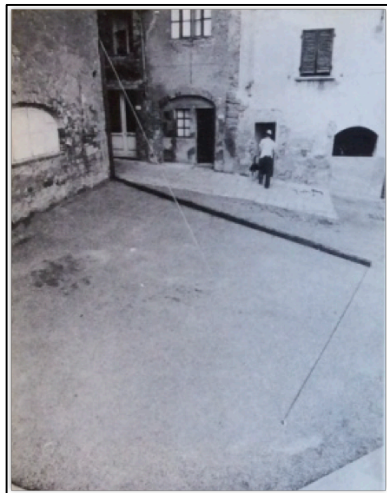
3.09. Shu Takahashi, *Untitled*, 1973



3.10. Nicola Carrino, *Costruttivo 1/71 B*, 1973



3.11. Maurizio Staccoli, *Untitled*, 1973

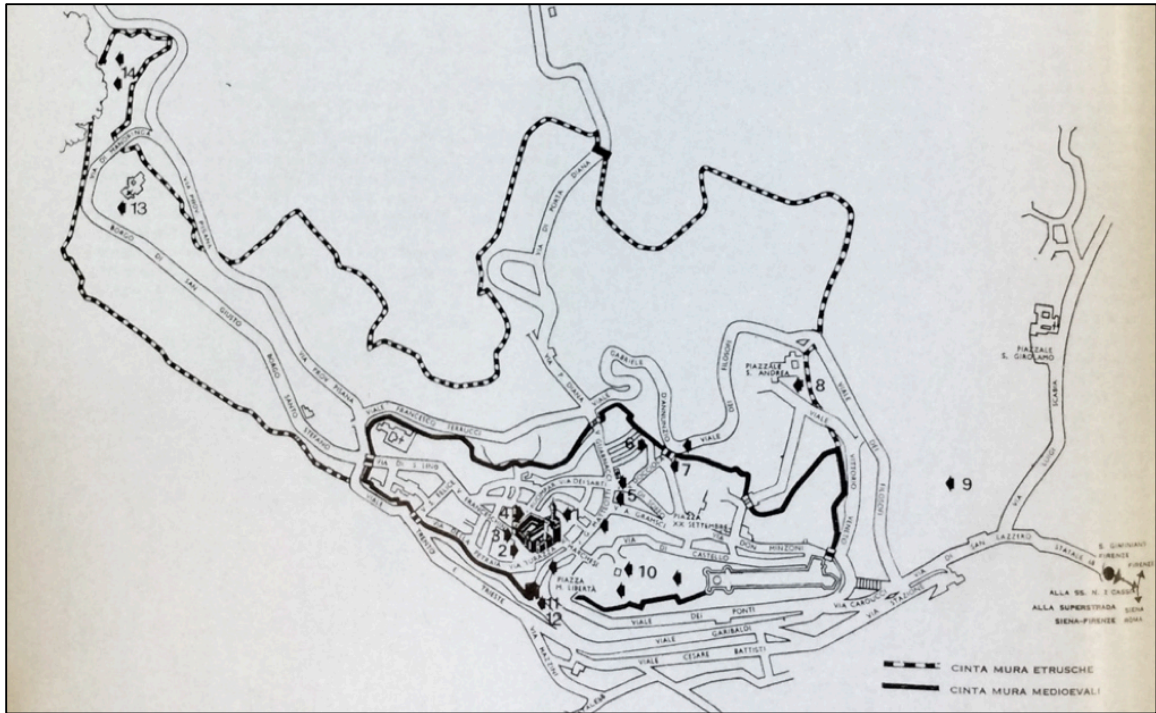


3.12. Teodosio Magnoni, *Untitled*, 1973



3.13. Franco Mazzucchelli, *AtoA*, 1973

³⁰ Lai, "Ulassai" 1981, 24



3.14. Map of the Interventions in Volterra

In *Volterra'73*, several of the artists placed their installations in strategic positions in the urban environment [3.14]. Prompted by the local council, their aim was one of addressing socio-economic issues connected with the abandonment of both the historic town centre and the surrounding countryside.³¹ Several works created visual dialogues with the town landmarks, and their installations were intended to alter perceptions of historic buildings. For instance, Nicola Carrino's modular *Costruttivo 1/71 B*, or Shu Takahashi made an intervention that responded to the Duomo's bell tower [3.09; 3.10].³² Other installations pointed to specific landmarks in the cityscape, as in Maurizio Staccioli's work, which drew attention to the prison from the *belvedere*, which is arguably the most scenic panoramic point in the whole city [3.11].³³ In some cases, they hindered the pedestrians' passage, such as Teodosio Magnoni's *Progetto per piazza san Michele*, or they restricted the traffic flow, as in case of *AtoA* – Franco Mazzucchelli's inflatable in Piazza dei Priori [3.12; 3.13].³⁴ Influenced by a semiotic reading of architecture and the city, several of these works presupposed an interpretation of the urban environment as a complex system of signs that the public could read, decode, and be provoked by. This was not simply for the sake of art experimentation, but reflected the socio-political inspiration of their practice. The artists'

³¹Crispolti, "Introduzione", in *Volterra'73*, np; but also the local vice-major's opinion in Crispolti, "Dibattito Finale", in *Volterra'73*, np.

³² Crispolti, *Volterra'73*, np.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

theoretical texts in the catalogue suggest that several sculptural installations were conceived on Marxist assumptions, similar to those that will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five.³⁵ According to these views, the lived urban space and its everyday use are determined and shaped through capitalist modes of standardisation. With their sculptural installations, the artists attempted to disrupt and challenge the locals' everyday use of the space of the city. In attempting this, the sculptural installations expressed an arguably centripetal potential, and aimed at redirecting the viewer's attention from the artwork, to the town itself, and to its landmarks and their roles and purposes.³⁶

These are the terms in which *Volterra'73* has been curated. Interpretations of this event, however, also involved a discussion about the crisis of the traditional, commemorative role that sculptural monuments perform in urban public spaces.³⁷ These sculptural installations were not intended to impose social and cultural meaning on the city.³⁸ Instead, their aim was to redirect the public's attention to urban space in its own right, so as to address the identity of the town. If history and memory participate in constructing urban identity, visually challenging the individual architectures and the space of the historic town centre was a way of interrogating the locals' collective memory of the town itself.

Transgenerational and collective community memory lay at the heart of Lai's *Legarsi alla montagna*. However, it was not a tribute to the collective use of the space. Lai was fascinated and inspired by what we might call an anthropological memory.³⁹ In other words, it was a local legend kept alive by families in the intimate space of the home that gave Lai the idea for the performance.⁴⁰ The version that Lai preferred can be summarised as the story of a girl, who was sent into the mountains to take food to the shepherds. Suddenly, a storm came. The men and the girl found shelter in a cave. The girl was with the others, when something outside the cave attracted her attention: a blue ribbon. Curiosity led the girl outside the cave, into the storm. It was fortunate for her, because a landslide came and killed all the men in the cave.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Luca Mansueto, "L'arte ambientale e l'utopia del monumento nella città del presente", in *Senza Cornice*, n.6 (March-May 2013), http://www.senzacornice.org/rivista/articolo_archivio.php?id_magazine=8&id=42, last accessed on 9th November 2016.

³⁷ Referring to Crispolti's theorization, the art critic Luca Manueto discuss the crisis of public monument in *Volterra'73* as result of the crisis of the city in: Mansueto, "L'arte ambientale e l'utopia del monumento".

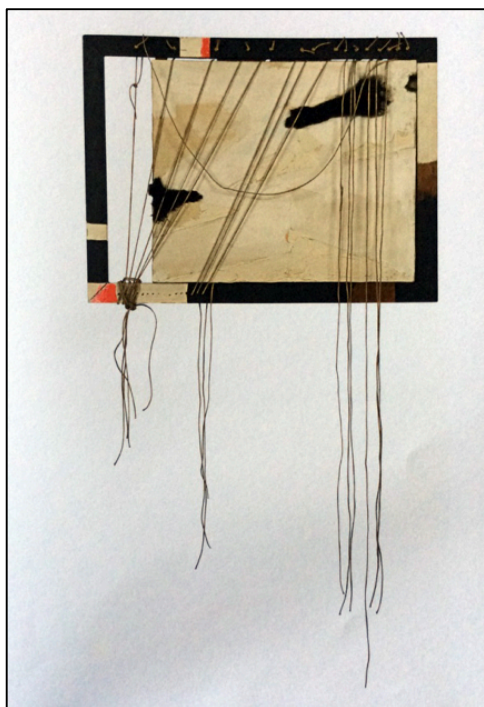
³⁸ The sociologist of art Cecilia Guida wrote about the crisis of public monuments in relation to the spread of televisions in: Cecilia Guida, *Spatial Practice. Funzione pubblica e politica dell'arte nella società delle reti* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2012), 65-70.

³⁹ For an overview of the crucial issues about collective memory, see: Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, "Introduction", in Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, editors. *Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-62.

⁴⁰ Lai, "Ulassai 1981", 25.

Lai listened to this legend over and over again in her visits to the families of Ulassesi during the preliminary phases of her project. The story was a memory shared by the community, but it also resonated with Lai's own childhood memories of the village.⁴¹ Other versions of the legend described different signs that saved the girl – a bird for instance. The ribbon itself could convey more than one meaning. It had an underlying religious symbolism for the villagers. It was believed to be a message from the Virgin Mary: the blue ribbon as a sign of the Virgin Mary's traditional cloak.⁴² To Maria Lai, however, the ribbon had a more established place in her practice.

Lai was fascinated by the ribbon's semantic potential, and she chose it because it resonated with the themes she had been exploring in her previous works. As critics have noticed, since the 1960s, threads had become a hallmark of Lai's artworks. Commenting on Lai's artworks, Gianni Murtas attributed to the artist's use of sewing threads several roles: a functional, ideological and provocational, and also linguistic and symbolic.⁴³ Lai herself defined them as the physical, sculptural and tactile manifestation of a line ('Le linee sono in rapporto tattile con la materia, quando si trasformano in filo').⁴⁴



3.15. Maria Lai, *B4 Telaio*, 1965



3.16. Maria Lai, *Oggetto paesaggio*, 1971

⁴¹ Several versions of the legend are reported in: Gardin and Finelli, "Festa come opera d'arte", 111-112.

⁴² About the sacred value of the blue ribbon, exhibition *Sul filo del mistero*, at the Centro Culturale e Galleria San Fedele in Milan (2016, <http://www.centrosanfedele.net/easyne2/arte/aria-lai/>, accessed on 30th September 2016)

⁴³ Gianni Murtas, "Inventare per filo e per segno", in Fabrizio d'Amico and Gianni Murtas, *Maria Lai. Inventare altri spazi* (Cagliari: Art Duchamp, 1993), 13-21; especially 18. About Lai's early work, see: Maria Luisa Frongia, "Maria Lai: Filogenesi di una ricerca innovative", in Casavecchia and Giusti, *Ricucire il mondo*, 102-115.

⁴⁴ Conversazione tra Maria Lai e Giuseppina Cuccu", in D'Amico and Murtas, *Inventare altri spazi*, 84.

In her series *Telai*, first exhibited in Rome in 1971, cotton threads are stretched, sometimes simply hung, within wooden frames of reversed canvas [3.15; 3.16].⁴⁵ They were organised in abstract compositions that gradually she structured three dimensionally. Throughout the 1970s, Lai worked on her *Tele cucite*. The *Tele* are abstract compositions of cloth, knotted and sewn, and threads on canvases, which, as in *Paesaggio al vento* (1977), for instance, were anchored to reality by a descriptive title [3.17]. The threads were used as an unconventional 'poor material', as lines on the surfaces of the canvas. It was in 1977, two years before *Legarsi alla montagna* was commissioned, that Lai produced the first of her *Libri cuciti*, and her use of threads then acquired a different connotation.⁴⁶ In *Diario intimo*, one of several of the artist's books at the time, the artist used sewing thread to make signs that had the appearance of handwriting, yet were meaningless [3.18].⁴⁷ The paradox of these non-semantic signs was enacted by the difficulty of turning the book pages, hindered by the long leftovers of threads. These embroidered signs did not express any content. But the threads nonetheless conveyed a sense of anguished incommunicability.



3.17 Maria Lai, *Paesaggio al vento*, 1977

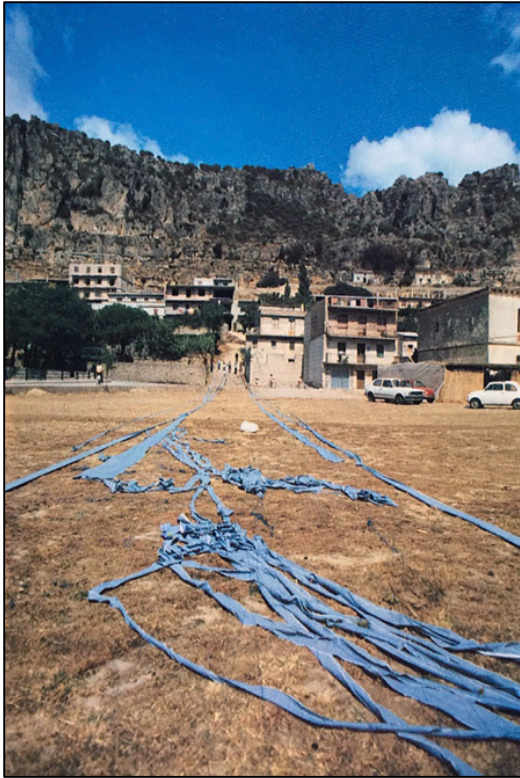


3.18. Maria Lai, *Diario intimo*, 1977

⁴⁵ Marcello Venturoli, *Maria Lai* (Rome: Galleria Schneider, 1971).

⁴⁶ About Lai's books, see: Anna Dolfi, *Maria Lai. Scritture* (Cagliari: Arte Duchamp, 1979).

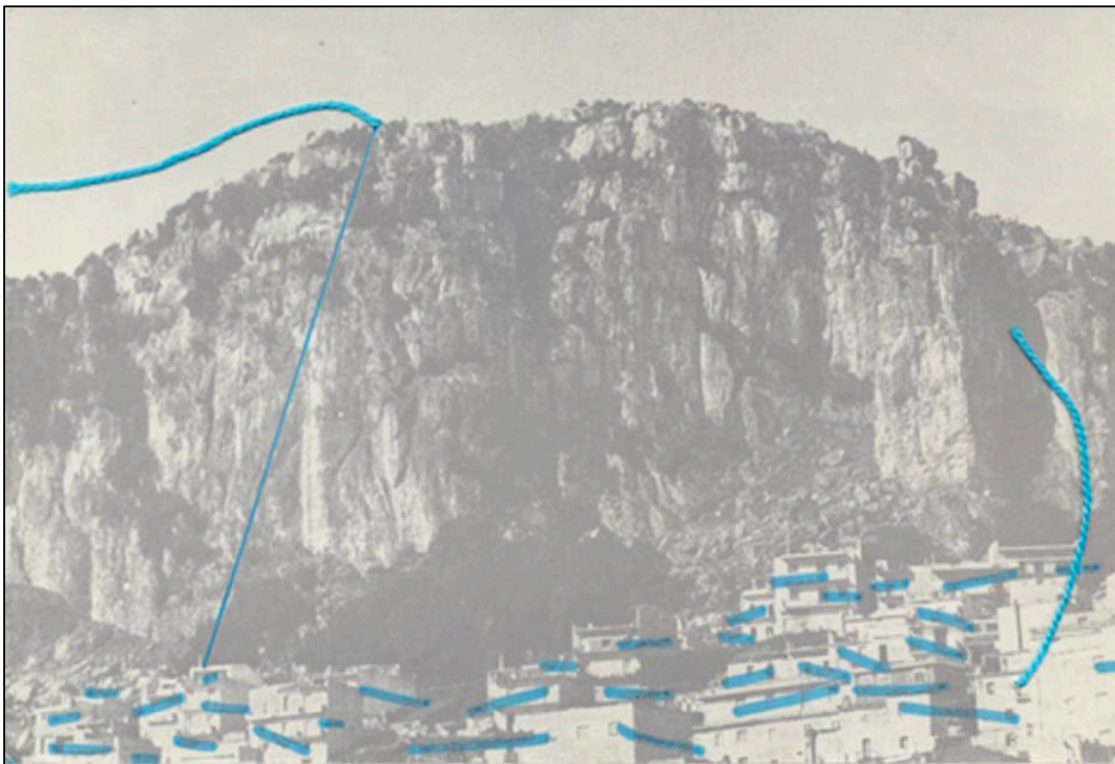
⁴⁷ Giuseppina Cuccu and Maria Lai, *Le ragioni dell'arte. Cose così semplici che nessuno capisce* (Cagliari: Arte Duchamp, 2002), 19-20; Francesca Cataldi, *Libri-Oggetto. Proposte per un'opera d'arte nella tematica del Libro*. (Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1992).



3.19. Maria Lai *Legarsi alla montagna*, 1981



3.20. Maria Lai *Legarsi alla montagna*, 1981



3.21. Maria Lai, preparatory image of *Legarsi alla montagna*, 1981

In *Legarsi alla montagna*, the blue ribbon was a three-dimensional, large-scale, development of these earlier works. Following her installation, *Cucire la casa*, which had been included in the 1979 exhibition *From the Page to Space* in New York, Lai had experimented with the transposition of sewing into an installation on a monumental scale.⁴⁸ Lai's *Legarsi alla montagna* was the scaled-up version, so that it assumed the dimensions of the mountain itself. The artist underlined this when, in her writing, she emphasised the length of the ribbon used – twenty-six kilometres – and also the fact that the whole village took part in the operation [3.19].⁴⁹ The photograph of the village, retouched by the artist as a preparatory model for the work, clearly visualised the way in which the ribbon is used as a line, while the urban settlement of the village is reduced to a two-dimensional, flat surface on which the artist can intervene. If in Volterra, the city was a gamut of signs for the locals who inhabited the town, in Lai's work, the village was a composition of geometric forms which the artist could reconfigure, as if she was engaging with a two-dimensional surface.

At the same time, *Legarsi alla montagna* was the artist's response to the question that she was rhetorically posing to herself: 'Una poesia, fatta di parole, può essere un monumento, perchè non anche fatta con un nastro?'⁵⁰ We can find echoes here of the artist's classical knowledge, which had been nurtured since her school days. In one of the *Odes* of Horace, the Latin poet challenges the longevity of the monumental statues built in Rome in the age of Augustus with the enduring power of his poetry:

I have finished a monument more lasting than bronze, more lofty than the regal structure of the pyramids, one which neither corroding rain nor the ungovernable North Wind can ever destroy, nor the countless series of the years, nor the flight of time.⁵¹

However, this was not all that Lai had in mind. I suggest that she was also responding to another work that had been developed within Enrico Crispolti's curatorial work: Mirella Bentivoglio's 1976-1978 *Poesia all'albero* [3.23]. Bentivoglio (1923-2017) was a verbo-visual and performance artist, as well as an art critic and feminist art historian, who explored the visual connotations of language.⁵² Lai probably had this work in mind as she

⁴⁸ Casavecchia and Giusti, *Ricucire il mondo*, 187

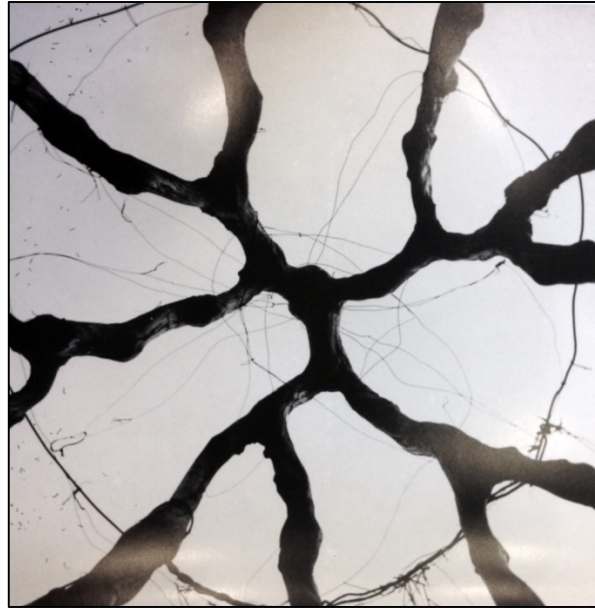
⁴⁹ Maria Lai, "Ulassai 1981", in D'Amico and Murtas, *Inventare altri spazi*, 90

⁵⁰ Grilletti Migliavacca, ed. "Ulassai", 28.

⁵¹ Horace, *Odes and Epodes*. Edited and translated by Niall Rudd. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 217.

⁵² About Bentivoglio's work, see: the 2015 exhibitions about the artist held in Treviso at the Galleria Elefante (<http://www.galleriaelefante.com/wordpress/7-novembre-3-dicembre-mirella-bentivoglio/>), last accessed on 9th November 2016) and at Pomona Museum of art of Claremont, in the United States: *Pages: Mirella Bentivoglio Selected Works 1966-2012* (<https://www.pomona.edu/museum/exhibitions/2015/pages>); Mirella Bentivoglio, *Mirella Bentivoglio: dalla parola al simbolo* (Rome: De Luca, 1996); Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, ed., *Mirella*

was exploring the potential of ribbon for monumental purposes. The two artists knew each other: Bentivoglio, who also worked as a curator, invited Lai to exhibit her work on many occasions, not least at the Venice Biennale in 1978.⁵³ It was also Bentivoglio who introduced Lai to the idea of the book as an art form.⁵⁴



3.22. Mirella Bentivoglio, *Mandala Arboreo*, photography, 1976



3.23. Mirella Bentivoglio, *Poesia all'Albero (Gubbio)*, 1976

Bentivoglio: Hyper ovum (Milan: Fabbri, 1987); Enrico Crispolti, ed. *Mirella Bentivoglio: Gubbio, 1976* (Gubbio : Comune, Azienda Autonoma di Soggiorno, 1976).

⁵³ Mirella Bentivoglio, ed., *Materializzazione del linguaggio* (Venice: Biennale, 1978), 269.

⁵⁴ An essential starting point about the relationship between the two artist is the unpublished interview with Mirella Bandini, in Anna di Matteo, *Maria Lai. Una storia di segni*. Unpublished thesis. (Università Roma 3, 2012/2013), 153-170, especially pp. 153-155.

In *Poesia all'albero*, Bentivoglio brought a fallen *oppiello* into the Piazza della Signoria, the historic centre in Gubbio.⁵⁵ The *oppiello* is a species of maple traditionally associated with the local cultivation of grapes. It was in fact used as a support for grapevine, which used to grow up the trunk and hang from branches to form garlands [3.22.]. Bentivoglio attributed an emblematic value to this species and to its cultural use, which was increasingly substituted by more practical metal trellises.⁵⁶ By bringing the tree into the square, Bentivoglio wished to address the rural, agricultural origin of the town and its traditions, which she felt were threatened by modernisation. But the relocation of the tree was not all that she did. She also asked the locals to leave their thoughts about the tree on paper notes, which were hung from the branches as though they were new leaves for the tree. The artist then composed a poem using these leaf-like messages, and the resulting poem was then read aloud by the artist as a performance, and was presented as a creation by the whole town.⁵⁷ At the same time, poetry condensed local memories of their agrarian roots, thus metaphorically linking the town and the surrounding cultivated land through the words.

In a similar way to Bentivoglio's collective poem, Lai's blue ribbon in *Legarsi alla montagna* was a symbolic element, which encapsulated living memory and shared knowledge of the community of Ulassesi. From the legend of the girl, held by the Ulassesi within their shared knowledge, Lai selected a poetic element – the ribbon-like thread – that also could resonate with her own practice. Running from house to house, the textile was indeed a disruptive element in the space of the street and, to some extent, the event a disruptive moment in Ulassesi's lives. Here, *Legarsi alla montagna* aspired to visualize a local legend and a memory shared by the artist, on a monumental scale, and with an exceptional undertaking of the part of the local community, when compared with artistic practices of public engagement. To answer Lai's question: 'Can a ribbon become a monument?' we need to return to where this discussion started, and to the differences between Lai's *Legarsi alla montagna, Volterra '73* and Bentivoglio's poem. The installation of *Legarsi alla montagna* took place within the context of religious festivity dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The level of community participation in the performance was favorable due to the inclusion of the intervention within a community-led annual religious festivity, and to the correspondence of Lai's poetic imagination with the religious iconography of the Virgin Mary. *Legarsi alla montagna* was woven into an annual religious celebration, thanks to the religious meaning attributed to the ribbon. The monumental potential of Lai's ribbon, and

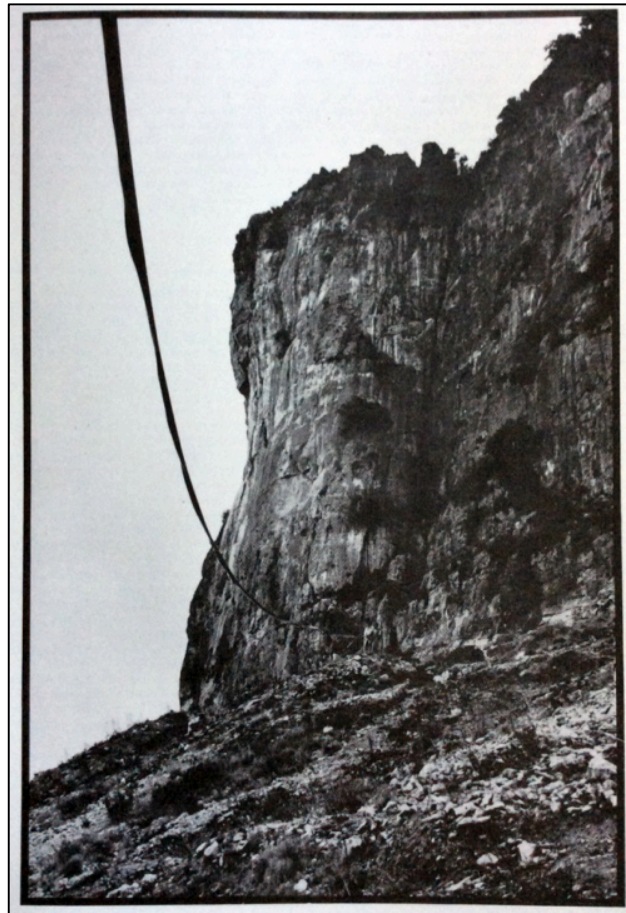
⁵⁵ About the Biennale of Gubbio see: Crispolti, *Arte visiva e partecipazione sociale*, 160-167;

⁵⁶ <http://www.galleriaelefante.com/wordpress/7-novembre-3-dicembre-mirella-bentivoglio/>, accessed on November 9th 2016.

⁵⁷ Mirella Bentivoglio, "Percorso", in *Mirella Bentivoglio, Dalla parola al simbolo*, 50.

thus of Lai's work, could only become a memorial when she tied her poetic vision to the religious beliefs of the Ulassesi.

Cultural Decentring and Lai's Lightness



3.24. Maria Lai, *Legarsi alla montagna*, 1981

In Calvino's *Ersilia*, the relationships between its inhabitants are the essence of the city and its community. There seems to be very little connection between the form of the web of urban relationships and the location of its settlement: when its inhabitants 'riedificano Ersilia altrove', writes Calvino, 'tessono con i fili una figura simile che vorrebbero insieme più complicata e insieme più regolare dell'altra.'⁵⁸ Unlike *Ersilia's* uprooted mobility, Lai's monument expresses an essential connection between the local community and the surrounding topography, which I will discuss in the second part of this chapter [3.24].

Raising the issue of the connection between the local community and the land it inhabits at the turn of the decade inevitably brings our attention to the rise of Achille Bonito Oliva's Transanguardia group (Sandro Chia, Enzo Cucchi, Mimmo Paladino,

⁵⁸ Calvino, *Città invisibili*, 76.

Francesco Clemente, and Nicola de Maria) first presented in 1979.⁵⁹ The critic postulated a rupture with artistic production from the previous decade, and particularly with Celant's Arte Povera.⁶⁰ Bonito Oliva was against internationalism and a sense of openness towards audience participation, which he perceived as having characterized the art of the previous decade. He supported an art that was subjective and individualistic, with no political and social associations, and which could return the audience to a contemplative state and role. Bonito Oliva also revived the Classical concept of *genius loci*, a generic anthropological notion of place, through which the artists could reconnect to their territorial origins and recover their individuality.⁶¹ Unlike Bonito Oliva's return to origins, I believe, the interpretations of Lai's *Legarsi alla montagna* that consider it in continuity with research approaches from the previous decade to be preferential. Even though Lai's work lacks the more direct political engagement of previous practices, her work does not appear to be a postmodern, subjectivist, melancholic and uncritical regression to a fetishized unproblematic local culture. On the contrary, in her work, political instances of cultural decentralisation and the choice of positive imagery to represent the cultural identity of Ulassai coexist in the adoption of a poetic image that is now instated as local and regional.

As discussed in the previous part of this chapter, Lai's *Legarsi alla montagna* has connections with the participatory art practices described by Crispolti in relation to audience engagement and intervention in the space of the street. The location where the project was realised, Ulassai, resonates with another aspect of the critic's analysis, namely that of *decentramento*, a model of cultural production that implies a dichotomy between the metropolitan, centralised creative industries and peripheral cultural productions.⁶² In the introduction to his 1977 book, Crispolti defines the term 'territory' as a 'social territory and social fabric.'⁶³ Despite assuming a non-geographical and non-urban-planning definition of the term 'territory', geographical marginality and isolation from the main Italian urban and socio-cultural centres coincided in Crispolti's theorisation.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Considering it as a rupture with the art production of the previous decade, Zevi briefly sets the position Bonito Oliva's Transavanguardia held in the international art and architecture context of modern-postmodern debate (Zevi, *Peripezie*, 466-480). The art historian criticised the retrospective exhibition of *Transavanguardia* held at the Castello di Rivoli in 2002 addressing it as revisionist [Ida Giannelli, ed. *Transavanguardia* (Milan: Skira, 2002)]. The dualistic model Bonito-Oliva/Germano Celant hinders the understanding of the more creative and critical understanding of the 1970s (and later) approaches to vernacular culture.

⁶⁰ About the Celant-Bonito Oliva indirect dispute, see the analysis of the exhibition catalogue of Celant's *Identité italienne* (Centre Pompidou, 1981) in: Messina, "*Identité italienne*"

⁶¹ Achille Bonito Oliva, *Genius loci: Acireale* (Florence: Centro Di, 1980).

⁶² Crispolti, *Arti visive e partecipazione*, 27-28.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ As Alessandra Pioselli has noted in her study on Italian art in public space from 1968 until today, the pursuit of *decentramento* and of participation often overlapped, leading to little achievements in both fields. Alessandra Pioselli, *Arte nello spazio urbano*, 41.

As with Crispolti's curatorial projects in Volterra, Salerno, Gubbio, and Martina Franca, *Legarsi alla montagna* took place well outside the metropolitan centres of the art world.⁶⁵ Ulassai lies in a mountainside area at the entrance to a valley between the mountain range of the *Tacco of Ulassai* to the north, and *Monte Tisiddu* to the south [3.25]. The already isolated village is thus very distanced from the main urban centre of the island, Cagliari, where Lai herself started to exhibit her works regularly at the Angela Grilletti Migliavacca's Art Duchamp gallery in 1975.⁶⁶ At the time, the village was connected to the rest of the region by a poor road network, which meant that a journey to Cagliari using public transport took around ten hours. This isolation was only worsened when the railway line that had connected the village to the coastline was closed in 1956.⁶⁷



3.25. View of Ulassai, in 1981

In his theorisation, Crispolti envisioned a seminal role for participatory art practices in the process of decentralisation and democratisation of cultural awareness and production.⁶⁸ Artists were renamed 'aesthetic operators', and were given the role of articulating the cultural contribution of peripheral and marginal areas in the face of the 'terroristic cultural colonialism' of the dominant metropolitan centres.⁶⁹ Within the Italian

⁶⁵ See: Crispolti, *Arti visive e partecipazione sociale*; and Anna D'Elia and Lidia Carrieri, eds., *Dall'arte nel sociale al teatro d'artista. Incontri di Martina Franca '79/'80/'81* (Taranto: Artebaria edizioni, 2012).

⁶⁶ *Ricucire il mondo*, 274.

⁶⁷ Edoardo Altara, *Binari a Golfo Aranci - Ferrovie e treni in Sardegna dal 1874 ad oggi* (Parma: Ermanno Albertelli Editore, 1992). Interestingly, Lai's current art foundation in Ulassai is located in the building previously used as train station in Ulassai. This is the reason for its name: *Stazione dell'Arte* (Art Station).

⁶⁸ Crispolti, *Arti visive e partecipazione*, 17-27; 29-33.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

context of decentralisation of administrative tasks, pursued through the institution of the *regioni* (regions) in 1970, Crispolti called for the peripheral areas of the country to become a 'emittente di risposte autonome e autogestite nella riacquisizione e nel risarcimento di patrimoni culturali specifici' through these kinds of participatory art practices.⁷⁰ For Crispolti, the work of Ricardo Dalisi, Eduardo Alamaro, Gruppo Salerno '75, Gruppo A3-ambiente arte azione and the project *Rapporti all'Ostiense* (by Artibiani, Baliani, Bedini, Cosimato, Girotti and Milanese) engaged with local culture and knowledge in productive ways. Enlarging our field of investigation beyond Crispolti's remit, we can also pinpoint a few other examples of similar outlook, including Enzo Navarro's projects in Pordenone, *Il gioco dell'uovo* (1976-1978) *Berta filava e poi urinava* (1978-1979) and Bentivoglio's *Poesia all'albero*.⁷¹ Like Lai's work and her recovery of a local legend, several participatory art practices described by Crispolti engaged in the process of rediscovery and representation of vernacular 'patrimoni di cultura materiale,' (heritages of material culture) including material culture heritage, and 'realtà antropologiche ancestrali' (ancestral anthropological realities).⁷²

Of these projects, *Rapporti sull'Ostiense* is especially interesting. It was a part of a wider project called *Operazione Roma Eterna* (1975), that consisted of a documentation of select buildings belonging to the industrial area of the Ostiense neighbourhood in the southern metropolitan area of Rome [3.26].⁷³ Similar interests in industrial archaeology can be found in Navarro's project *Berta filava e poi urinava* (1978-1979) [3.27]. The artist collected women's stories of labour in the local silk factory in Pordenone for over a year, and created a display of sound installation and found objects connected to these stories.⁷⁴

These artists worked with memories connected with the cultural and social world of factories, in order to create bonds with the working classes. In his presentation of such projects, Crispolti declared that the artists were primarily keeping the ideological side of these works in the participative methodology adopted.⁷⁵ The choices of subject betrays clear left-wing affiliations. Anticipating more recent art practices, these artists found themselves in the role of bringing to light memories, rooted in local communities, in their work places and homes. These were memories that had been marginalised by dominant historical narratives.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁷¹ Pioselli, *Arte nello spazio urbano*, 37-38. Pioselli does not mention Bentivoglio's work.

⁷² Crispolti, *Arti visive e partecipazione*, 18.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 168-189.

⁷⁴ The work was exhibited in Pordenone (Galleria Sagittaria), Milan (Centro internazionale di Brera), Gubbio (Biennale), and in ex Yugoslavia (Sloveny Gradec). See the artist's website:

<http://enzonavarra.it/it/opere/berta-filava-e-poi-urinava>, last accessed on 29th November 2016.

⁷⁵ Crispolti, *Arti visive e partecipazione sociale*, 181-184.



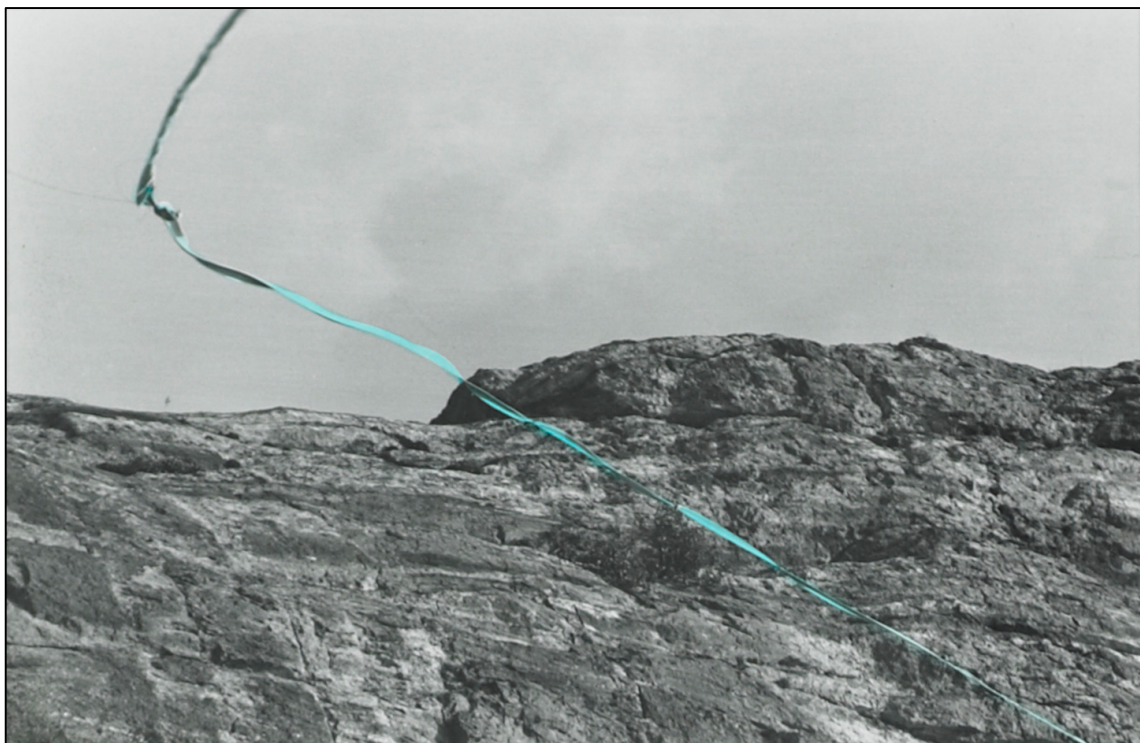
3.26. Enzo Navarra, *Berta filava e poi urinava*, 1978



3.27. Sandro Baliani, *Rapporti sull'Ostiense*, 1975

The tendency of these artists was to work on memories of specific locations, such as focusing on meaningful buildings for a specific social class. In so doing, their works appealed to notions of identity, and collective memory. According to Jan and Aleida Assmann's theory of cultural memory, collective memory consists of a communicative memory (the embodied memory, informally passed from generation to generation) and a collective self-image,

which is externalised and is created for and by the whole society.⁷⁶ Within cultural memory, Assmann relies on previous theories to distinguish between ‘storage knowledge’, the totality of memories from which the a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity, and ‘figures of memory’, which are manifestations of past events through cultural formations and institutional communication.⁷⁷ Despite their differences, the artists discussed by Crispolti dug into the ‘storage knowledge’ of the urban *milieu* that had not yet found a formalised expression. Found-objects and recordings of personal memories that were connected to specific places proposed alternative narratives, thus constructing a cultural identity for a working class that had, up to this point, been underrepresented.



3.28. Maria Lai, *Legarsi alla montagna*, 1981
Photo: Gianni Berengo Gardin

Rapporti sull'Ostiense and Navone's *Berta filava* resulted in multimedia works that were not dissimilar to sociological research. Like Bentivoglio, Lai produced an individual work, less didactic and iconic, which synthesized local memories. *Legarsi alla montagna* engaged with memories that belonged to the local community. Lai's refusal to design a war memorial to commemorate those who had died for the nation state, was answering the call for cultural decentralization, and to give representative form to cultural identities that were

⁷⁶ Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", in *New German Critique*, No. 65 (Spring - Summer, 1995), 125-133. About the historiographical debates on memory and history, see: Joan Tumblety, ed., *Memory and History. Understanding Memory as a Source and Subject* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁷⁷ Assmann and Czaplicka, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*, 129-130.

rooted in local traditions. However, despite the politics of cultural decentralisation, which appealed to Gramsci's theories as well as to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of a 'minor literature', there is a degree of idealisation and pastoralism in Lai's work.⁷⁸ This is not to be found in the artist's relationship with the locals, but in the way in which the relationship between the village and the mountain was envisioned. In her essay, Manuela De Cecco suggests that the way in which Lai embraced Sardinian vernacular traditions in her work was permeated with primitivism.⁷⁹ This was partially influenced by Arturo Martini's memorably sexist comment: 'Vergine ti volevo', which had left an indelible mark on young Lai.⁸⁰ Martini deprecated Lai's education in Rome, praising instead her Sardinian origins. The different cultural components that are encapsulated in the ribbon could be seen to be a pastoral idealisation of the local culture of her home village. However, we could also view the work as informed by a precise poetic and moral choice on her part.



3.29. Maria Lai, *Donna al fiume*, 1961



3.30. Maria Lai, *Pastore pecore e sassi*, 1961

Certainly, pastoral idealisation appears in Lai's earlier drawings, in which Lai portrays an ontological identity between peasants and shepherds, and the land.⁸¹ Representing peasants in this way was not uncommon in post-war Italian literature and

⁷⁸ De Cecco mentions Deleuze, in De Cecco, *Da vicino, vicinissimo, da lontano, in assenza*, 26-28. Gramsci's theory, as it will be discussed in the next two chapters, had an influence in the art practices which appealed to anthropology.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ About Lai's drawings, see: Franco Maria Ricci, ed., *A matita, disegni di Maria Lai dal 1941 al 1985* (Cagliari: Arte Duchamp, 1988).

paintings. In Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli*, the physiognomic description of the local farmers is accompanied by poetic references to the local topography and comparisons with the animals with which they live. Levi held a positive, idealised view of the peasants' world, charged with existential and psychoanalytic undertones that were associated with childhood and to a state that was perceived to predate civilisation.⁸² In a deterministic view of the culture-environment relationship, the author considered their proximity to natural cycles as their reason for being in an irrational and privileged state of nature.⁸³ In Lai's *Pastore pecore e sassi* (1961), which is more abstract than *Donna al fiume* (1961), the colour expands beyond the pencil outlines that define the elements of the representation and homogenises their visual appearance [3.29; 3.30]. The title itself, which refers to the rocks as one of the subjects of the representation, reinforces this reading. In these works, the discontinuity between the figures and environment dissolves, and suggests an ontological identity between the rural dwellers and the environment they inhabit.

In *Legarsi alla montagna*, the relationship with the land is not one of material identification. It suggests a more sophisticated reflection on the rural community's connection with the land. Being rooted in Lai's investigation among the Ulassesi, *Legarsi alla montagna* was inspired by folkloric oral legends. Lai herself refers to the anthropological relevance of the work. She interpreted the image of the ribbon to be a creative response to the fear of impending landslides from the mountains surrounding the village.⁸⁴ Following De Martino's theory of cathartic mourning, Lai's ribbon was imagined as a symbol of creative potential that was triggered by the environment.⁸⁵ This connection between the environment and the processes of mythmaking is central to her work: the Sardinian landscape is presented as enshrining and inspiring legends and myths: 'le tante leggende che ogni sasso di Ulassai sembra aver ispirato,' as she herself declared in a conversation with Maria Cuccu.⁸⁶ *Legarsi alla montagna* makes these ties explicit, weaving them through processes of myth-making, involving the local community and the land.

This way of imagining the Sardinian landscape as saturated with ancestral legends resonates with the work of Sardinian author Giovanni Cambuso, who was also Lai's mentor. Lai illustrated *Miele amaro* (1954), his collection of Sardinian folktales, and the book

⁸² As the Italian critic Asor Rosa reports, the irrational charge attributed to the peasant world are features of Levi's *Cristo*. See: Alberto Asor Rosa, *Scrittori e popolo* (Turin: Einaudi editore, 1988), 153-154. Antonio Catalfamo, "Cesare Pavese e Carlo Levi: un dialogo a distanza, tra vita e letteratura", in Antonio Catalfamo, editor, *Un viaggio mitico: Pavese intertestuale: alla ricerca di se stesso e dell'eticità della storia*. Conference proceedings (Santo Stefano Belbo: Ce.Pa.M., 2006), 13-34.

⁸³ Vincenzo Napolillo, *Carlo Levi dall'antifascismo al mito contadino* (Cosenza: Edizioni Brenner, 1984), 29.

⁸⁴ Cuccu and Lai, *Cose cosí semplici che nessuno capisce*, 20.

⁸⁵ About Lai's anthropological perspective, see: Pietro Clemente, "Fuori era note. Sui presepi di Maria Lai", in Angela Grilletti Migliavacca, Pietro Clemente, Gianni Murtas and Maria Lai, *Fuori era note. Sui presepi di Maria Lai* (Cagliari: Arte Duchamp, 2004), 9-15.

⁸⁶ Cuccu and Lai, *Cose cosí semplici che nessuno capisce*, 29.

inspired several of Lai's subsequent works.⁸⁷ Another literary counterpart for Lai's outlook can be seen in the work of the Sardinian intellectual, Giuseppe Dessì.⁸⁸ Lai used to live in the same building as Dessì when they were in Rome, and the two were friends. During those years the author was writing his novel, *Paese d'ombre* (1972). Even though the locations Dessì discusses in his books are imaginary, they describe the Sardinian situation following unification.⁸⁹ His multi-sensorial descriptions of the topography encapsulate vernacular mythologies, and portray the landscape as a palimpsest that records environmental transformations of the region. In *Paese d'ombre* (1972), local vegetation, whose fragrances are vividly invoked, has a hidden life in the legends of the local tradition: 'L'anima dei defunti, secondo un'antica credenza di Norbio, dopo aver vagato come l'odore di un'erba o un fiore, sceglie una tenera pianta e vi si rifugia.'⁹⁰ As in Lai's words, and in *Legarsi alla montagna*, Dessì's landscape enshrines ancestral legends and spirits that weave together the life of the locals and their environment at a symbolic level. More importantly, Dessì makes the topography of Sardinia a protagonist of his novels.⁹¹ Woods and mines on the western coast of Sardinia are central narrative elements in *Paese d'ombre*, and determine the circumstances of the whole community of Norbio, to such an extent that the trees are anthropomorphised by the protagonist: 'A vederli dalla strada sembravano tutti uguali: ora invece si accorgeva che per la prima volta erano tutti diversi: avevano ognuno una fisionomia particolare, come le persone.'⁹²

The Barbagia, the area where Ulassai is located, was very much affected by land-related conflicts caused by historical changes in jurisdiction, and these are likely to have fuelled the rivalries that Lai talks about in relation to her project.⁹³ Recalling her experience

⁸⁷ Salvatore Cambosu, *Miele amaro* (Florence: Valsecchi editore, 1954). An analysis of Lai's relationship with Cambosu and their different anthropological views, see: http://www.fondazionealsalvatorecambosu.it/new/images/files/documenti/Cambosu_Le_Radici/Cambosu_le_radici_-_Testimonianza_di_Maria_Lai.PDF, accessed on 1st December 2016; about Maria Lai and Salvatore Cambosu, see: Anna Maria Montaldo, "Passages and Links between Rhythm and Poetry", in *Ricucire il mondo*, 23-27.

⁸⁸ About Dessì's literary work, see: Gerardo Trisolino, *Ideologia, scrittura e Sardegna in Dessì* (Bari: Edizioni Milella, 1984); See: Giuseppe Marci and Laura Pisano, *Giuseppe Dessì: I luoghi della memoria* (Cagliari: CUEC, 2002). Francesca Nencioni, ed. *A Giuseppe Dessì. Lettere di amici e lettori* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2009), 15; 232-233; 394-395.

⁸⁹ Laura Pisano, "Paesaggi sensibili, paesaggi della memoria", in Marci and Pisano, *Giuseppe Dessì*, 87-120; Sardinian socio-political issues are addressed by Pino Jorio, "Dopo Scotellaro: tra Sciascia e Dessì, attraverso due testi a confronto", in Aristide Scompiglio and Giuseppina Rocca, *Il mezzogiorno da Scotellaro ad oggi*. Conference proceedings (Napoli: Ligouri, 1996), 69-80.

⁹⁰ Giuseppe Dessì, *Paese d'ombre* (Verona: Mondadori, 1972), 38.

⁹¹ This is the reason why Dessì is included in the Italian environmental writers, see: Patrick Barron and Anna Re, *Italian Environmental Literature: An anthology* (New York: Italica INC press, 2005), 173-183.

⁹² Dessì, *Paese d'ombre*, 62.

⁹³ In a conversation with a local collaborator at the Stazione dell'Arte in Ulassai, he told me about the importance of the element of the landscape in defining the individual private properties, and how costume had created problems in Ulassai in the past. About Sardinian environmental history see: Angelo Varni, ed., *Storia dell'ambiente in Italia tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), especially Chapters 4 and 5. About the social conflict following the privatisation of the land, see: Carlo Giuseppe Rossetti, "Banditismo politico: Terra e guerra civile nella Sardegna del XX secolo", *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 5, (1982): 643-693.

in Ulassai, Lai wrote: 'I rapporti cordiali sono rari, la regola è tenere le distanze. [...]. Vengo trascinata [...] Di casa in casa a parlare, ma più che altro ad ascoltare: storie di malocchio e di furti, di drammi e rancori.'⁹⁴ In the delicate web of relationships that form a community, Lai made a poetic shift towards the anthropological roots of the community, and transformed these into the lightness of a ribbon that stretched out towards the top of the mountain. As such, the ribbon acquires a new symbolic meaning in her work: 'Il nastro celeste mi rivela nuovi rapporti con la realtà dell'arte: bello ma insicuro, non sostiene ma guida, è illogico ma contiene verità, sembra irrealista ma indica realtà più profonde [...] Anche le condizioni di Ulassai mi suggeriscono analogie con la realtà del mondo e coi problemi dell'esistenza,' wrote Lai, for instance.⁹⁵

The formal lightness of Lai's installation visualises a cultural memory that connects and unites the local community to their topography. The artist's poetic draws on lightness, and, as in Calvino, becomes the way in which art might be able to foster positive values for expressing and representing the identity of a social group, and to bring it to the realm of art. In her work, Lai chose to overcome the complex social fabric of the town, and proposed a positive shared community value. Like in Bentivoglio's *Poesia all'albero*, this link is visualised through a poem, but, unlike Bentivoglio's, it is one that is extraneous to a criticism of modernity. Instead of creating a monument and bringing the institutional historical narrative to the village, she appealed to the local's connection with their land, symbolised by the ribbon that wove together its inhabitants, not in terms of their ways of life, but as a collective tie rooted in their everyday cultural memory.

In the next chapter, Claudio Costa's and Superstudio's works will be instead discussed in relation to rural tools, which these practitioners considered as the embodiment of their essential material connection with the land.

⁹⁴ Lai, *Ulassai*, 29.

⁹⁵ Lai, *Ulassai*, 26-27.

Chapter Four

Learning from Rural Objects:

Claudio Costa's *Indagine di una cultura* and Superstudio's *Cultura materiale extraurbana*

In March 1975, Pier Paolo Pasolini published a treatise in the Italian weekly magazine *Il Mondo*.¹ It was addressed to Gennariello, an imaginary Neapolitan boy whom he had selected as his ideal reader, and it consisted of a discussion about the places from which he might acquire his education. The author pinpointed four sources: family and peers, school and formal education, mass media (especially television), and the physical landscape of objects that surrounded him during his childhood. While the first four explicitly act on a conscious level, Pasolini explained, things influence our education at a subtler, indirect level: 'Le tue fonti educative immediate sono mute, materiali, oggettuali, inerti, puramente presenti. Eppure ti parlano.'² These objects constitute the material and socio-cultural environment that were to become the unit of measure for his future experience.

Six weeks later, Pasolini developed this idea further. Inspired by a set of yellow Bauhaus teacups used in one of the scenes of *Salò o le cento giornate di Sodoma* (1975), Pasolini wrote deploringly the end of craftsmanship, and with it the possibility of inter-generational communication between his contemporaries and that of Gennariello, who was raised in the era of mass production:

Quelle tazzine avevano in sè una misteriosa qualità, condivisa, del resto, dalla mobilia, dai tappeti, dai vestiti e dai cappellini delle signorine, dalle suppellettili dalle stesse carte da parati: questa misteriosa qualità non dava però dolore, non causava un violento senso di regresso (che poi la notte ho sognato) in epoche anteriori e atroci. Dava anzi gioia. La loro misteriosa qualità era quella dell'artigianato. Fino agli anni Cinquanta, fino ai primi anni Sessanta è stato così. Le cose erano ancora cose fatte o confezionate da mani umane: pazienti mani antiche di falegnami, di sarti, di tappezzeri, di maiolicari. Ed erano cose con una destinazione umana, cioè personale. Poi l'artigianato o il suo spirito è finito di colpo [...] La verità che dobbiamo dirci è questa: la nuova produzione delle cose –cioè il cambiamento delle cose dà a te un insegnamento originario e profondo che io non

¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Lettere luterane* (Rome: Garzanti, 2012), 27-80.

² *Ibid.*, 43.

posso comprendere (anche perchè non lo voglio). E ciò implica un'estraneità tra noi due che non è solo quell'ache per secoli e millenni ha diviso padri dai figli.³

The unspoken language of objects and their 'educational' potential, the end of craftsmanship, and the alienation encapsulated by mass produced objects are three of the themes that emerge from Pasolini's text. They will be addressed in this chapter, which investigates two projects centred on objects belonging to the rural milieu in the cultural context of the early 1970s: Claudio Costa's artistic research *Indagine di una cultura*, which was based in the mountainside village of Monteghirfo, and an educational project undertaken for the University of Florence by the architectural collective, Superstudio.⁴

Since the late 1950s, semiotics, a renewal of interest in folklore (*demologia*) and Marxist materialist archaeology have treated artefacts as signifiers with distinct powers. Both French and Italian semiologists have investigated objects as communicative acts.⁵ Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard adopted a sociological approach to explore the socio-cultural values that objects convey, while Umberto Eco and Tomás Maldonado debated the role of semiotics in the interpretation of everyday objects and architecture, interrogating the shape of objects as expressions of their function.⁶ Later in the 1960s, an increasing interest in Italian vernacular material culture manifested itself in surveys and publications of folk artefacts, following the urge to record a civilisation at risk from disappearance, due to the spread of commercial, popular culture.⁷ In turn, anthropology influenced a number of progressive Italian archaeologists, who expanded their interest beyond the formalist, art-oriented approach of classical archaeology into research areas that previously had been dismissed.⁸ Each of these disciplines developed ways for approaching the potential of objects to represent the mute language of the cultures and civilisation that created them, according to the geographical and historical framework of their fields of investigation.

This chapter also draws on Tim Ingold's distinction between anthropology and ethnography to discuss the ways in which rural tools and artefacts came to acquire a privileged status. For Costa, they were of existentialist importance, while for Superstudio

³*Ibid.*, 55-56.

⁴ These works were first brought together by Ugo La Pietra in 1979: Ugo La Pietra, *Fuori dalle città: Le altre culture* (Milan: Centro internazionale di Brera, 1979).

⁵ Ugo Völli, *Manuale di semiotica* (Bari: GLF editori Laterza, 2000), 198-204.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁷ For a very short overview of the publications about material culture at time, see the introduction in: La Pietra, *Fuori dalle città*, np. Relevant examples are: Pietro Toschi, *Arte Popolare Italiana* (Rome: Bestetti, 1960); Vittorio Fagone, *Artigianato siciliano* (Caltanissetta: Edizione Sciascia, 1966); Vittorio Fagone, et Al., *Artigianato Lombardo* (Rome: Bestetti, 1970); Vittorio Fagone and Italo Sordi, *Lunario lombardo - Il mondo popolare in Lombardia* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale d'Arte, 1976); Vittorio Fagone, *Il momento artigiano. Aspetti della cultura material in Italia*, (Milan: Silvana Editoriale d'Arte, 1976); Bachisio Bandinu and Gaspere Barbiellini Amidei, *Il re è un feticcio. Romanzo di cose* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1976).

⁸ For an overview of this process by one of its protagonists, see: Andrea Carandini, *Archeologia e cultura materiale* (Bari: De Donato Editore, 1975).

they had a pedagogical significance. According to Ingold, these ‘two parts of the same craft of practice’ have different ways of engaging with their object of study, gaining knowledge through different means.⁹ Anthropology is a study *with* and learning *from* people, whilst ethnography is a study *of* and *learning* about. The aim of the first is transformational, and is based on Gregory Bateson’s concept of ‘deutero-learning’, in that the anthropologists’ method consists of ‘learning how to learn’ from the people with whom they study. With the acquired knowledge, the learner moves forward, whereas the ethnographer looks backward to the information collected. Even though there might be a process of transformation as a side effect, ethnography is a documentary practice. Drawing on this distinction, this chapter will argue for the primary anthropological nature of Costa’s and Superstudio’s works. In so doing, the ‘politics of representation’ of these works in 1970s Italy will be reconsidered in the light of the ‘ontological commitment’ of anthropology in these artists’ practices.

⁹ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology Archaeology Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013), 2-3.

Claudio Costa's 'Work in Regress'

*All men who repeat a line from Shakespeare
are William Shakespeare*

Jorge Luis Borges,
Labyrinth: selected stories and other writings, 1962¹⁰



4.1 Claudio Costa's display at Documenta 6, 1977

At Documenta 6 in Kassel in 1977, Claudio Costa presented five wooden packing cases.¹¹ Each was approximately two metres high and one metre wide, and were displayed both vertically and horizontally in the tiny room assigned to him. Completely open, the cases contained fragments of objects, plants and animals, photographs and other visual materials, all coated with a layer of dried clay [4.1]. Titled *Antropologia seppellita* (1977), this series was included in the section curated by the German critic Günter Metken. The critic was in charge of a small exhibition called *Archäologie des Humanen* that appeared within the overall programme.¹² Alongside Costa's work, the show included works by Jean-Marie Bertholin, Ugo Dossi, Jochen Gerz, Paul Armand Gette, Nikolaus Lang, Anna Oppermann, Anne and Patrick Poirier, Charles Simonds, and Dorothee Windheim.

¹⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths, selected stories and other writings* (London: Penguins, 2000), 36.

¹¹ The work is discussed in: Caterina Gualco, ed. *Materiale e Metaforico. Sintomatologie sul Work in Regress* (Genoa: Unimedia, 1979), 39; Antonio Paradiso, *Teatro Antropologico* (Milan, 1981), 27; Sandra Solimano, ed., *Lordine rovesciato delle cose* (Milan: Skira, 2001), 32; 132-137; 177.

¹² For an overview of *documenta 6*, see: https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_6, accessed on 5th February 2017; <http://d13.documenta.de/#archive/d6-1977/>, accessed on 5th February 2017; For a comparative analysis of *documenta 5* and *documenta 6*, see: Maria Bremer, "Lookig back at documenta 5 and documenta 6", *Stedelijk Studies Journal*, issue 2, 2015, <http://www.stedelijkstudies.com/journal/modes-of-making-art-history/>, accessed on 30th May 2017.



4.2. Charles Simonds, *Dwelling*, 1977



4.3. Anne and Patrick Poirier, *Construction IV*, 1977

The installations, such as Simonds's miniaturised dwellings in a deserted landscape and the Poiriers's reconstruction of the Roman Harbour of Ostia Antica in *Costruction IV*, evoked the rise and fall of past civilisations, and the transience of human existence [4.2; 4.3]. Costa's cases appeared as if they had just been unearthed from an archaeological site, and the utensils and objects they contained, particularly in the vertical case displayed at the far end of the room, appeared as traces of a forgotten pre-industrial agricultural past [4.4].



4.4. Claudio Costa, *Archeologia seppellita - Gli uccelli maestri dell'agricoltore*, 1978

After this first, superficial impression, it became apparent that Costa's cases were carefully ordered. 'Mi ero avvicinato all'antropologia vera e propria attraverso la scienza antropologica, seguendo Lévi-Strauss e seguendo gli schemi imposti,' the artist commented, during a seminar about art and anthropology at University of Salerno in April 1978, and continued: 'ora, allo stesso modo, ho pensato di liberarmi di questa scienza, e di risepellire

tutto.’¹³ *Antropologia seppellita* not only brought a lost pre-industrial civilisation to the gallery space. It was also meant to demonstrate the ordering operation which had discovered and classified it, or rather the fallacy of it. In other words, it displayed the impossibility of both reviving that rural world and of making sense of it through anthropology.

Antropologia seppellita marked a shift in the artist’s work, and can be taken as the end point of Costa’s artistic involvement with anthropology.¹⁴ But between 1975 and 1977, anthropology had played a crucial role in his practice. The works he displayed, together with Antonio Paradiso’s, at Guido Le Noci’s *Centro Apollinaire* in Milan are clear examples of the way in which Costa developed his multimedia art practice around it.¹⁵ The 1975 series about peasant culture in Monteghirfo, called *Indagine di una cultura*, is particularly relevant. Although touching on rural civilisation and material culture in ways similar to Paradiso’s, Costa’s work is rather different in terms of its political orientation. It also presented a sophisticated relationship between the practices of anthropology and ethnography.

As a premise to an analysis of *Indagine di una cultura*, this section explores Costa’s ambivalent attitude towards physical anthropology in his multi-media artistic practice from the early 1970s. Recently commenting on his work, Flaminio Gualdoni summarises the artist’s attitude well with a reference to Borges’ labyrinth: ‘Antropologo diventa, Costa, non per sistemare l’esistente *ab origine*, ma per spingere lo schema delle razionalizzazioni fino al punto del collasso, che fa della griglia un labirinto, che fa dei segni accertati i punti di innesco di uno scorrimento mitico, i luoghi del magico, della sapienza prima, della perfetta artaudiana “densità interiore”.’¹⁶ Drawing on Gualdoni’s interpretation, this chapter suggests that Costa’s projects, engaging with forms of representation that were typical for physical anthropology, were the result of his existential quest for authenticity and identity. It retraces the ambiguity of the artist’s work and emphasise how Metken’s group of artists posed questions about established narratives within the human sciences.

Costa and Metken had already been in contact prior to Documenta. In 1974, the critic had invited him to exhibit his work in Hamburg, with Didier Bay, Christian Boltanski, Jürgen Brodolf, Nikolaus Lang, and Anne and Patrick Poirier.¹⁷ The exhibition, titled *Spurensicherung: Archäologie und Erinnerung (Preserving Traces: Archaeology and*

¹³ Antonio Paradiso, ‘Autodocumentazione’, in Paradiso, *Teatro antropologico*, 26.

¹⁴ Around 1980, the artist started to develop his interest in alchemy and magic, later synthesised in his work *Museo dell’alchimia* (Venice Biennale, 1986), 1980-1986. See: *Lordine rovesciato delle cose*, 36-38;58

¹⁵ Centro Apollinaire, ed., *Situazione antropologica*.

¹⁶ Flaminio Gualdoni, *Claudio Costa nei materiali dell’uomo* (Genoa: Il Canneto editore, 2014), 11.

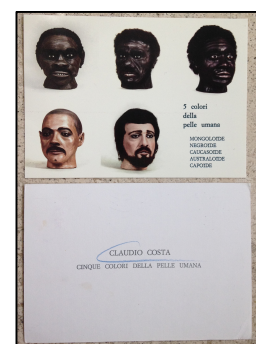
¹⁷ <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-41722123.html>, accessed on 10th February 2017. Metken later published a book of the same title: Günter Metken, *Spurensicherung: Kunst als Anthropologie u. Selbsterforschung: fiktive Wiss. in d. heutigen Kunst* (Köln: DuMont, 1977).

Memory), consisted of assemblages and installations of found objects, and presented typical archaeological and ethnographic strategies of display. Their ambiguity raised questions about established narratives concerning human nature, which had already been questioned in Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) and by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).¹⁸ But the artworks also examined an archaic form of knowledge, namely empirical classification.¹⁹ The exhibition's title, *Spurensuche*, literally meaning 'forensics', implied the visitors' need to construct a narrative, or a message, out of the collection of objects on display. It was left unclear whether the viewer or the artist generated these narratives, or if they derived from the overall exhibition. Metken considered it sufficient to rely on a notion of a *Zeitgeist*, but the objects and photographs on display and the installations nonetheless left the audience puzzled.²⁰ The curator wrote: 'Questi oggetti fragili racchiudono già in sé il dubbio nei confronti dell' "opera" finita e delle sue pretese. Sono elementari, provvisori, ordinari. Tracce, niente di più. Illustrano una certa vanità del proprio fare, ma appunto questa povertà chiede attenzione. Con poco si può ottenere molto, [...] in particolare perché, a questo punto, tutte le relazioni tradizionali spariscono, siano esse di natura familiare, sociale, intellettuale.'²¹ The ordinary, everydayness of the objects and images provoked fundamental questions about the capacity of materials to mean things.

In Hamburg, Costa presented *Cinque colori della pelle umana* (1972), a piece that consisted of five painted terracotta head casts, representing the stereotypical features of racial types, which were disturbingly presented in a glass case [4.5; 4.6].²²



4.5 Claudio Costa, *Cinque colori della pelle umana*, 1972



4.6. Claudio Costa, *Cinque colori della pelle umana*,
Invite to the exhibition in Venice (1972)

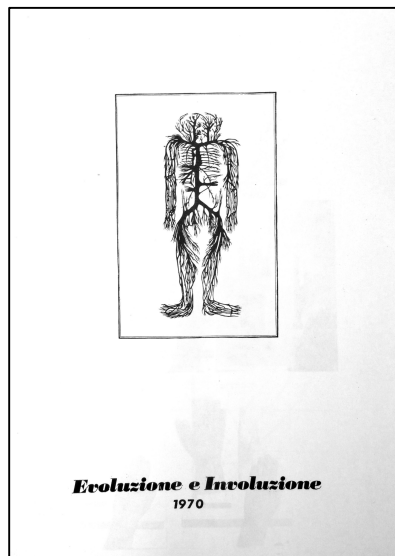
¹⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, c1973); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁹ Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, "The Model of the Science" [1997], in *Archive*, ed. Charles Merewether (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), 108-112.

²⁰ <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-41722123.html>, accessed on 10th February 2017; The article starts with a brief review of journalists' reaction to the exhibition.

²¹ Translated and quoted in Gualdoni, *Claudio Costa*, 68-69.

²² The piece was first presented in Venice (Galleria del Leone, 1972) and in Genoa (La Bertesca, 1973).



4.7. Claudio Costa, *Evoluzione e Involuzione*,
Book Frontispiece, 1970-1972

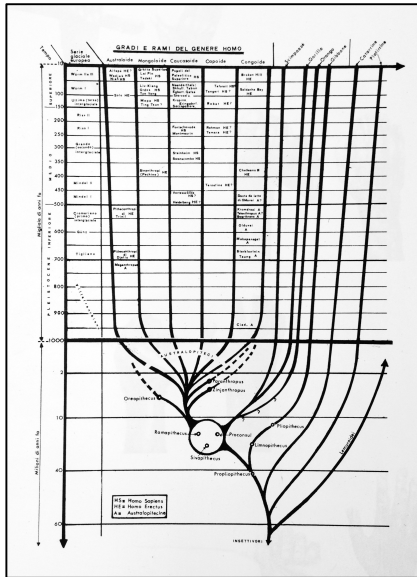


4.8. Claudio Costa, *Museo dell'uomo*, 1971-1973

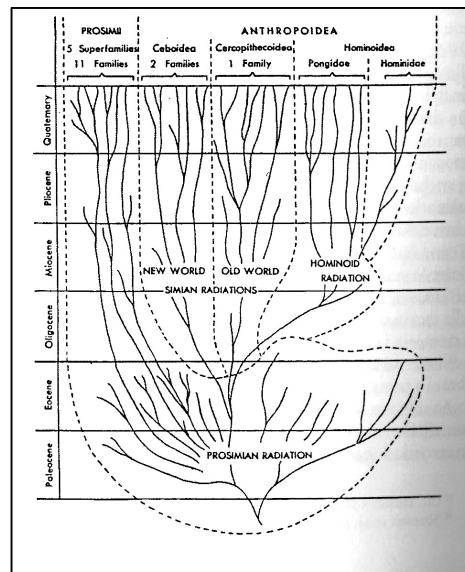
This installation was one of Costa's works that related to physical anthropology, alongside the artist's book *Evoluzione e Involuzione* (1972-1973) and the environmental installation *Museo dell'uomo* (1971-1973). The analysis of these two, earlier works is helpful in understanding the ambiguity of his work in Hamburg, and his attitude towards anthropology. Published by Galleria La Bertesca, the book, ambitious in its scope and non-specialist in its content, retraced the evolution of man [4.7]. It was the development of a project previously begun in Berlin in 1970 at Dieter Hacker's Produzentengalerie, which had resulted in a series of prints.²³ The installation *Museo dell'uomo* (1971-1973), presented in Cologne (*Kunst bleibt Kunst: Projekt 74*) and later in Milan (1974), presented the evolution of the human body and artefacts, from *Australopithecus* to the *Homo Sapiens*, through the display of painted terracotta anatomical parts and heterogeneous artefacts in a wooden cabinet [4.8]. The cabinet was originally accompanied by a series of portraits of individuals from around the world reproduced from manuals and magazines [4.13].²⁴

²³ Claudio Costa, *Evoluzione e Involuzione* (Genoa: Galleria Masnata), 1972. For a chronology see: Gualdoni, *Claudio Costa*, 65-66.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.



4.9. Claudio Costa, *Illustration table from Evoluzione e Involuzione*, 1972



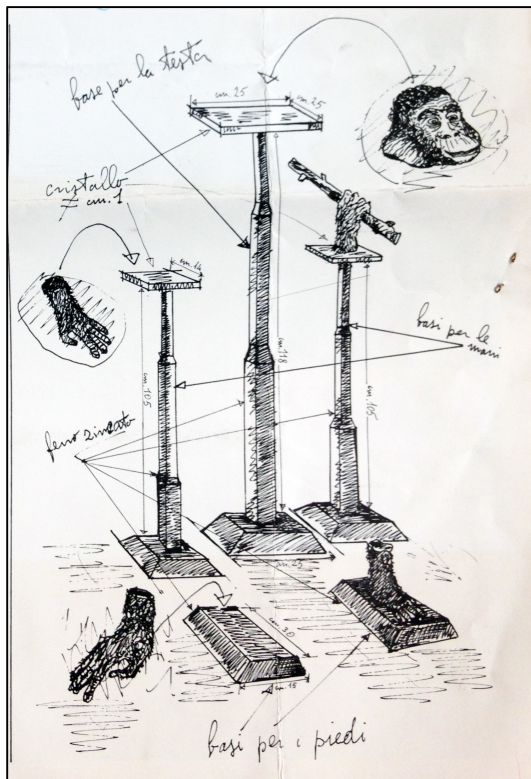
4.10. George G. Simpson, *Evolutionary tree of primates*, 1960

The book and the cabinet engaged, respectively, with the visual rendering of illustrated manuals about evolutionary theory and modes of display used by ethnographic museums. *Evoluzione e Involuzione* was a philosophical interpretation, as well as a non-specialised account of biological evolution, from the creation of life, to its current 'involved' state in contemporary technological society.²⁵ The text was alternated with simple illustrations of human anatomy, animal classification, and genealogic trees of the human species, which were not dissimilar from the illustration found in the natural history treatise from the previous century, but also in contemporary manuals on the subject [4.9; 4.10].²⁶ *Il Museo dell'uomo* (1971-1973) adopted a compartmentalised wooden cabinet, with glass shutters and drawers like those used in ethnographic museums, or in the museum dedicated to Cesare Lombroso's studies in the field of anthropological criminology in Turin [4.14]. Close to the drawing *Progetto per una gnoseologia non avvenuta* (1972) and to the installation *Ricostruzione di homo sapiens in era moderna* (1972), the three upper sections of cabinet were horizontally divided in compartments, each referring to one of the essential body parts whose modifications had contributed to human evolution: the facial structure (especially jaws and teeth), the feet, the hands, and the skull.²⁷ The lower section contained

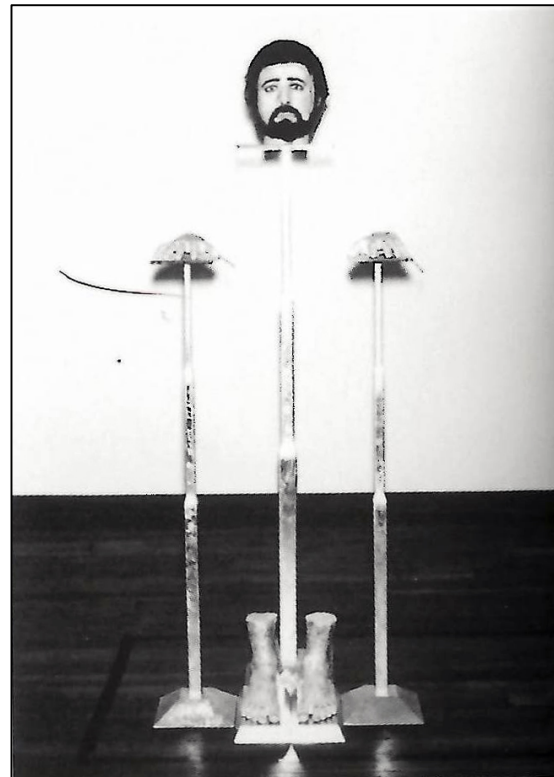
²⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁶ For natural history illustrations see: Giulio Barsanti, *La scala, la mappa, l'albero: Immagini e classificazioni della natura tra Sei e Ottocento* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1992). For a brief history of the evolution theory from the same author, see: Giulio Barsanti, *Una lunga pazienza cieca: Storia dell'evoluzionismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005). For modern forms of collecting, see: Paula Findel, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Costa, *Evoluzione e Involuzione*, 48²⁷

reproductions of tools. The horizontal succession of the windows followed the physiological stages of human evolution.



4.11. Claudio Costa, *Progetto gnoseologico non avvenuto*, 1972



4.12. Claudio Costa, *Ricostruzione di homo sapiens in era moderna*, 1972



4.13. Claudio Costa, *Museo dell'uomo*, 1971-973



4.14. View of the *Museo Lombroso*

Despite the deference to the conventions of natural science, the artist did not exactly comply with the ideological principles that informed these disciplines. What had started as his scepticism towards modes of representation in his early prints had grown into an effort to completely overturn their teleological narratives.²⁸ Among the artist's bibliographical references in *Evoluzione e Involuzione*, Jacques Monod's *Le Hasard et la Nécessité* (1970) played a crucial role. This book, written in 1965 by the Nobel Prize winner for medicine, explored the philosophical implications of his discoveries in the field of molecular biology for human evolution and human agency.²⁹ Monod's work was influential on artists in the early 1970s.³⁰ It shared Albert Camus's nihilism and an existential assertion of human freedom.³¹ Monod argued against a predetermined, universal and transcendental plan governing the creation of life and the emergence of the human species.³² In line with developments in genetic research at the time, humans had appeared in history by chance alone, being just one of the infinite possibilities for life. Only after an initial difference was coded in a DNA sequence and replicated did human existence became a necessity.³³ From this perspective, 'man' is the result of a sequence of events determined by chance. How, then, was it possible to find value in human existence? In essence, denying the illusion of a

²⁸ Giorgio Cortenova and Miriam Cristaldi, eds., *AFRICA* (Verona: Adriano Parise editore, 1991).

²⁹ Jaques Monod, *Caso e Necessità* (Milan: Mondadori, 1997).

³⁰ Wolfgang Becker "Claudio Costa. In compagnia del cervello umano e della preistoria dell'uomo," in Solimano, *Ordine rovesciato delle cose*, 72.

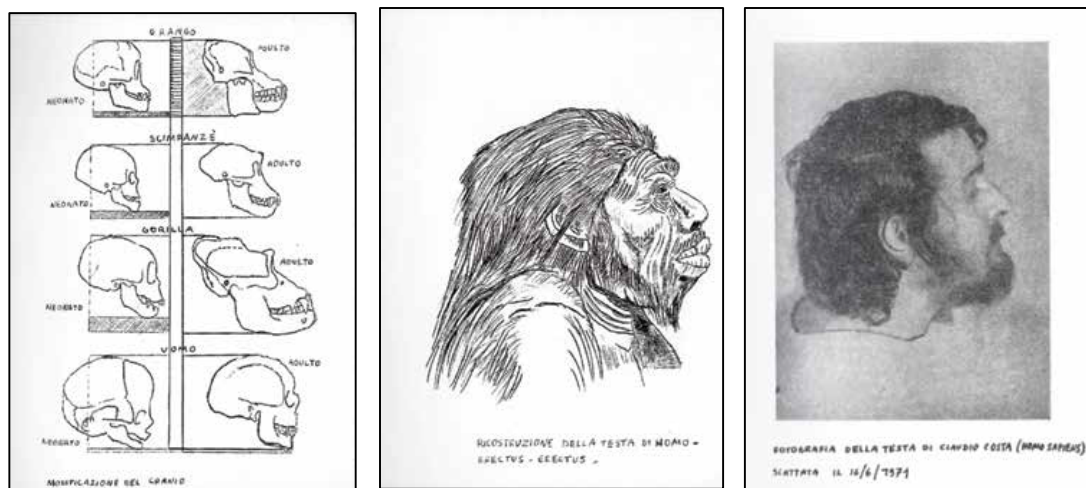
³¹ For the relationship between the philosopher and the scientist in 1940s Paris and later; see: Sean B. Carroll, *Brave genius* (New York: Broadway Books, 2013).

³² For a brief overview of the critical responses to Monod's book, see: "Introduzione," in Monod, *Caso e Necessità*, XIII-XV. For a brief history of the way evolution has been conceived see: Giulio Barsanti, *Una lunga pazienza cieca* (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 2005).

³³ Monod, *Caso e Necessità*, 110-112.

transcendental meaning in human life, Monod's philosophy offered man both freedom and disorientation.

For Costa, the only way to respond to this unresolved condition, and to search for, or better to construct, an identity was to 'work in regress'.³⁴ Retracing through his practice the path of human development, his search went back in time to the point zero of the universe, and to the meaning of human existence. This notion of 'working in regress' was not only directed to the discovery of the origins of man. In *Evoluzione e Involuzione*, the artist's search for the human biological roots was primarily an existential, personal quest for identity. Costa described it: 'Non deve essere inteso come un semplice ritorno alle origini, o come regressione freudiana su un piano infantile, ma come un tentativo di prendere coscienza che esiste l'origine delle idee, come esiste l'origine dell'uomo.'³⁵ This manifests itself in his projects. Recalling his experience of curating Costa's solo exhibition at Aachen in 1974, the art historian Wolfgang Becker writes: 'I remember the moment when I read page 65 and suddenly understood that the photograph of the head presented as a reconstruction of the homo sapiens Cro-Magnon was him and that the whole book was written as a self-reassurance of the artist as a member of the mankind.'³⁶ The artist's anthropological search for the origin of humanity and that for his identity are inextricably interrelated, and unfold in the process of the making of the works themselves.

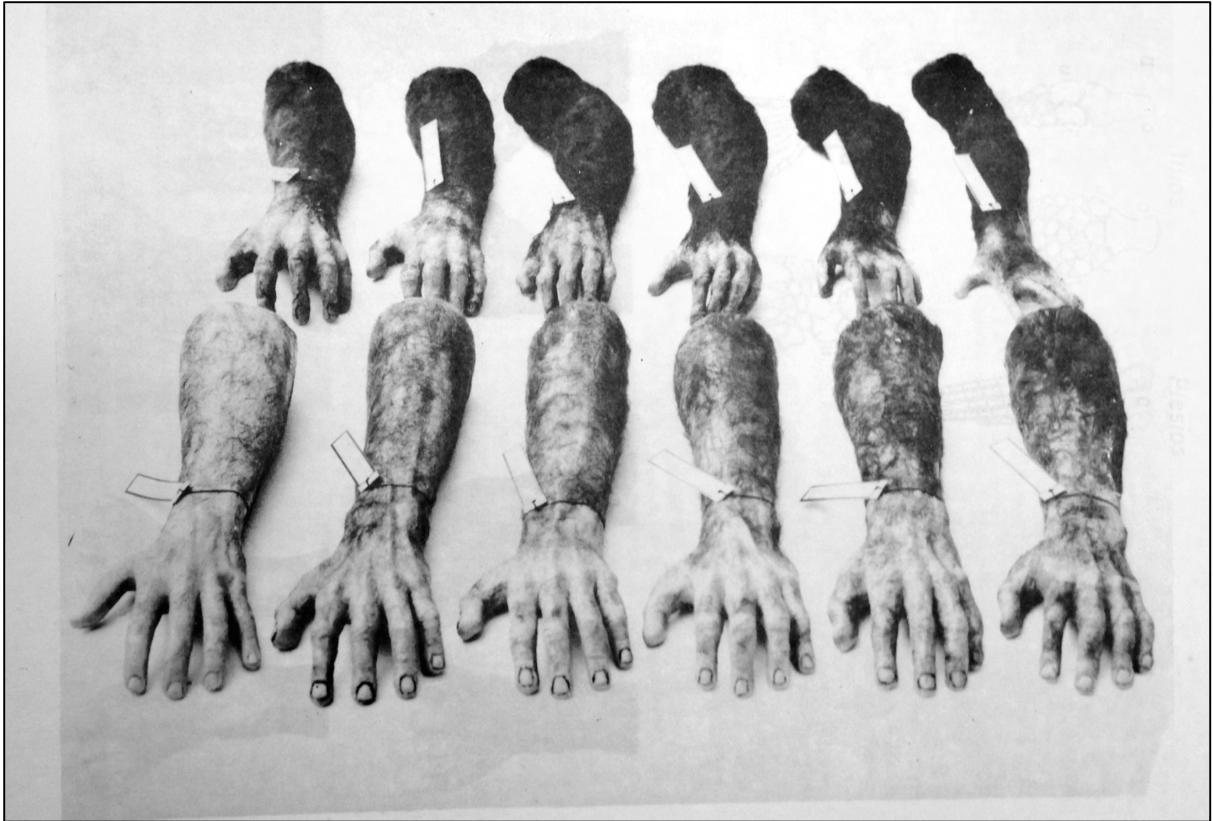


4.15 - 4.17. Illustrations from *Evolution Involuzione*, 1971

³⁴ Claudio Costa, *Materiale e metaforico. Sintomatologie sul work in regress* (Genoa: Unimedia, 1978),

³⁵ Gualdoni, *Claudio Costa*, 15.

³⁶ Wolfgang Becker, *Claudio Costa. In the Company of Human Brain and Prehistoric Man*, in *L'ordine rovesciato delle cose*, 73.



4.18. Claudio Costa, *Evoluzione e Involuzione* (Hand-cast), 1972

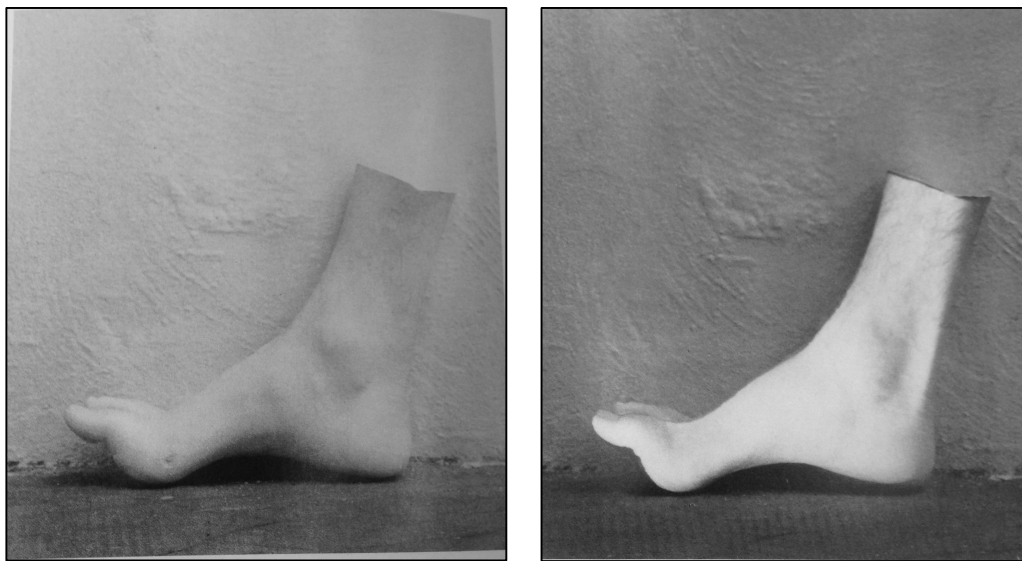
In the book, and in his first print works on evolution created in Berlin, the artist identified himself within the previous evolutionary steps of mankind, but, in the *Museo dell'uomo*, this process also acquired a sculptural component. In this project, as in *Cinque colori della pelle umana*, working in regress translated into a practice based on self-casting, which was part of the standard training practice for sculptors. In this work, the artist's own body, both as a subject and an instrument of knowledge, guided Costa through a discovery of the anthropological origins of mankind as well as to his own origin [4.18]. Each of the thirty-six casts of the artist's body was later developed into a sculptural piece that retraced evolution back to the first appearance of the physical features of humankind.³⁷ At the same time, the self-casting was, for the artist, a process of self-discovery through the apprehension of the body. Costa claimed: 'L'unica mappa possibile, imperfetta ma possibile, è pensare ed esperire il proprio essere corpo, scegliere la centralità del punto di vista del self.'³⁸ In this way of operating, the artist recalls Penone's works from 1972, which are examples of self-casting as artistic practice.³⁹ In 1972, the Turin-based artist developed a series of works titled *Calco in Gesso/Peli/Proiezione*, which consisted of a cast of a segment

³⁷ *Work in regress*, 35; Solimano, *Lordine rovesciato*, 28.

³⁸ Gualdoni, *Costa*, 10.

³⁹ See: Giuseppe Penone, *Rovesciare i propri occhi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 96-97.

of the body, accompanied by a projection of the photographic image of the same body part, taken before the application of the plaster [4.20-4.21]. In the combination of cast and projection, the body element found a more accurate representation.⁴⁰ Unlike Penone, Costa's artistic practice used his own body as an epistemological compass, and not only to reflect on the transient nature of corporality and its sculptural potential. It was instead the artist's means of reflecting on his belonging to the history of humanity expressed in physical features. In addition, the portraits hanging on the walls of the exhibition space allowed him to measure the difference between phenotypes and their variations in individuals, thus challenging institutional forms of representation.



4.19 - 4.20. Giuseppe Penone, *Calco in Gesso/Peli/Proiezione*, 1972

Developing this idea synchronically instead of diachronically as in the case of *Museo*, Costa worked on *Cinque colori della pelle umana* for Metken's exhibition in Hamburg. In this work, five heads of different human races are displayed according to the colour palette of their skin. Following the same process for the realisation of *Museo dell'uomo*, the artist explored racial differences measuring his own features against them. Reasoning with Sartre's aversion towards bourgeois universalism, the artist reasserted the common ground of different races through his physical features.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Penone, *Rovesciare i propri occhi*, 98. Penone dedicated an interesting reflection on touch in collaboration with the surgeon Michele Merle. See: Giuseppe Penone and Michele Merle, *Un dialogo*, edited by Chantal Destrez (Fossano: Centro Culturale Teresa Orsola Bussa De Rossi, 1990).

⁴¹ Robert Bernasconi, 'Racism is a system: how existentialism became dialectical in Fanon and Sartre,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. Steven Crowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 342-360.

Costa's interest in anthropology and natural science was parallel to his participation in Metken's group. Adopting visual strategies associated with human sciences, the artists in the group nonetheless unsettled communicative strategies. In Costa's early, anthropologically-engaged works, scientific manuals only provided a provisional theoretical structure and visual starting point, which he debunked through his 'working in regress' praxis. His bodily exploration of the wider spectrum of human physical differences was Costa's means of pursuing his own existential quest for identity, beyond the boundaries of his discipline. After 1973, however, Costa's artistic research took a new direction. His works, especially in *Indagine di una cultura* in Monteghirfo, became inspired by cultural anthropology, and the mute language of rural material culture became a means of self-education. This will be discussed in the next section.

Statuto antropologico, between Collective Memory and Individual Experience

4.21. View of Monteghirfo, 1990s

Costa developed several multi-media artworks about Monteghirfo and his experience in the village.⁴² Monteghirfo is a mountainside village near Genoa that the artist had discovered during one of his wanderings [4.21].⁴³ Through assemblages, performances, and conceptual works, the artist tackled different aspects of it and its community, ranging from the topography and the structure of the village, to the physical, cultural and relational features of its inhabitants.⁴⁴ The most ambitious artwork was conceived in the village itself: the *Museo di antropologia attiva* (*Museum of Active – or living – Anthropology*), a conceptual operation consisting in a temporary museum of peasant folklore, inaugurated in October 1975 with a public collaborative performance with the Genoa-based artist Aurelio Caminati (1924-2012) [4.22-4.26].⁴⁵ This section analyses Costa's works connected to Monteghirfo and the way in which he assigned an existentialist authenticity to the peasants' relationship with their environment, as embodied in rural tools.

Organised in a local family's semi-abandoned dwelling, the *Museo* collected vernacular peasant everyday objects and agricultural tools. A ticket desk was set up at the entrance of the building. Within the different rooms, the artist arranged the objects in typological series, added labels indicating their names in the local dialect and in Italian, and

⁴² For the list of aspects analysed in Monteghirfo, see: Centro Apollinaire, ed., *Situazione antropologica*, 39. A complete catalogue of Claudio Costa's works is not available yet. This chapter is based on published works about the project, and benefits enormously from the conversations with art museums and galleries in Genoa. I am referring to the Museo di Villa Croce (Francesca Serrati), Istituto per le Materie e le Forme Inconsapevoli (Gianfranco Vendemmia and Miriam Cristaldi), and the Galleria Unimedia (Caterina Gualco).

⁴³ Many thanks to Caterina Gualco, the artist's partner at the time, for telling me about their exploration of the hinterland of Genoa.

⁴⁴ Centro Apollinaire, ed., *Situazione antropologica*, 37-49;

⁴⁵ Caminati's non-painterly work was mainly performative and involving a reflection on historic re-enactment. About Caminati's work, see: Franco Sborgi, ed. *Aurelio Caminati : Opere dal 1947 al 1998* (Genova : De Ferrari, stampa 1998).

accompanied the display with documentary images showing their actual use. He also experimented with gallery signage, adding warning sign such as 'sala in costruzione'.



4.22



4.23



4.24



4.25



4.26

4.22 – 4.26. Claudio Costa, *Museo di antropologia attiva di Monteghirfo* (Documentary photographs), 1975

Costa's artistic intervention could be easily mistaken for one of several grassroots initiatives concerning the museumification of peasant culture.⁴⁶ After all, the industrialisation of agriculture and the abandonment of the countryside had led to an extraordinary proliferation of local museums of peasant culture at the time. This phenomenon was fuelled by the accumulation of unused working tools, furniture and objects, and by a nostalgia for the ancestral rural roots of the country.⁴⁷ Early examples of this trend can be seen in the Museo di Civiltà Contadina di San Martino di Bentivoglio (near Bologna), Ettore Guatelli's house-museum in Ozzano Taro (near Parma), Giuseppe Sèbesta's Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina, and later in 1980 the Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente di Romagna di Sant'Arcangelo in Romagna. In 1978, the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali published a compendium about the state of anthropological and folkloric studies in Italy at the time, and Costa's *Museo* in Monteghirfo was listed among them as *Museo di antropologia ligure*.



4.27. Claudio Costa, *Museo di antropologia attiva di Monteghirfo*, 1975

Costa involved several local peasants in the *Museo* [4.27]. In return, villagers became attached to Costa's initiative, as is demonstrated by the fact that when the artist left,

⁴⁶ Sandro Biagiola, and others, *Ricerca e catalogazione della cultura popolare* (Rome: Museo Nazionale delle arti e delle tradizioni popolari, 1978), 13.

⁴⁷ Gaetano Forni, "Ethnographic Museums in Italy: a Decade of Phenomenal Growth", *Museum International*, vol. 51(1999): 47-52; Maria Anna Bertolino, "Museology and Ethnography in Italy: An Historical Perspective", *Great Narratives of the Past. Traditions and Revisions*. Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodenstien, and José María Lanzarote Guiral, eds. (Linköping University Electronic Press, 2011), 285-296; http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=07, accessed on 24th August 2015.

the *Museo* was adopted by a group of young local volunteers.⁴⁸ The project rehabilitated the cultural memory connected to the countryside, and gave the village inhabitants the opportunity to take pride in their cultural upbringing. This was especially necessary because many villages in the surrounding Liguria region had been profoundly marked by emigration.⁴⁹ For instance, the Valley of Fontanabuona, as well as Monteghirfo itself, had been all but abandoned by its residents in preference for new, industrial jobs, often in Genoa, and for the flourishing tourist enterprises on the coastline. Costa described the Ligurian countryside of the hinterland as ‘*stillicidio di abbandoni, d’emigrazione che svuota i villaggi e muta i paesaggi,*’ leaving the land and its inhabitants in a state of forgetfulness.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, despite its social relevance, Costa’s operation was once again impelled by his existentialist quest. While posing questions about the epistemological validity of the representational potential of ethnography, Costa found an authentic experience of reality in rural objects.

The *Museo di antropologia attiva* was conceived around the idea of *statuto antropologico*. Reasoning with Paradiso’s concept of *usura* as well as with an avant-garde aesthetic of the ‘unfinished’, the *statuto antropologico* was a key concept that tied together Costa’s anthropological and artistic interests, his existential quest and his social engagement with contemporary peasant culture. The artist defined *the statuto antropologico* as ‘*l’impronta antica del gesto di fabbricazione. Allora esso [l’oggetto] è capace di suggerire la passata movenza naturale per la quale è nato e della quale tutt’ora vive, assumendo intera la sua tattilità, evocando la fonte primaria di energia da cui è scaurito e per la quale agisce nella coscienza di chi lo può osservare.*’⁵¹ Costa considered the haptic qualities of rural instruments as the linking point between the maker, the process of making, the user and the viewer. In other words, these objects, which possessed a *statuto antropologico*, linked the potential viewer with the peasant’s lifestyle and environment.

The series *Indagine su una cultura – natura naturata* best expresses this notion [4.28-4.30].⁵² Conceived for the gallery setting, *Natura naturata* consists of nine assemblages of objects, photographs, and handwritten notes on plywood panels. Each panel is divided in two sections: the upper portions document one of the interior environments of the *Museo*; the lower ones display everyday items or their faithful reproduction that have a connection

⁴⁸ Unfortunately it was closed soon afterwards, because of the lack of interest in and support from the Regional authorities.

⁴⁹ For statistics about demographic trends in Liguria, see: Rapporto statistic Liguria 2010. <https://www.wistat.it/it/files/2011/11/rapporto-statistico-liguria-2010.pdf>, accessed on 15th February 2017.

⁵⁰ See: *Materiale e Metaforico* (Genova: Edizioni Unimedia, 1979), 37.

⁵¹ Galleria Apollinaire, ed., *Situazione antropologica*, np.

⁵² Sandra Solimano associates these two works, but without discussing them in Sandra Solimano, eds. *Attraversare Genova. Percorsi e linguaggi internazionali nel contemporaneo. Anni '60-'70* (Milan: Skira, 2004), 56; 65.

with the image above. In each panel, these items could be found in the upper images: for instance, the plates on the shelves on the left of the image; the collection of roots on the wooden case on the right hand-side corner; and the sickle in the lower hang on the wooden wall in the background. The aesthetic, visual continuity between the two parts had the intriguing aim of questioning the viewer about the correlation between these two proximal elements: the objects and their environment. This present but unspoken connection in the series constituted the material and immaterial system of cultural meanings of a determinate environment, and lay at the heart of the artist's reflections about the notion of *statuto antropologico* that was expressed in the *Museo*.



Claudio Costa, *Indagine di una cultura - Natura naturata* series, 1976-1977
4.28. *Il portapiatti*; **4.29.** *17 radici del giorno*; **4.30.** *Gli uccelli, i maestri dell'agricoltore*

Costa's site intervention was conceived to keep this cultural system alive. Labels accompanied each tool, creating a cultural landscape of Ligurian-dialect words throughout the space. Illustrations of the way in which objects ought to be handled, as in the case of the sickle, were displayed near the items themselves. Locals also attended the *Museo* to explain and demonstrate how to use them. In doing so, Costa's operation clashed with eminent academic views about the present and the future of the peasant culture and its institutional

preservation.⁵³ Mario Cirese, who was a key figure in debates about this at the time, was a fervent supporter of the positive role that folkloric museums could play in the representation and understanding of rural material culture.⁵⁴ Cirese's argument was built on the idea that the museum is a meta-language *per se*, as well as a space cut out of the flow of life. Only when subtracted from their daily use and accompanied by pertinent audio-visual documentary materials could rural objects disclose knowledge about the culture that produced them. As such, museums had to distance themselves from opaque representations of life, and needed to elaborate their own effective communicative language, in order to become sources of preservation, study and representation of that civilisation. In Monteghirfo, Costa indirectly contested Cirese's point. Unlike Cirese, he was not aiming to further decontextualise anthropological studies. His work was developed in the field of art, and followed Marcel Duchamp's legacy.



4.31. Nikolaus Lang, *Für die Geschwister Götte*, 1973-74

The artist himself revealed that the *Museo* aimed at subverting the Duchampian action of the ready-made.⁵⁵ Alert to Duchamp's lesson, Costa knew that an object has the potential to change its status into that of artwork, if viewed within the context of a museum or of an art gallery.⁵⁶ In his *Museo*, however, he aimed at re-contextualising the meta-language of such institutions. Instead of bringing an item from rural everyday life into the

⁵³ Alberto Mario Cirese, *Oggetti segni musei* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 5-34.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 56-37.

⁵⁵ Costa, *Materiale e metaforico*, 37.

⁵⁶ Costa, *Uomo e l'oggetto come strutture solidali nella struttura mobile del Museo antropologico di Monteghirfo* (Milano: Galleria Apollinaire, 1977), np.

realm of art and thus making it lose its essential *statuto antropologico*, Costa decided to export the organisational principles from a museum and its institutional mobile elements to a rural semi-abandoned house. Organised into categories and typologies, Costa's *Museo di antropologia attiva* – this was the complete title of the work – did not alienate the objects from their original milieu, but used the language of the museum as an organisational grid. This language, adopted in institutional displays in folkloric museums, expressed a systematic organisation of material culture. These, often typological, classifications provided an indexical grid to collect and order artefacts.⁵⁷

The artist Nikolaus Lang had already worked on the anthropological organisation grid in his *Für die Geschwister Götte* (*For the Götte siblings*, 1973-74) [4.31]. The comparison between this work and Costa's clarifies Costa's relationship with cultural anthropology. Lang (b.1941) was the most representative artist of Metken's *Spurensuche* group at the time, and his work about the Götte siblings was first presented in Hamburg, in 1974, where Costa could have seen it.⁵⁸ On that occasion, Lang presented 238 objects from the rural village of Oberammergau in Bavaria (his hometown), ranging from agricultural tools, to animal bones, from newspapers to receipts from a seed company. Presenting their belongings in a carefully cleaned state, organised and categorised as in an anthropological glass case, Lang told the story of an ordinary family of hermitic peasants from rural Bavaria. A journalist from *Die Spiegel* who commented on the exhibition noted that in this work, the objects, which Lang had collected and organised in aseptic cases, had lost part of their 'magic appeal', which is a comment that implies an implicit critique of ethnographic display.⁵⁹ However, the 'magic appeal' lost in Lang's work found expression in what Costa considered an anthropologically-valuable connection of each object with their original environment. Unlike Lang's cases, it was not the organisation and museumification itself that interested Costa the most in Monteghirfo. It was instead the process of unveiling of networks of connections, both social and cultural, to which those vernacular objects owed their existence and were encapsulated in their shapes. The process of organisation and systematisation of local knowledge was firstly a process of personal apprehension, understanding and virtual re-appropriation of reality.

⁵⁷ Leroi-Gourhan [André Leroi-Gourhan, *Uomo e la materia* (Milan: Jaca Book – 1993)] was crucial point of reference at the time.

⁵⁸ About Nikolaus Lang, and his stay in Florence (Villa Medici), see: Genda Wendermann, *Spurensuche im Florenz der siebziger Jahre*, <http://www.villaromana.org/upload/Texte/Archivtext5.pdf>, accessed on 2nd February 2017; Metken was involved in the exhibition 'La creazione Volgeva al termine' (Genoa, Galleria Unimedia, 1978).

⁵⁹ <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-41722123.html>, accessed on 10th February 2017.



4.32. Costa at work for one of his reproduction of objects **4.33.** Claudio Costa, *Le cinque stagioni*, 1975-1978



4.34. Claudio Costa, *Analisi su un oggetto del Museo di Monteghirfo*, 1976

As in his previous works, Costa adopted the identity of the anthropologist, in Ingold's terms, for a self-reflective and self-reflexive process, aiming at recovering his individual and cultural identity, being himself someone who had grown up in the Ligurian countryside of Chiavari. This attitude finds particular expression in the works developed in Monteghirfo after the opening of the *Museo*, such as *Analisi su un oggetto del Museo di Monteghirfo* (1976) and *Le cinque stagioni* (1975-1978) [4.33; 4.34]. In these assemblages, the artist investigated the essence of the objects through the different materials used to reproduce them. Remaking an utensil with wax, paraffin, chalk and lead, as in *Le cinque*

stagioni, or a billhook with wax, clay, wood, and as a print, as in *Analisi su un oggetto del Museo di Monteghirfo*, allowed him to appropriate their essence [4.32]. In so doing, his practice reinforced an understanding of the artist's use of the epistemological potential of making, as both a means of apprehension of the surrounding reality and of self-discovery. What is experience for Costa? Gualdoni suggests it is 'È un corpo a corpo, è risalire fino all'origine del toccare...'⁶⁰ The hand is the primary tool of such processes: 'La mano è divenuta morsa meccanica. L'estetica degli oggetti ha smarrito il senso del contatto, è diventata fluida ed esterna, limitando in un unico scivolare di linee la sua tenue perfezione asettica, nel nome di un'ipotetica perfettibilità funzionale ed estetica.'⁶¹ From Costa's perspective, the process of making art, the task of understanding the world, and of re-appropriating one's ability to understand the world through touch coincide.

Furthermore, the remaking of the rural objects was the artist's way to penetrate the essence of the pre-industrial culture that had been denied by consumerism. With his practice, Costa not only tested the boundaries of the grid provided by science. He also longed for a sensual re-appropriation of the physical identity of objects, against their symbolic implications: 'Il rapporto che l'Uomo ha con le cose nel mondo come quello con gli individui nella società si basa sempre più sull'alienazione esasperata dello spazio estensibile insito nella Cosa e nell'Individuo, che non sul riconoscimento dell'utilità mentale di questa possibile estensività.'⁶² The re-appropriation of things through touch was also a process of re-appropriation of both mental and physical space, a space that had been lost in modern time, as he arguably wrote in *La Pratica dell'oggetto antico*: 'L'unica traccia che ci riporti dati essenziali di una situazione umana non alienante, rimane la narrazione che questi semplici oggetti manufatti dicono nella loro lingua muta, legata alla terra e alla natura, ma libera dalle imposizioni e dai falsi compiti di una civiltà che sta operando, con i suoi stessi mezzi, la sua completa obliterazione.'⁶³ Criticising the alienation in contemporary society, tactility and the hand played a fundamental role in deciphering the language of the objects, and their *statuto antropologico*. In return, rural objects were the materials that encapsulated a lesson of adherence with the world, that contributed to a re-appropriation of the artist self.

Costa's first project about *Evoluzione/involuzione* acted as a recovery of his anthropological roots in the evolution of mankind by reflecting on the differences in anatomical features. In Monteghirfo, the *statuto antropologico* expresses the essential connection between the maker, the rural object and the environment where it was

⁶⁰ Gualdoni, *Claudio Costa*, 10

⁶¹ Galleria Apollinaire, ed. *Situazione antropologica*, np.

⁶² Gualdoni, *Claudio Costa*, 9.

⁶³ Claudio Costa, "La pratica dell'oggetto antico", in *La creazione volgeva alla fine*, 33.

conceived and for whom it was made, as an essential feature of the object itself. Close to Paradiso's *usura*, the anthropological definition of *statuto antropologico* provokes reflections about the object maker and the environment to which it relates, as well as the means for the artist to explore and live out this connection. For the artist, the hand was the primary source of our understanding and re-appropriation of the physical and mental space, and the rural objects, for their anthropological qualities, are the means to acquire this. Costa endorsed ethnography as a form of description only to the extent that it was useful for his anthropological, transformational, experience. It was through the artist's hand that rural objects and agricultural tools, with their unpolished surfaces and their history of use, taught the artist a lesson of mindful presence in the world.

Bringing the Change Home: Superstudio's Empowering Objects

Question your tea spoons.

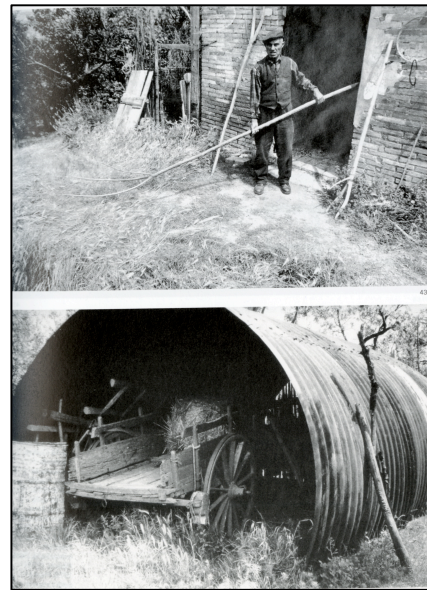
Georges Perec,

Species of Spaces and Other Pieces, 1974⁶⁴

Before 1980, when the Fondazione Biennale instituted the Biennale Architettura, architecture was included within the Venice Biennale for the visual arts. During the 1978 Biennale *From Nature to Art/ From Art to Nature*, the Magazzini del Sale hosted 'Utopia e crisi dell'antinatura. Intenzioni architettoniche in Italia', curated by Laura Vinca Masina and Superstudio as part of the exhibition at the Italian Pavilion.⁶⁵ Superstudio had accepted Vinca Masina's invitation, but with a curatorial proposal: it would bring together architects and designers who took part in the recent fertile cultural phenomenon that Celant had called 'Architettura Radicale'.⁶⁶ Projects from the previous ten years by Ettore Sottsass Jr, *Archizoom Associati*, *UFO* collective, Ugo La Pietra, and Riccardo Dalisi, among others, were presented for this occasion.



4.35. Superstudio, *La moglie di Lot*, 1978



4.36. Superstudio, *La coscienza di Zeno*, 1973-1978

⁶⁴ George Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London: Penguin, 1999), 210.

⁶⁵ Enrico Crispolti, ed. *Immaginazione e megastrutture dal Futurismo ad oggi e crisi dell'antinatura. Momenti delle intenzioni architettoniche in Italia* (Venice: Biennale di Venezia, 1979).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-25.

Superstudio displayed two new installations: *La moglie di Lot* and *La coscienza di Zeno*.⁶⁷ According to Adolfo Natalini, one of founder members of the collective and its most influential spokesperson, the two installations conveyed the essence of *Superstudio*:

I due lavori in mostra potrebbero essere letti in contrapposizione: da una parte la crisi pessimistica sui meccanismi e sui destini dell'architettura, dall'altra un'analisi ottimistica per una rifondazione della progettazione costruzione ed uso attraverso la creatività collettiva. I due lavori non devono essere letti in contrapposizione o in contraddizione: insieme rappresentano dialetticamente i nostri tentativi di comprendere per modificare.⁶⁸

La moglie di Lot was an engine designed to comment on architectural entropy, and on the cultural meaning of architecture.⁶⁹ *La coscienza di Zeno* displayed a selection of photographs of a farmer called Zeno Fiaschi and his farmstead in Riparbella, a rural village near Pisa.⁷⁰ Unlike *La moglie di Lot*, this second project was not a new creation, but was drawn from a long-term, multifaceted research that Superstudio had named *Cultura materiale extraurbana*. It had been designed for Natalini's academic module, *Plastica ornamentale C*, which he taught at the University of Florence.⁷¹ Running from 1974 to 1977, *Cultura materiale extraurbana* was a multidisciplinary study of the material culture in several rural areas in central and northern Italy. Despite having national and local visibility in the late 1970s, as Natalini himself recalls, the project was soon dismissed as a reactionary turn on the part of the collective.⁷² Commenting on the project, the architectural historian Peter Lang noted that it 'lacked the checks, balances and ironies that might have lifted this project to a more international platform.'⁷³ Only recently, Catherine Rossi has reconsidered this project from a different perspective, discussing it as a telling example of a more generalised pastoral attitude in 1970s Italian radical design.⁷⁴ This chapter instead reconsiders *La coscienza di Zeno* and *Cultura materiale extraurbana* within the context of Superstudio's academic and educational activities.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁶⁸ Natalini, in Crispolti, *Immaginazione e megastrutture dal Futurismo ad oggi e crisi dell'antinatura*, 34.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 36-37. See also: Lang and Menkin, *Life Without Objects*, 214-215; 218-221; Mastriqli, *Superstudio*, 554-561.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 38-39. The title of the project is the title of Italo Svevo's fictional memoirs *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923)

⁷¹ Adolfo Natalini, Lorenzo Netti, Alessandro Poli, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, *Cultura materiale extraurbana* (Florence: Alinea editrice, 1984), 7.

⁷² Gabriele Mastriqli and Adolfo Natalini, "Una storia a più finali," in Gabriele Mastriqli, *La vita segreta del monumento continuo* (Macerata: Quolibet, 2015), 65.

⁷³ Lang and Menking, *Life Without Objects*, 47.

⁷⁴ Catherine Rossi, "Crafting a Design Counterculture: the Pastoral and the Primitive in Italian Radical Design, 1972-1976," in Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan, eds. *Made in Italy Rethinking a Century of Italian Design* (London - New York: Bloomsbury 2014), 145-160.

This section prepares the ground for a closer analysis of *Cultura materiale extraurbana*, which will be developed in the final section of this chapter. Superstudio is mainly known for its theoretical projects and ‘negative utopias’, circulated in design magazines through carefully crafted collages and comic strips, but very little remembered at their objects. This chapter focuses on their well-known *Istogrammi di architettura*, and on a selection of their household articles produced by Poltronova, Zanotta and Abet Laminati between 1967 and 1974. It discusses these designs through Henri Lefebvre’s notion of ‘contestatory’, which was first adopted by Emilio Ambasz in his *Italy: the New Domestic Landscape* exhibition in 1972, and insightfully contextualised by the architecture historian Felicity D. E. Scott in her 2007 study.⁷⁵ None of the designs analysed in this chapter was included in the contestatory section of Ambasz’s exhibition.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, the adoption of this category demonstrates appropriate to discuss the collective’s commitment to a socio-political praxis for change, and to articulate the way in which this aspect was manifested in their objects.



4.37. *Unknown, Italy: The New Domestic Landscape.* Exhibition view. 1972 **4.38.** *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape.* Catalogue cover. 1972

Adopting a didactic curatorial approach to make a political statement and to inspire a contemporary generation of American designers, Ambasz organised a display of around 180 objects in the internal courtyard of the Museum of Modern Art. The artefacts were arranged according to three different categories, each representing different degrees of criticism of contemporary society: conformist, reformist, and ‘contestatory’ objects.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Felicity Dale Elliston Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics After Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, c2007)

⁷⁶ Ambasz included *Passiflora* lamp was presented within the reformist section, and commissioned Superstudio an environment.

⁷⁷ Ambasz, *New Domestic Landscape*, 19-21

Conformist designs were included for their aesthetic qualities.⁷⁸ Reformist items challenged the socio-linguistic codes and established socio-cultural meanings.⁷⁹ The ‘contestatory’ category included objects flexible in function, which permitted multiple modes of arrangement and use, and proposed ‘more informal patterns of behaviour in the home than those currently prevailing.’⁸⁰ As suggested by Scott, Henry Lefebvre’s concept of ‘contestation’, often used in the context of discourses about urban space, provided a framework to express the political charge of this third category overcoming strict Marxist orthodoxy.⁸¹ This was in fact the perspective adopted by the architecture historian Manfredo Tafuri, who was extremely critical of Superstudio’s form of political-commitment: in his fundamental *Storia dell’architettura italiana 1944-1985* (1986), he defined their activities a ‘luddismo intellettuale tanto più irresponsabile quanto più verbalmente dedotto dalla frettolosa lettura delle riviste della nuova sinistra.’⁸² Ambasz had instead a positive view of the politically-engaged content of Italian radical design. The way in which he conceived their work has been recently described as a ‘laboratory for experimentation in new forms of political thinking that help to conceive a revolutionary praxis’.⁸³ In this respect, the ideas of the French philosopher provided a more flexible mental and physical framework for socio-politically committed design.

The notion of the ‘contestatory’ was rooted in Lefebvre’s critique of the everyday, in which he extended Marx’s socio-economic alienation to every aspect of life.⁸⁴ He saw alienation ‘everywhere’, and contributing to the homogenisation, despoliation of value, and the impoverishment of life. Alienation also enforced the capitalist mode of production and consumption outside the factory, the place for orthodox class struggle.⁸⁵ In this context, contestation was conceived as the refusal of the happiness that could result from passive consumption. In the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Ambasz tailored Lefebvre’s notion to a category that included designs not to be passively consumed, but to empower the users in their everyday lives by prompting them to shape their own objects. Gatti’s, Paolini’s, and Teodoro’s now famous beanbag *Sacco* (1969), Becchi’s convertible couch *Anfibio* (1971), and Boeri’s seat of unlimited length *Serpentone* (1970-71) were among the

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-92

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 93-110.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 111-136.

⁸¹ Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia*, 124. Contestatory is however used in Lefebvre in relation to space. See: Richard Bower *Architecture and Space Re-imagined*. London: Routledge, 2017, 70-78.

⁸² Tafuri, *Storia dell’architettura italiana*, 125; Felicity Dale Elliston Scott, *Architecture or techno-utopia: politics after modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, c2007), 140. William Menking has widely analysed the extent of Tafuri’s disdain of Superstudio and Archizoom. See: Menking, “The Revolt of the Object,” in Lang and Menking, *Life Without Objects*, 53-63.

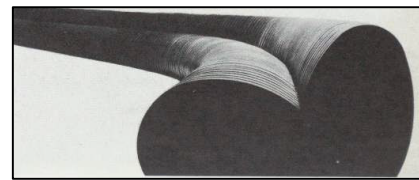
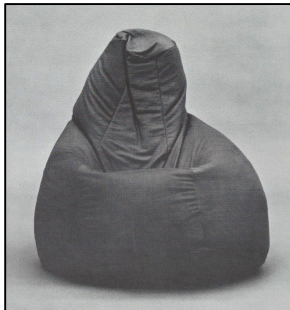
⁸³ This is one of argument of chapter five, in Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia*, 117-306; 140.

⁸⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*. Translated by John Moore. London: Verso, 2008. Lefebvre’s thought will be discussed more in depth in the next chapter

⁸⁵ Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henry Lefebvre*, London – New York: Continuum, 2004, 110-111.

items included in this category [4.39; 4.40; 4.41]. Allowing users to decide the shape of their everyday objects, domestic appliances and objects were presented as means for such a political training, as Scott has recently argued, and the living space of the house was conceived as ‘a sort of training ground for more engaged and flexible modes of interaction’.⁸⁶

A number of Superstudio’s objects formally resonated with objects included in Ambasz’s contestatory category, because of the way in which they elicited the user’s active engagement, and avoid passive consumption. They represent three different strategies: non-functional design (*Istogrammi*), objects that required interaction (*Gerpe; Lucean stelle; OLOOK*) and do-it-yourself strategies (*Tavolo 11; Contenitori*).⁸⁷



4.39. Piero Gatti, Cesare Paolini, Franco Teodoro, *Sacco*, 1969 4.40. Alessandro Becchi, *Anfibia*, 1971 4.41. Cini Boeri, *Serpentone*, 1971

The first of these strategies rely on a semiotic understanding of objects and on Eco’s *Opera aperta* (1962), views that had resonated widely in the art world as well as in Italian design over the course of the 1960s.⁸⁸ According to Eco, objects are more than their physical, formal manifestation.⁸⁹ They exist at the intersection between their functions and the meanings attributed by the socio-cultural system that incorporates them.⁹⁰ Thus, if we draw on the concept of ‘open work’, an object can be intended to have an intersubjective entity, emerging from the experience of both its producer and user. In a text collaboratively

⁸⁶ Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia*, 125.

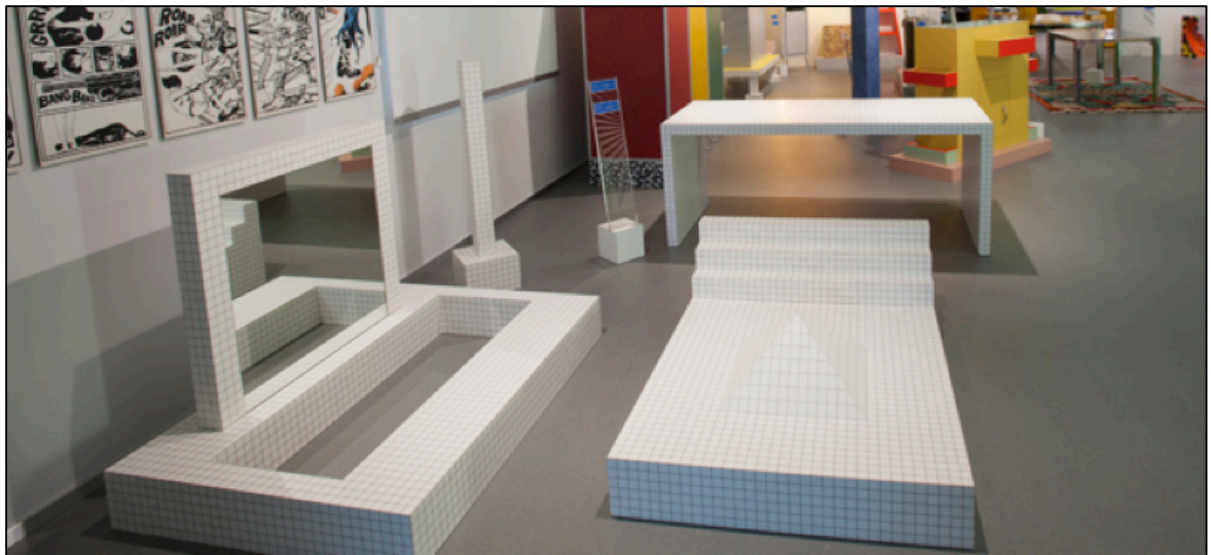
⁸⁷ Anna Deuze has recently grouped under the notion of DIY art, ‘works that require the audience active physical and/or conceptual participation on the part of the spectator’ Anna Deuze, ed. *Do It Yourself. Participation from Fluxus to New Media* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 1. I use this term more literally as a synonym of design.

⁸⁸ Vittorio Gregotti, “History of Italian Design”, in Ambasz, *The New Domestic Landscape*, 332. Eco taught at the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence between 1966 and 1969. Cinzia Colosimo, “Umberto Eco, la cattedra a Firenze, e il pendolo di Foucault in Duomo”, *Corriere della sera* (20.02.16), http://corrierefiorentino.corriere.it/firenze/notizie/arte_e_cultura/16_febbraio_20/umberto-eco-cattedra-firenze-pendolo-foucault-duomo-3db1dac2-d7be-11e5-8684-4b5b901309e6.shtml, accessed on 10th September 2016.

⁸⁹ Umberto Eco, “Introduction” to Vittorio Fagone and Umberto Eco, *Il momento artigiano. Aspetti della cultura materiale in Italia* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 1976), 7-11.

⁹⁰ Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta* (Rome: Bompiani, 1962).

written for a touring exhibition for *Abet Laminati* by Superstudio with Ettore Sottsass Jr, Clino Trini Castelli, Georges Sowden, and Archizoom, this semiotic approach to objects and Le Febvre's notion of alienation are combined to introduce the most controversial of Superstudio's design: the chequered surface. 'Gli oggetti che circondano l'uomo gli creano un universo figurato intorno, significante, comunicante,' they wrote, which is an assertion that resonates with Pasolini's text, mentioned at the start of this chapter. The authors continued: 'che creano la sua alienazione. Creando uno spazio e delle superfici neutre, si vuole tagliare con il legame linguistico condizionante [...] Una materia neutra dove tutto si somiglia. Un ambiente materialmente omogeneo permette di recepire come unico fenomeno in atto la propria esistenza biologica ed elettrica come uno sforzo in grado di definire tempo e habitat.'⁹¹ Objects were conceived as communication transmitters within a cultural network of meanings. The use of neutral surfaces aimed at silencing the language of objects, allowing the users to take charge of their definition in temporal and spatial terms.



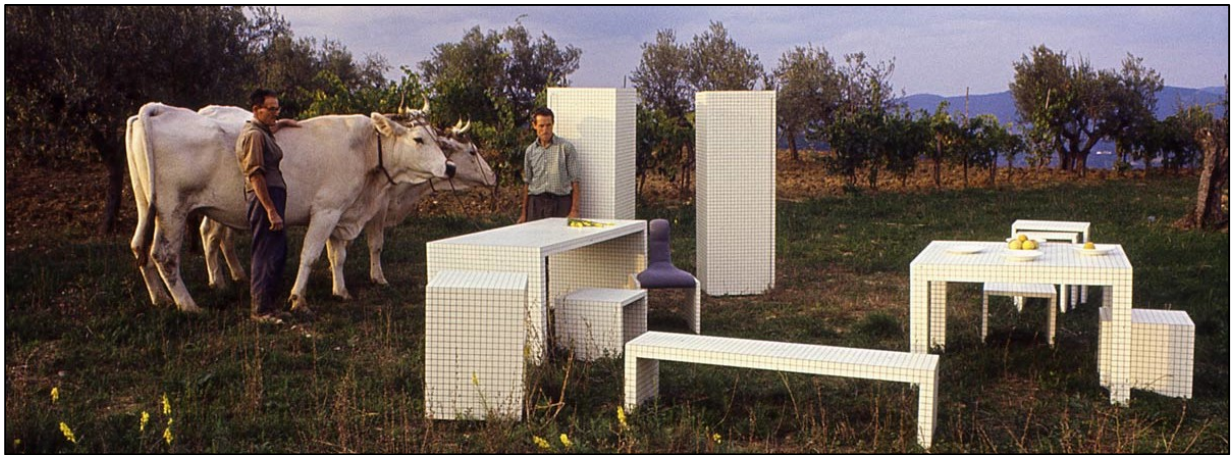
4.42. Superstudio, *Istogrammi di architettura* (Bra, Abet Museum, 2017), 1969-1971

Superstudio's chequered pattern was an elementary two-dimensional principle, which the collective took as the starting point for their aesthetic and conceptual practice prior to the 1972 exhibition. In June 1971, they participated in an editorial project called *La distruzione dell'oggetto*, coordinated by the architect Ugo La Pietra with *IN / Argomenti e Immagini di Design* magazine.⁹² Planned as one of a series of three, the issue invited fifteen architects or architects' collectives to propose ways of overcoming the perceived contemporary impasse in design, namely the reduction of the designers' activity to a purely

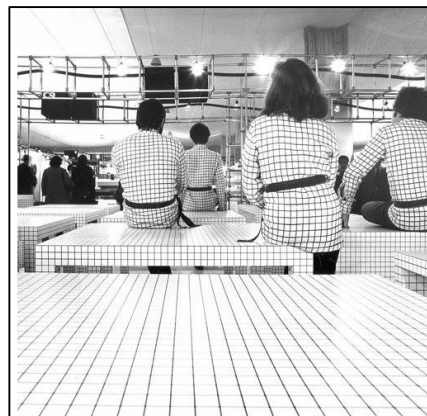
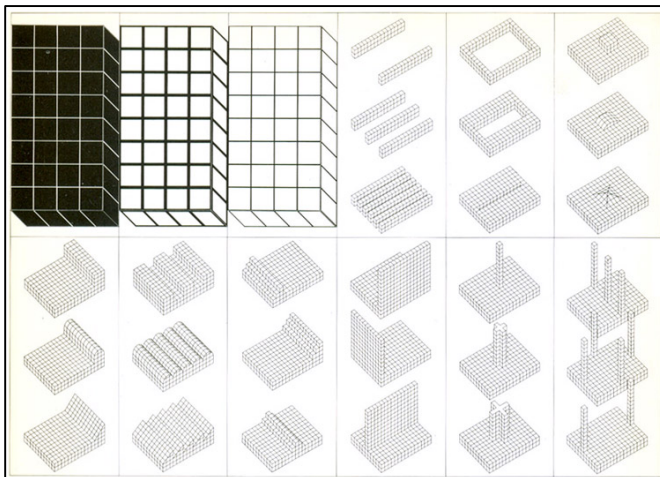
⁹¹ Mastrigli, *Superstudio*, 130.

⁹² Superstudio, "Distruzione, metamorfosi e ricostruzione degli oggi," in *IN / Argomenti e Immagini di Design*. Special issue. *La distruzione dell'oggetto*. (1971): 14-25.

aesthetic pursuit. Superstudio's response in the issue worked as a manifesto for their practice, and it was accompanied by a selection of its previous projects. *Monumeto continuo* (1969-1970), *Architettura interplanetaria* (1970-1971), *Architettura riflessa* (1970-1971), and the *Oggetti inesistenti* or *Istogrammi di architettura* (1969-1971) were presented as a coherent attempt to debunk the socio-cultural system of architecture as a discipline, from urbanism to object design. Using absurdity as a rhetorical strategy to push the rules of this architectural culture to its intrinsic limits, their projects aimed at inducing the user-viewer to feel symbolically 'disgusted', or better, becoming aware of their 'disgust' about the 'solutions' of modern design.⁹³



4.43. Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, *Istogrammi di architettura* (serie *Misura M*), 1969-1971



4.44. Superstudio, *Istogrammi di architettura* (Plate), 1969-1971

4.45. Superstudio, *Quaderna* series, 1970

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

The architects pursued this project through objects based on the development of the geometrical form of the square, and by playing with the semantic ambiguity of grids. They conceived a plastic chequered surface for Abet Laminati, and the *Istogrammi di architettura*. The *Istogrammi* were a three-dimensional development of this chequered surface. The grid allowed innumerable permutations, as illustrated in a series of prints published by Plura Edition in 1969 [4.44].⁹⁴ A selection of them was produced in two series that made their way to the market: *Misura M*, self-produced by the Superstudio's own brand in 1969, and *Quaderna*, later produced by Zanotta in 1970 [4.43; 4.45].⁹⁵ The *Istogrammi* were based on a geometric element – the square, thus excluding human scale from the design process. Most of them appeared as things with no function. Nonetheless, the user, as a relational being, was the centre of their operation. On the one hand, they pushed the rationalist approach to its absurd consequences by demonstrating the impossibility of 'use' that results from pure, geometrical formalism and rationalism that reduced to zero the imaginative role of the designer.⁹⁶ On the other hand, the *Istogrammi* were provocations conceived to disrupt everyday behavioural patterns and psychological associations, through the interaction with the object as well as with its symbolic implications.⁹⁷ What, for instance, could possibly be done with things composed of two perpendicular chequered surfaces and volumes, with no recognisable function?

Superstudio presented the *Istogrammi* as the starting point for a re-foundation of society on new values and new possibilities of self-determined users' agency. The idea was for people to actually employ them as they pleased. In the film *Supersuperficie* (later *Cerimonia*, in the series *Atti fondamentali*), which was broadcast at the MoMA exhibition, Superstudio illustrated the appropriation and use of the *Istogrammi* without the conditioning of the existing semantic and symbolic associations [4.46].⁹⁸ The movie alternated images of actors engaging freely with the *Istogrammi*, with photomontages of nomadic life [4.47; 4.48].⁹⁹ Hence, Superstudio proposed, naively and ironically, these 'non-objects' as platforms for the re-appropriation, 'mystical and magical', of the physical and metaphorical space of individual and collective everyday essential actions.¹⁰⁰ Ironically working with the grid, whose cultural meanings were later explored by Rosalind Krauss, the *Istogrammi* proposed to work beyond the objects' symbolic associations in the everyday,

⁹⁴ Gargagni and Campanello, *Superstudio*, 45

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

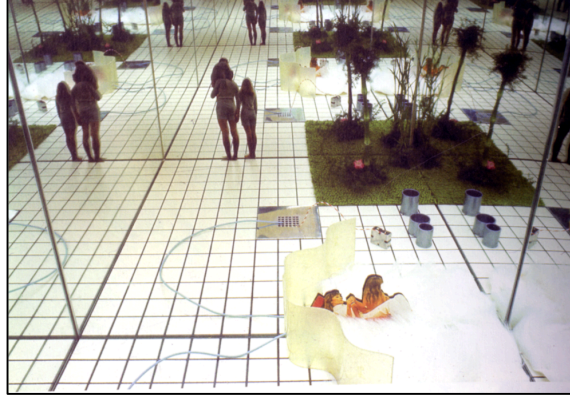
⁹⁷ Superstudio, "Le tombe degli architetti," in Mastrigli, *Superstudio*, 126.

⁹⁸ *Superstudio*, in Ambasz, *The New Domestic Landscape*, 240-253.

⁹⁹ About Nomadism in Italian radical design, see: Catharine Rossi, "From East to West and Back Again: Utopianism in Italian Radical Design," in Blauvelt, *Hippie Modernism*, 58-67.

¹⁰⁰ Superstudio, "Distruzione, metamorfosi e ricostruzione degli oggi," 21.

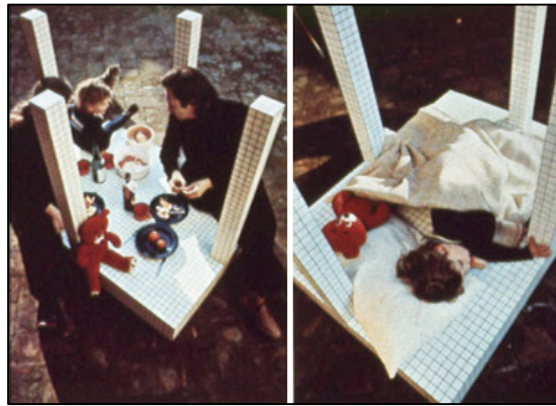
and towards the possibility of empowering the user to attach their own symbolic meanings to them.¹⁰¹ Hence, the *Istogrammi* were arguably conceived to prompt the user to choose their own ways of occupying, living and acting on their living space according to their particular needs and will.



4.46. Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, *Microenvironment for Italy: the New Domestic Landscape*, 1972



4.47 Superstudio, still from *Supersuperficie*, 1972



4.48. Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, *Istogrammi di architettura*, 1971

Although the most sophisticated one, this was not the only way in which Superstudio pursued a user's empowerment. A number of domestic designs required instead particular methods of interaction. The lamps *Gherpe* (1969) and *Passiflora* (1966) are described by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia as anti-rationalist projects.¹⁰² Anticipating Robert Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), their ambiguous shapes induced the user to question the function of the object itself, thus eliciting creative processes and new forms of behaviour. The spiral, organic shape of the plexi-glass sheets of *Gherpe*, or the flower shape of *Passiflora* overturned the modernist idea of functionality, thus using the shape of

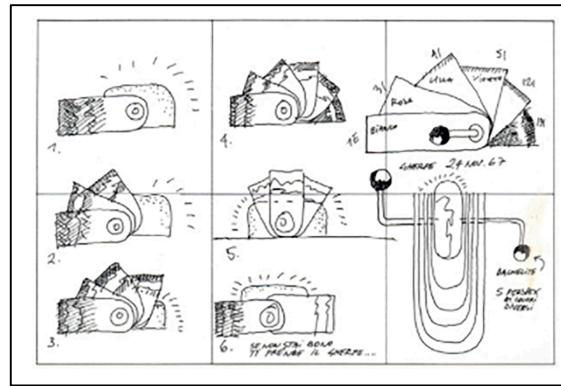
¹⁰¹ Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October*, vol. 9 (1979): 50-64.

¹⁰² Gabriele Mastrigli and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, "Aspettando l'alluvione. Conversazione con Cristiano Toraldo di Francia," in Mastrigli, *Vita segreta*, 102.

the object as a means to inspire creative behaviours in the user, and the user's redefinition of the meaning of an object [4.49].



4.49. Superstudio, *Gherpe*, 1968,



4.50. Cristiano Toraldo diFrancia, *Gherpe* (sketches), 1968



4.51. Superstudio, *Lucean stelle*, 1969



4.52. Superstudio, *OLOOK*, 1967

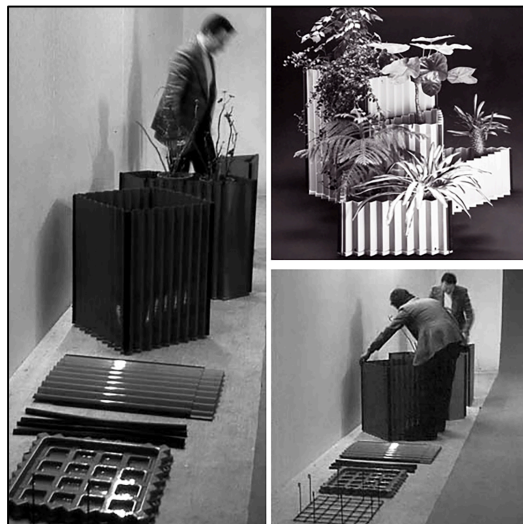
As Toraldo di Francia's sketches show, *Gherpe* was originally designed to be modified by the user. Pulling or pushing a lateral lever changed the shape of the object, with a consequent impact on its degree of luminosity [4.50]. More overtly, *OLOOK* (1967) and *Lucean stelle* (1969) required an even greater user interaction to determine both the shape and the functionality of the object [4.52; 4.53]. The first was a lamp with a metallic cover functioning as an eyelid, and the second a portable base with extendible cables with lightbulbs on top. The two pommels of *OLOOK* as well as the possibility to position the different bulbs of *Lucean stelle* allowed the user to adapt the shape of the objects according to the degree of luminosity required.

This principle was developed further in Superstudio's experiment in the do-it-yourself kit, *Table 11*, designed for Abet Laminati in 1971, and in *Contenitori*, for the Anonima Castelli in 1974 [4.53; 4.54]. As reported by Catherine Rossi, DIY was not popular in Italy until the early 1970s because landlords in rented accommodation provided fully-

furnished apartments.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, it was an engagement strategy attempted by several artists in the 1960s and 1970s. In Italian design, Marxist designer Enzo Mari's *Proposta per un'autoprogettazione* (1974) was the most representative work of DIY furniture at the time.¹⁰⁴ Mari proposed nineteen designs to invite the user to have a non-alienated experience of production. Superstudio's DIY table was not as radical as Mari's. Unlike Mari's designs for standard-dimension timber, Superstudio's project for Abet adopted plastic laminate, and allowed the consumer to buy the components altogether. Although partial, *Table 11* and *Contentori* proposed an experience of creative construction.



4.53 – 4.54. Superstudio, *Table 11*, 1971



4.55. Superstudio, *Contentori*, 1974

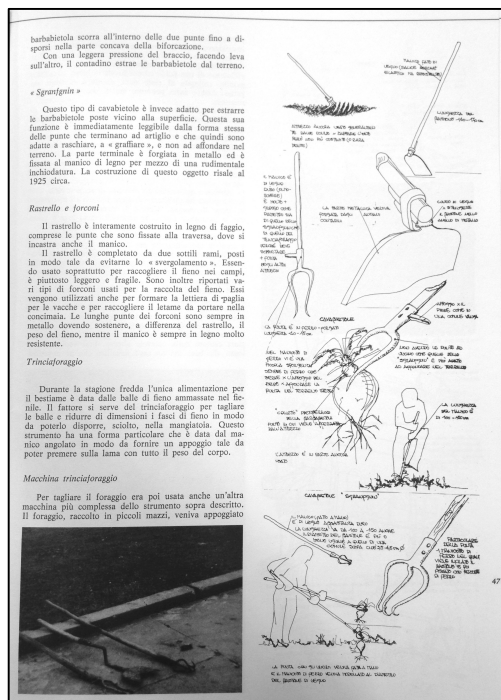
¹⁰³ Rossi, "Crafting a Design Counterculture," 151.

¹⁰⁴ Enzo Mari, *Proposta per un'autoprogettazione* (Milan: Galleria Milan, 1974).

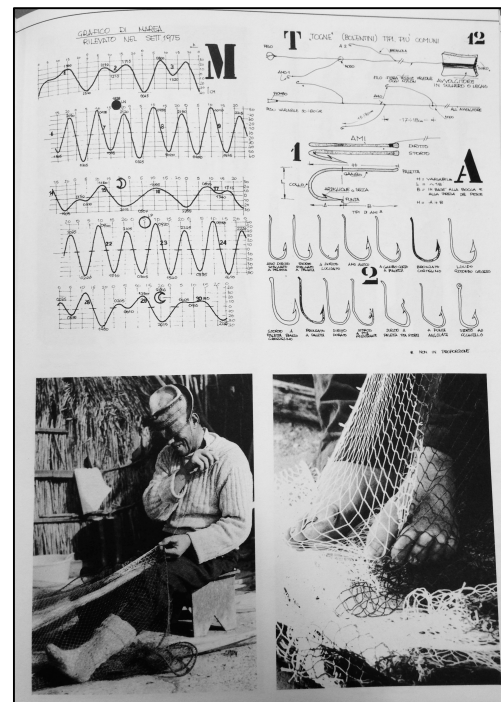
This diverse body of objects stimulated different degrees of user participation in determining their shape, use and meaning. Even though they were appropriated by the market, these design objects arguably represent attempts to empower the user to self-manage and make decisions about elements of their everyday living environment. In the *Istogrammi*, the process of re-appropriation of agency over the objects is developed *per absurdum*, thus, as non-objects they proposed an extreme version of the idea of design as the result of crystalline, geometric forms. In *Gherpe*, *OLOOK* and *Lucean stelle*, Superstudio left the user with considerable possibility to determine the shape of the objects according to their needs. The experimental DIY kit directly overcame the issue of passive consumption by not providing anything readily consumable. These different strategies of user empowerment respond to the ideal of self-determination of the domestic environment pursued by the collective, on the level of the individual shapes of objects, or, as in the case of the *Istogrammi*, with an attention for objects' functions and meanings. In the light of Ambasz's category, they acquire a political undertone. Furthermore, this interest in self-determination of the living environment is the premise of *Cultura materiale extraurbana*. In this educational project, the notion of contestatory as self-determination acquired a particular geo-political localisation and an educational relevance.

4.2.2. Superstudio and the Creative Farmer

Superstudio's *La coscienza di Zenò* presented at the Venice Biennale 1978 was part of Natalini's graduate course, *Plastica ornamentale C* at the University of Florence, as mentioned earlier. *Cultura materiale extraurbana* was one of the educational projects run with Superstudio members as part of his academic activities, and it was later recorded in the 1984 publication of the same title.¹⁰⁵ Conducting research in small villages or farms nearby Siena, Pistoia, Trieste, and Rovigo, *Superstudio* and their students surveyed simple working tools, everyday utensils, and agricultural and craftsmanship techniques.¹⁰⁶ This section explores the way in which this project integrated their critique of architects' traditional academic training into their institutional pedagogical activities.



4.56. Alberto Dalboni, *Tre fattorie del polesine*, published in *Cultura materiale extraurbana*, 1984



4.57. Dario del Zotto, *La pesca nella Laguna di Grado*, published in *Cultura materiale extraurbana*, 1984

Since 1963, the Politecnico in Milan, along with other architectural departments, had been the places where students' protests were the most active. As Robert Lumley notes this was probably 'due to their keen and critical interest in centre-left experiments, for which planning and building programmes were touchstones.'¹⁰⁷ Superstudio participated in

¹⁰⁵ Natalini, Netti, Poli, Oraldo di Francia, *Cultura materiale extraurbana*, 7

¹⁰⁶ Lang, *Superstudio*, 224.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Lumley *States of emergency*, 64. About the student movements in Italy see: Rossana Rossanda, *Lanno*

this turnover of academic praxis and political protests in the University of Florence during their time as students.¹⁰⁸ As in other universities across the country, students addressed the authoritarian structure of academia, and called for more innovative research projects and teaching methodologies through protests and occupations.¹⁰⁹ When *Cultura materiale extraurbana* was organised, this state of socio-political and cultural turmoil was still persistent, but in new forms.¹¹⁰ Adolfo Natalini, founder of Superstudio and officially employed by the university at the time, recently commented on the project:

In the university there had remained very little to destroy, and so the programme of the neo-avant-garde, 'The technical destruction of culture', sounded out of place. The hegemonic culture had already been liquidated. [...] The process of transformation of the university, its transition into the university of the masses through proletarianization, its growth into a place for struggle and refinement of strategy (political survival) render it one of the key positions - with the factory, the countryside, the city, being other examples.¹¹¹

In this context, the research they proposed to their students was conceived as a politicised response to the changing demographic, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, and to the shifting cultural paradigm of the university system.¹¹² Superstudio defined their projects from 1970-1971 (*Reflected Architectures*, *Interplanetary Architecture*, and the *Twelve Ideal Cities*) as 'didactic', and used this term to indicate their enquire into the promotional mechanism of architecture and into its practices. This section, however, focuses on their academic educational endeavour in particular, which started around 1973.¹¹³ It explores the ways in which *Cultura materiale extraurbana* relied on a conceptualisation of the city-countryside relationship based on Marxist literature, on their

degli studenti (Bari: De Donato, 1968); Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy*, 298-309; Sydney Tarrow, *Democrazia e disordine: movimenti di protesta e politica in Italia, 1965-1975* (Rome: Laterza, 1990); Aldo Agosti, Luisa Passerini, and Nicola Tranfaglia, editors, *La cultura e i luoghi del Sessantotto*. Conference proceedings (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1991); Balestrini and Moroni, *Lorda d'oro*, 220-263; Aldo Cazzullo, *I ragazzi che volevano fare la rivoluzione* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998); Nicoletta Fasano and Mario Renosio, *I giovani e la politica. Il lungo 68* (Turin: EGA, 2002); Stuart Hilwig, *Italy and 1968: Youth Unrest and Democratic Revolt* (Springer 2009); Stuart Hilwig, "Constructing a Media Image of the Sessantotto," in *Media and Revolts: strategies and performances from 1960s to the present*, eds. Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Erling Sivertsen, and Rolf Werenkjold (Oxford; New York: Berghahn books, 2014), 109-125. About the faculty of architecture in Milan, see: Marco Biraghi, "Università: La facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano (1963-1974)," in *Italia 60/70: Una stagione dell'architettura* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2010), 87-97; and <http://www.paisia.eu/1967-1968-la-strana-sperimentazione-della-facolta-di-architettura-del-politecnico-di-milano/>, accessed on 27th July 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Cristiano Toraldo di Francia recalls his participation in the autogestione and occupation of the university of Florence. See: Mastrogli and Toraldo di Francia, "Aspettando l'alluvione", 79-89.

¹⁰⁹ Biraghi, 'Università: La facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Milano (1963-1974)', 92-94.

¹¹⁰ Mastrogli and Toraldo di Francia, "Aspettando l'alluvione", 79-89.

¹¹¹ Lang, *Superstudio*, 222.

¹¹² Restrictions to university education were repelled in 1969 (Legge Codignola). For an overview of data about the increased number of students at the Politecnico, for instance, see: Biraghi, 'Università', 91.

¹¹³ See: Adolfo Natalini, "How great architecture still was in 1966...(Superstudio and Radical Architecture, ten years on)", in *Il Radical italiano nel contesto internazionale dell'architettura utopica e visionaria 1957-1980*, eds. Bruno Tonini and Paolo Tonini. (Gussago: edizioni dell'Arengario, 2011), np.

integration of ethnography into their architectural methodologies, and in their practice-based approach, to be socio-politically and educationally innovative. In this project, rural objects were conceived as ‘contestatory’, and acquired an educational relevance.

The coursework for Natalini’s module invited students to research into the material culture of their family’s tradition.¹¹⁴ This was the pragmatic starting point, but the theoretical framework adopted to define their rural field of investigation appealed to a Marxist understanding of the city-countryside relationship. As it will be further discussed in the next chapter, this approach was shared by other representatives of the Italian Radical Architecture. Archizoom, a collective based in Florence like Superstudio, expressed strong views on the topic, and conceived the *No-Stop City* (1969-1972), an influential critical model for understanding the phenomena that structure the city and society.¹¹⁵ In an article published in *Casabella* in 1972, Andrea Branzi, one of its members, discussed the city as a knowledge system of socio-economic dynamics: ‘Today’s metropolis, as an intensive concentration, stems from a distinction between town and country. Capitalism was born in the town and was at first identified with the urban organisation of land, but through urban planning, it extends its rationalising rule over the whole territory and organises it productively. Urban status, or being a town dweller, does not mean that one is more integrated than one who is not, since there is no territorial zone that is not organised with the system. The metropolis then ceases to be a “place”, and becomes a condition. The city coincided with the dimension of the market and no longer with that of particular place.’¹¹⁶ For Archizoom, the city had spilled out of its traditional boundaries in physical terms, whilst expanding as a model of economic organisation. The same was true for Superstudio, which, in addition, endowed the urban expansion with cultural features: ‘La città, dopo aver distrutto le sue mura, sta allargando i suoi confini sul territorio, estendendo a tutto lo spazio intorno il suo modello fisico e culturale,’ they wrote in the introduction to *Cultura materiale extraurbana*.¹¹⁷ If the city was an expanded and expanding physical and cultural entity, the countryside was therefore conceived of as a residual area that had ‘escaped’ it. The selection of case studies included in the publication testifies this approach. Riparbella (Pistoia), three farms in Polesine (Rovigo), Carpineta di Treppio (Pistoia), val d’Ema (Florence), and Laguna di Grado (Gorizia) examined in their research are small rural traditional communities and settlements.¹¹⁸ They represent a heterogeneous constellation of socially and culturally

¹¹⁴Students were asked to return to their family origins” see:Lang and Menking, *Life Without Objects*, 47

¹¹⁵ Natalini defines the *No-Stop City* a “classic” of Radical Architecture’ [Natalini, “How Great Architecture Still Was in 1966”, in Tonini and Tonini, *Il radical italiano*, np.]. For an introduction to Archizoom’s *No-Stop City* see: Andrea Branzi, *No-stop city Archizoom associati* (Orléans: HYX c2006).

¹¹⁶ Andrea Branzi, “Radical Notes”, in Alex Coles and Catharine Rossi, eds. *The Italian Avant-Garde 1968-1976*, 185.

¹¹⁷ Natalini, Netti, Poli, Tòraldo di Francia, *Cultura materiale extraurbana*, 8.

¹¹⁸ Natalini, Netti, Poli, Tòraldo di Francia, *Cultura materiale extraurbana*. These settlements were so small that it

homogenous microcosms, which embodied the last bastion of what was perceived to be an impossible resistance to urban culture and to its material-scape.

Although acknowledging the introduction of industrial materials in traditional practices, Superstudio and their students were primarily concerned with handcraft and handmade objects of these non-urban areas. This interest in crafts resonates with the consideration received in Italy and abroad by William Morris and in his interpretation of craftsmanship, expressed in Gianfranco Bologna's study (1972) at the time.¹¹⁹ Morris distinguished the city from the countryside according to different systems of production. He considered the latter as a place of preindustrial production and non-alienated working experience, and attached moral and aesthetic value to craftsmanship.¹²⁰ This appreciation of craftsmanship was not the case for Superstudio.¹²¹ Their research project looked especially into artefacts not yet affected by the 'continuous process of destruction of different cultures and of construction of a hegemonic cultural model' of the city, and especially at objects and technique with a 'contestatory' potential.¹²²

The language and the ideological premises of this and other statements within Superstudio's writings about this project reflected the generalised third-worldism had influenced the student movement and intellectuals between the 1960s and 1970s, opening the way to an appreciation of marginalised and underrepresented social classes.¹²³ In Italy, the work of Gramsci played a crucial role in this respect, contributing to the Italian intellectuals' interest in peasant culture. Unlike Marx and Engels's celebration of the spread of urbanisation as salvation from the 'rural idiocy', the Italian philosopher invested the Italian peasantry with political agency and cultural relevance.¹²⁴ Not only did he champion the potential alliance between southern peasants and northern proletarians.¹²⁵ Gramsci's reflections on folklore were as influential as his political praxis, especially in postwar Italy.¹²⁶ In his *Note sul folklore* (1935), Gramsci defined folkloric culture as the popular

is now not simple to locate them on maps.

¹¹⁹ Ferdinando Bologna, *Dalle arti minori all'industrial design: Storia di una ideologia* (Bari: Laterza, 1972). The architect Giancarlo De Carlo had already published a book about Morris in 1947: Giancarlo De Carlo, *William Morris* (Milan: Il Balcone, 1947). This phenomenon had a global scale: Britt Salvesen, "The Artisanal Avant-Garde," in *Labor and Wait*, ed. Julie Joyce (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Museum of Art/RAM, 2013), 45-53.

¹²⁰ About William Morris, see: Linda Parry ed., *William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement: A Source Book* (London: Studio editions, 1989); within the wider discussion about craftsmanship, see: Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). For the differences between Marx's and Morris's perspective on craftsmanship, see: John Roberts, "Labor, Emancipation, and the Critique of Craft-Skill," *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 5, issue 2 (2012): 137-148.

¹²¹ Postwar Italian designers' and William Morris's different views on craftsmanship are discussed by Andrea Branzi and Caterine Rossi in: Catherine Rossi, "Crafting Modern Design in Italy from Post-War to Postmodernism" (PhD dis. Royal College of Art, 2011), 41.

¹²² Natalini, Netti, Poli, Tbaldo di Francia, *Cultura materiale extraurbana*, 8.

¹²³ Lumely, *States of emergency*, 309-310 (quoting Asor Rosa); Balestrini and Moroni, *Lorda d'oro*, 174-179.

¹²⁴ Glaucio Ary Dillon SOARES and Jane COLLINS, "The idiocy of rural life", in *Civilisations*, Vol. 32 (1982), 31-65.

¹²⁵ Gramsci, *La questione Meridionale*. and Gramsci, *Quaderni*, Vol III, 2037.

¹²⁶ About the political relevance and the study of Gramsci in post war Italy see: Paolo Capuzzo, and Sandro

alternative to the hegemonic, official, culture and interpretations of the world.¹²⁷ This perspective was endorsed by Italian intellectuals, who contrasted folklore with bourgeois culture. In Mario Cirese's influential *Cultura egemonica e classi subalterne* (1970), Gramsci's *Note* and his distinction between hegemonic and subaltern culture became the rationale for the delimitation of the field of study of Italian folklore, and for a wide-spread interest in traditional vernacular culture.¹²⁸

As for other artists discussed in this dissertation, the commitment to bringing voice to subaltern social classes informed Superstudio's use of vernacular material culture in their pedagogical activity.¹²⁹ Although an unusual novelty in Superstudio's architectural interest, vernacular material culture had already played a role in Italian Modernist architecture and urbanism.¹³⁰ The persistence of traditional vernacular features within the Italian modernist movement in the twentieth century has been widely explored in recent Anglo-American scholarly literature on architecture and design.¹³¹ Scholars share an understanding of the complex socio-political relevance of the acquisition of vernacular cues in post-war Italian architecture, and in the context of the democratisation of the country in its transition from an agriculture-based to an industrial-based economy. As Michelangelo Sabatino has recently synthesized, referring to the post-war period, 'this shift ushered in a renewed era of both realist and modernist architecture (and urbanism) that integrated the ethical formal and material qualities of the vernacular tradition within a new political framework of a democratic Italy focused upon providing the lower and the middle classes a new voice after years of coercion, manipulation, and violence.'¹³² Superstudio's socio-political commitment

Mezzadra, "Provincialising the Italian Reading of Gramsci," in Srivastava and Bhattacharya, *Postcolonial Gramsci*, 34-54. About Gramsci's influence on anthropology see: Paola Filippucci, "Anthropological Perspective on Culture," in *Italian Cultural Studies*, eds David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 61.

¹²⁷ For more general introduction about Gramsci and anthropology, see: Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), especially section 3 and section 5. About Gramsci's theory of hegemonic and subaltern culture, see: Nadia Urbinati, "From the Periphery of Modernity: Antonio Gramsci's Theory of Subordination", *Political Theory*, vol. 26, n. 3 (June 1998), 370-391; about Gramsci's theory of knowledge, see: Fontana, "Intellectuals and Masses", 57-60.

¹²⁸ Fabio Dei, "Dal popolare al populismo: Ascesa e declino degli studi demologici in Italia", *Meridiana*, 77 (2013), 95-100.

¹²⁹ About international designers' interest in anthropology see: Clarke, Alison J. "The Anthropologic Object in Design: From Papanek to Superstudio," in *Design Anthropology: Object Culture in 21st Century*, ed. Alison J. Clarke (Vienna: Springer, 2011), 74-87. Alison J Clarke, "The Indigenous and the Autochthon," in *Global Tools 1973-1975*, eds. Valerio Borghonovo, Silvia Franceschini (Istanbul, SAIT/Garanti Kültür AŞ, 2015), 214-150.

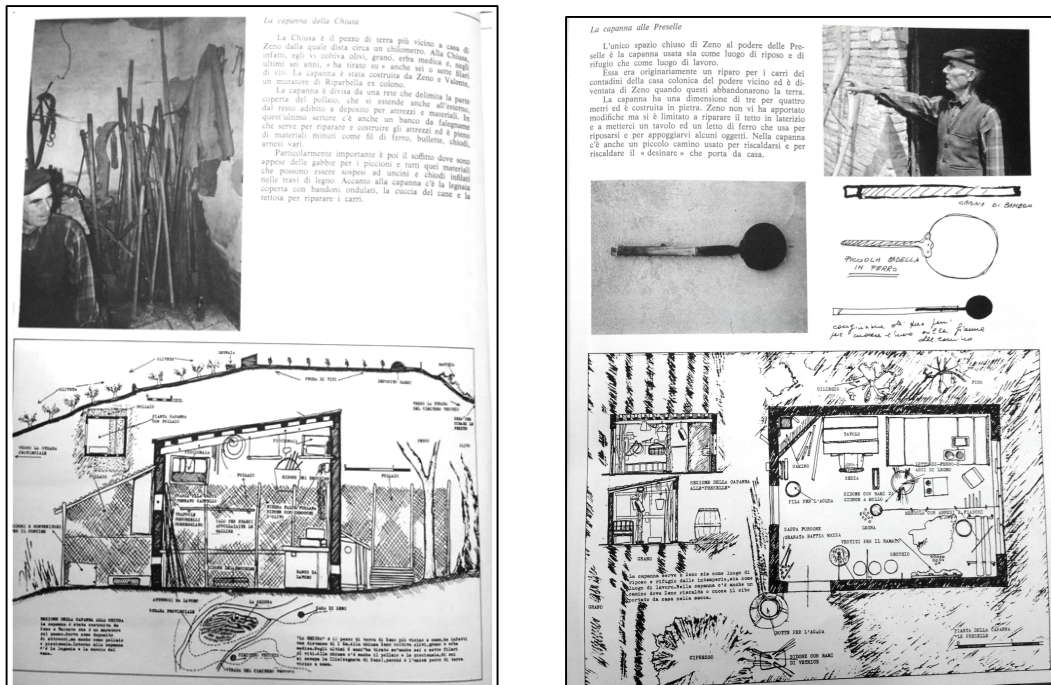
¹³⁰ Previous projects manifest Superstudio member Gian Pietro Frassinelli's interest in anthropology See: Giovanni Accame and Carlo Guenzi, ed., *Avanguardie e cultura popolare* (Bologna: Comune di Bologna, 1975), 106-112; Davide Sacconi, *Savage Architecture. Gian Piero Frassinelli. Superstudio and 2/A+P/A* (Milan: Black Square, 2016). Frassinelli, however did not participate in *Cultura materiale extraurbana*. Gian Piero Frassinelli and Gabriele Mastrigli, "Disegnare il Superstudio," in Mastrigli, *Vita segreta*, 157.

¹³¹ "Dennis PDoordan, "Changing Agendas: Architecture and Politics in Contemporary Italy", *Assemblage*, No 8 (1989), 60-77; Penny Sparke, *Italian Design. 1870 to the Present* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1998); Penny Sparke, "The Straw Donkey: Tourist Kitsch or Proto-Design? Craft and Design in Italy, 1945-1960", in *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, (1998): 59-69; Michelangelo Sabatino, *Pride in Modesty. Modernist Architecture and Vernacular Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Rossi, Unpublished PhD Thesis.

¹³² Sabatino, *Pride in Modesty*, 168.

belongs only partially to this genealogy of architecture interest in vernacular architecture. Their educational operation appeared in fact far more subversive.

Superstudio adopted a multidisciplinary approach that integrated ethnography and anthropology into the set of methodologies for architectural academic training. In describing this research project in the course handbook in 1976-1977, Natalini distinguished between the 'metodo antropologico', *anthropological method*, and the 'sperimentazione diretta', *direct experimentation*.¹³³ This distinction resonates with Tim Ingold's differentiation between ethnography as documentation, and anthropology as the learning process from and with the people whose work is documented. It also facilitates the analysis of the socio-political educational endeavour within Superstudio's project.



4.58 – 4.59. Superstudio, *La coscienza di Zeno (Cultura Materiale Extraurbana)*, 1984

The 1984 publication curated by Natalini's assistant, the architect Michele De Lucchi, gives an institutional account of Superstudio's student fieldwork, and of the methodologies adopted, and thus their attempt to merge ethnographical and architectonic research.¹³⁴ The introduction provides a detailed explanation of the methodology adopted in the work, as well as accurate descriptions of the techniques and instruments used for the investigation. In each case study, as in Superstudio's *La coscienza di Zeno*, plans, sections,

¹³³Superstudio, "Viaggio a matita" in Mastrigli, *Superstudio*, 530.

¹³⁴ All the technical instruments and methodologies used in the project are carefully recorded in the publication. Natalini, Netti, Poli, Tòraldo di Francia, *Cultura materiale extraurbana*, 10-27.

topographical and metric surveys, cross sections, and exploded view diagrams complemented photographs, ethnographic descriptions, and biographical information about the family nucleus studied [4.57;4.58].

Their ethnographic approach followed the guidelines elaborated in collaboration with the *Comitato per le ricerche antropologiche in Toscana*.¹³⁵ Set up by Giovanni Caselli and Silvano Guerrini, the *Comitato* started its activities in 1971, and had its headquarters in Antella, near Florence. One of the aims of the *Comitato* was to compile a history of the most significant rural tools, such as ploughs and means of transport, and of their formal development.¹³⁶ In line with this research, Superstudio's students addressed domestic and work objects of these areas. In his study of three Polesine farms, Alberto Dalboni examined not only buildings and the settlements, but investigated different types of wooden waggons, baskets and agricultural tools [4.56]. Antonella Butelli and Maria Grazia Chiodini pursued a similar investigation into Carpineta di Treppio. Shepherd tools in Val d'Emma were investigated by Cesare Beghi and Mario Federici, while fishing techniques and tools were studied by Dario del Zotto, in the Laguna di Grado, near Gorizia [4.57]. Charcoal pits were instead Tiziano Ceccarelli's, Pierino Pompili's and Graziano Machetti's object of interest, and the *corbelli*, braided wooden baskets produced in Pistoia, were Caterina Scorcelletti's focus. The body of material and immaterial culture studied by Natalini's students suggest that the nature of Superstudio's interest in peasants' culture was clearly not aesthetic as for previous generations of architects, but connected to the "use value" of the rural tools deployed in the countryside, and for the reservoir of knowledge they embodied.

Endorsing the idea of design not for passive consumption, they especially appreciated the quality of the rural objects as embodying the rural dwellers' ability to adapt to their living environment. This set of versatile low-tech objects, and the *techne* they encapsulated, appeared of even greater importance in light of the energy crisis that began in December 1973, and concerns about the status of the planet raised by the Club of Rome in 1972.¹³⁷ More importantly, in light of their views on contemporary consumerist urban society, these objects were fine examples of self-determination, because they were self-produced, and constituted a '*corredo per la sopravvivenza*' to and modification of the living environment.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³⁶ See: Caselli, Giovanni. "La treggia. Nota preliminare per uno studio dei materiali delle culture non urbane in Italia," 1975. https://www.academia.edu/16108965/PEASANT_CULTURE_IN_TUSCANY_1978_, accessed on 16th February 2017.

¹³⁷ About the oil crisis and architects' international responses: Giovanna Borasi, Mirko Zardini, editors, *Sorry Out of Gas: Architecture's Response to the 1973 Oil Crisis* (Montréal; Montova, Italy: Corraini Edizioni c2007).

¹³⁸ Superstudio, "Viaggio a matita," in Mastrigli, *Superstudio*, 530.

Beside the more academic skills taught during the course, the relevance of the project lays in the practice-based element of their educational project. Firstly, by undertaking fieldwork, the students exited the walls of the university and overcame the studio-based training. Endorsing a general criticism of the education system, Superstudio considered the educational institutions as secluded from society, and organised in a hierarchy, that reflected the structure of power of the institution and of the ruling class in general.¹³⁹ Furthermore, their approach appears to relate to Ingold's idea of anthropology as a 'self-transformative process'. Despite not being documented, the experiential side of the project was crucial to the whole educational experience. The students were invited to learn and have first-hand experience of the techniques they were drawing. In so doing, they were not only learning the visual qualities of the objects. They were apprehending an attitude towards making whilst documenting it. Unlike previous Italian architects appealing to anthropology, Superstudio did not seek out visual clues to appropriate. Superstudio were eager to support their students to apprehend the knowledge and creative capacity detained by farmers by including them as object of study in their academic curriculum.¹⁴⁰



5.60. Adolfo Natalini whilst teaching



5.61. Superstudio during Global Tools, 1973

Natalini's university courses had already proposed an empirical exploration of the relationship between the making process of objects, their form and materials, and their use [5.60]. Instead of turning to the examples of architecture in Florence and to the study of architectural plans on paper, Superstudio induced their students to experience the relationship between essential human activities and elementary, and self-produced objects. As scholars have noticed, these educational strategies had already been previously tested

¹³⁹ Discussing the relationship between architecture and school, Gian Carlo De Carlo expressed a criticism, shared in student protests, of the isolation of educational institutions from more complex learning experiences [Gian Carlo de Carlo, "Ordine-Istituzione Educazione-Disordine," *Casabella*, 368/369 (1972): 65-71]; Superstudio critiqued traditional education in *Educazione (Atti fondamentali)*. See: Mastrigli, *Superstudio*, 406-427.

¹⁴⁰ Superstudio, "Programma del corso 1976-1977," in Mastrigli, *Superstudio*, 535-534.

with Global Tools (1973-75), a creative collaboration and a self-educational platform, and in the S-Space (*Separate School for Expanded Conceptual Architecture*), an alternative network for informal architecture education founded with Gruppo 9999 in Florence in 1970 [5.61].¹⁴¹ In June 1975, Superstudio and the younger Gruppo 9999 proposed to Global Tools members a workshop that more clearly resonates with their course at the University of Florence. To apprehend and understand the way in which essential, survival use value informed the shape of utensils, they proposed a 'structural interpretation' of the utensils of prehistoric, Australian Aboriginal, and Tuscan peasants' culture, which was then followed by the reconstruction of these same objects.¹⁴² This was only one of many activities that, in an informal educational context, pushed boundaries of learning through experiential practices indebted to performative arts.

Unlike Global Tools's workshops, however, very little is recorded about Superstudio's didactic activities at the University prior to *Cultura materiale extraurbana*. Superstudio members recall that lectures included attempts to activate students' senses other than sight, for example, touch and taste. Natalini recalls having a bean-cooking and tasting session to make his students understand the material selection process in design.¹⁴³ With these classes, Superstudio brought the process of object design back to its anthropological and physical origins. Compared with these experiential classes, *Cultura materiale extraurbana* was a more structured experience, in which farmers, often family members, taught what was perceived as the vernacular process of adaptation to and modification of their own land. Collapsing the distance between creation and use, these experiences of object-making were therefore an empowering experience of self-determination rooted in the students' family heritage.

Despite belonging to a later phase of Superstudio's work, *Cultura materiale extraurbana* reflects a collective attempt to change the conventions of architectural culture and education from within the academic system. Superstudio envisioned the countryside as a space that had evaded contemporary urbanisation. These spaces were associated with Gramsci's notion of subaltern culture, and were associated with the empowering ability to

¹⁴¹ The important role of Global Tools in the development of *Cultura materiale extraurbana* has been explored Catherine Rossi, "Crafting Modern Design in Italy, from Post-War to Postmodernism". Unpublished PhD thesis (Royal College of Art, 2011), 391-401; Borgonuovo and Franceschini, *Global Tools*, 32; Lang is more critical of Global Tools as a consumeristic operation: Lang and Menking, *Life Without Objects*, 48. About Global Tools and de-schooling, see: Sara Catenacci and Jacopo Galimberti, "Deschooling, Manual Labour, and Emancipation: The Architecture and Design of Global Tools, 1973-1975", in *Collaboration and its (Dis)Contents: Art, Architecture, and Photography since 1950*, eds. Meredith A. Brown and Michelle Millar Fisher, editors (London: Courtauld Books Online, 2017), 99-121. About the S-Space, see: Catherine Rossi, "Architecture goes disco", *Files*, No. 69 (2014): 138-145; Carlo Caldini, "Space Electronics", in Cole and Rossi, *The Italian avant-garde*, 97-106.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 143-150.

¹⁴³ Mastrogli and Natalini, "Una storia a più finali", 61-63.

self-determine an environment. Peasant tools and the traditional knowledge they embodied were the research objects of Superstudio's students. Integrating ethnography, practice-based research, and collaborative projects into architectural education helped reshape the academic curriculum according to students' experiences from the previous decade, whilst rural tools became didactic materials to diversify, culturally and methodologically, the discipline of architecture. Although in a different way from what Pasolini wrote in 1975, hand-crafted objects were considered as embodying a lesson in self-determination that was worth learning.

Chapter Five

Rural Counter-Dwellings:

Ugo La Pietra's *Gradi di libertà* and Gianfranco Baruchello's *Agricola Cornelia*

C'era Ampelio e si chiusero in sala da pranzo, ingombrando tutto il tavolo di carte, presero a fare da capo i conti.

La madre era in giardino. I caprifogli odoravano. I nasturzi erano una macchia di colore fin troppo vivo. Se non alzava gli occhi in su, dove da tutte le parti s'affacciavano le finestre dei casamenti, il giardino era sempre il giardino.¹

Quinto, the narrator, his brother Ampelio, and their mother, from the Anfossi family, are the protagonists of Calvino's *La speculazione edilizia* (1957-1963). Conceived as part of a trilogy titled *Cronache degli anni '50*, this book gives an account of, and indirectly denounces, the unruly urbanisation and proliferation of second homes that was transforming the topography of the Ligurian Riviera, especially the author's hometown Sanremo, which, in this book, is called 'A*'.² In the book, the Anfossi sell part of the garden of their family's villa to Caisotti, a real estate entrepreneur working at the edge of what is legal, to build a holiday house complex. The three members of the family embody a range of attitudes towards their contemporary circumstances.³ Quinto is an intellectual, who lives out a personal crisis whilst facing up to the change, while Ampelio is a chemist, with a pragmatic, hasty attitude towards it. They both live away from A*, unlike their mother. Mrs. Anfossi, busy in the villa's garden throughout the book, is always up to date with the changes occurring in the development of the town. As described in the extract above, both brothers deal with the administrative, legal and economic issues connected with the property. Meanwhile, their mother, caring for the garden, is involved with everyday negotiations relating to changes arising directly from the land.

Descriptions of the transformation of the garden recur in the book, and encapsulate not only the relationship with nature, eroded by the new urbanisation of the town, but also the erased memory of vernacular forms of middle-class dwelling. As Monica Seger's eco-critical approach suggests, the garden is a mid-scape, a space in which to negotiate the relationship between nature and man.⁴ At the same time, the portion of garden that is left to

¹ Calvino, *La speculazione edilizia*, 142.

² Sanremo is a seaside resort town that is never mentioned, but nonetheless is always present as a point of reference in Calvino's writings. Massimo Quaini, "La Sanremo di Italo Calvino", in Bertone, Giorgio, ed. *Italo Calvino. La letteratura, la scienza, la città*. Conference proceedings (Genoa: Marietti, 1988), 60-66.

³ Seger, *Landscape In-between*, 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

the family, where rusty pipes from the construction site are used to water narcissi, is where the mediation with the touristic trends and manifestations in the territorial fabric creatively occurs. This reconfiguration therefore takes place between 'humans' and 'nature', but especially between tourism and local life-style, modernisation and memories, private and public interests.

Ten years after *La speculazione edilizia*, Pasolini bitterly criticised the colonisation of the countryside by tourism, along with its abandonment and industrialisation. He even described this trend as a physical violation of the land. The rural world, he wrote, is nothing but what has survived the loss of identity that this phenomenon and the connected urbanisation have caused: 'La campagna parla di sè stessa quasi come di una spettrale e spaventosa sopravvivenza [...] Essa è un luogo esotico per atroci weekend e per non meno atroci villette da alternare con l'atroce appartamento in città.'⁵ The countryside had lost its traditional function, whilst the city had acquired a peasant identity through the extent of the recent migration, which manifested itself in the urbanisation of the city: 'L'urbanesimo è ancora contadino. Il mondo operaio è ancora contadino. Il paesaggio può contenere questa nuova forma di vita (bidonvill, casupole, palazzoni) perchè il suo spirito è identico a quello dei villaggi, dei casolari.'⁶ In short, Pasolini perceived and denounced the progressive detachment of both urban and rural culture from their traditional locality: the ruralisation of the city and the urbanisation of the countryside.

Chapter Five deals with the relationship between postwar urbanisation, *speculazione edilizia*, and the rise of tourism. Isabella Scaramozzi defines this last phenomenon 'una delle industrie peesanti che hanno contribuito a questa epopea', with reference to the impact of tourism on postwar territorial changes.⁷ It does this through an analysis of Ugo La Pietra's *gradi di libertà*, and Gianfranco Baruchello's *Agricola Cornelia*. La Pietra developed a multidisciplinary investigation of forms 'architettura spontanea' and gardening in the outskirts of Milan, and renamed this manifestation 'seconde case di campagna'.⁸ Baruchello, meanwhile, moved to the Roman countryside, where he started to cultivate pieces of land, abandoned at the time, but previously allotted by the Municipality as middle-class holiday villas. Baruchello and La Pietra's works have been recently displayed together within Marco Scotini's exhibition *Earthrise. Visioni pre-ecologiche*

⁵ Pasolini, *Lettere luterane*, 59.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷ Isabella Scaramozzi, "Turismo un'industria pesante", in *L'Italia è cambiata*, ed. Francesco Indovina (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2000), 237.

⁸ For an overview of the terminology used to describe this impromptu architectures, and the issues that these terms rise, see: Sabatino, Introduction to Sabatino, *Pride in Modesty*, especially pages 6-8.

nell'arte italiana (1967-1973) under the umbrella of Murray Bookchin's social ecology.⁹ Though appreciating the ecological element in the works of these artists, this chapter discusses La Pietra's and Barcuhello's distinct works within their respective contemporary context. It proposes that gardening and farming were forms of negotiations with, and resistance to, the early 1970s changes in the 'metropolitan areas' of Milan and Rome, in ways that resonate with Mrs Anfossi's gardening activities.¹⁰ I will demonstrate that, in the artists' respective practices, these rural ways of living and cultivating the land encapsulate a political stance and a revolutionary potential.

⁹ *Earthrise. Visioni Pre-ecologiche nell'arte Italiana (1967-1973)* (Turin, Parco Arte Vivente, 7th November 2015 – 6th March 2016) exhibition curated by Marco Scotini, <http://parcoartevivente.it/mostre/archivio/mostre-2015/>, accessed on April 25th, 2017; Emanuele Piccardo, "La natura radicale", in *Il Manifesto*, 16.01.2016, <https://ilmanifesto.it/la-natura-radicale/>, accessed on 1st April 2017.

¹⁰ The 'Metropolis' maintains its urban identity, and it is clearly distinguished from the countryside. The 'Metropolitan area' is instead the territorial extension of metropolis. In these areas, the boundaries between the city and the countryside and their socio-cultural distinctiveness are not defined. See: Ardigò, *Diffusione urbana*, 10-11.

Ugo La Pietra's *Sistema disequilibrante*

Anche a Raissa, città triste, corre un filo invisibile
che allaccia un essere vivente a un altro per un attimo
e si disfa, poi torna a tendersi tra punti in movimento
disegnando nuove rapide figure cosicché a ogni secondo
la città infelice contiene una città felice che nemmeno sa
di esistere.

Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, 1972¹¹

Curating the exhibition *Fuori le città: Le altre culture* in Brera in 1979, La Pietra included a project of his own, alongside Costa's *Museo di Monteghirfo* and *Superstudio's Cultura materiale extraurbana*.¹² His work was titled *La seconda casa*, and it consisted of two series of images of impromptu architecture individuated by the artist in, respectively, the suburbs of Milan and at the Poetto beach, near Cagliari [5.1; 5.2].¹³ In the exhibition catalogue, La Pietra presented these constructions as working-class versions of the middle-class holiday villas that Pasolini acrimoniously criticised, as well as examples of contemporary vernacular architecture.¹⁴ While the Milan exhibition was the first time that La Pietra had presented the images of Cagliari, the investigation and documentation of the spontaneous architecture in the suburbs of Milan have been crucial to the artist's work since the late 1960s.¹⁵

La Pietra worked on this research into the ephemeral architecture of Milan between 1967 and 1976, and presented it in different contexts, and with new titles, such as *I gradi di libertà*, *Recupero e Reinvenzione*, or *Riappropriazione della città*. The project circulated through design magazines, both internationally known ones, like *Casabella* and *Domus*, and niche publications, as *IN | Argomenti e Immagini di design* (1971-1973) and *Progettare INPIÙ* (1973-1975), both edited by La Pietra himself.¹⁶ This research was also exhibited as a series of collages, as a short film, titled *Riappropriazione della città* (1977), and published as a photographic book with an introduction by the artist.¹⁷

¹¹ Calvino, *Città invisibili*, 142.

¹² La Pietra, *Fuori dalle città*, np

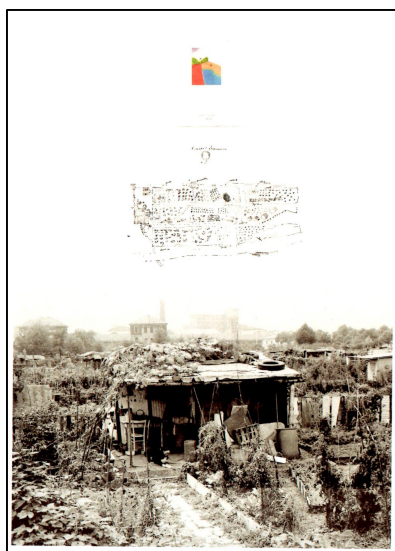
¹³ Roberto Barocchi, *Dizionario di urbanistica* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1982), 167-168; Marco Venturi, *Glossario di urbanistica* (Venice: Arsenale editrice, 1990), 220. La Pietra, *Fuori dalle città*, np

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

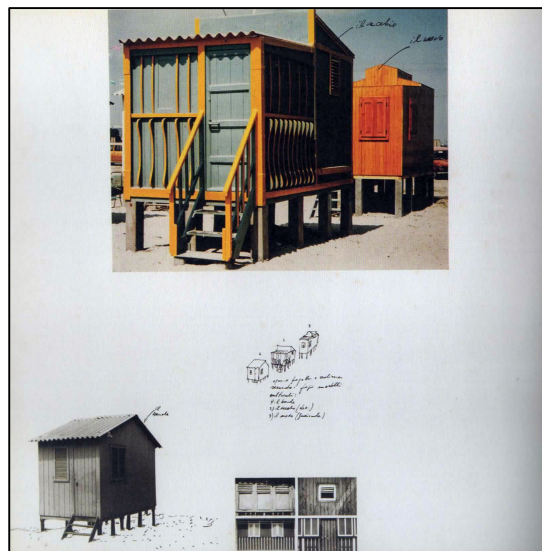
¹⁵ The research about Poetto beach has been recently published independently: Ugo La Pietra, *Le altre culture, le ville al mare sulla spiaggia del Poetto a Cagliari*, 1978 (Milan: Corraini Editore, 2017).

¹⁶ Ugo La Pietra, "Città iperstatica", *Casabella*, n 366 (1972), 43-48; Ugo La Pietra, *Recupero e Reinvenzione* (Milan: Progettare INPIÙ, 1976). About La Pietra's editorial activities within the wider context of postwar architecture, see: Beatriz Colomina and Craig Buckley, editors, *Clip, Stamp, Fold: the Radical Architecture of Little Magazines* (Barcelona; Princeton: Actar ; M+M Books, Media and Modernity Program, Princeton University 2010), especially *Interview with Ugo La Pietra*, 356-357.

¹⁷ <https://vimeo.com/11457755>, accessed on 25th April 2017; Ugo La Pietra, *I gradi di libertà. Percorsi preferenziali e sistemi di comunicazione* (Milan: Jabik & Colophon, 1975).



5.1. Ugo La Pietra, *Recupero e Reinvenzione*, 1975



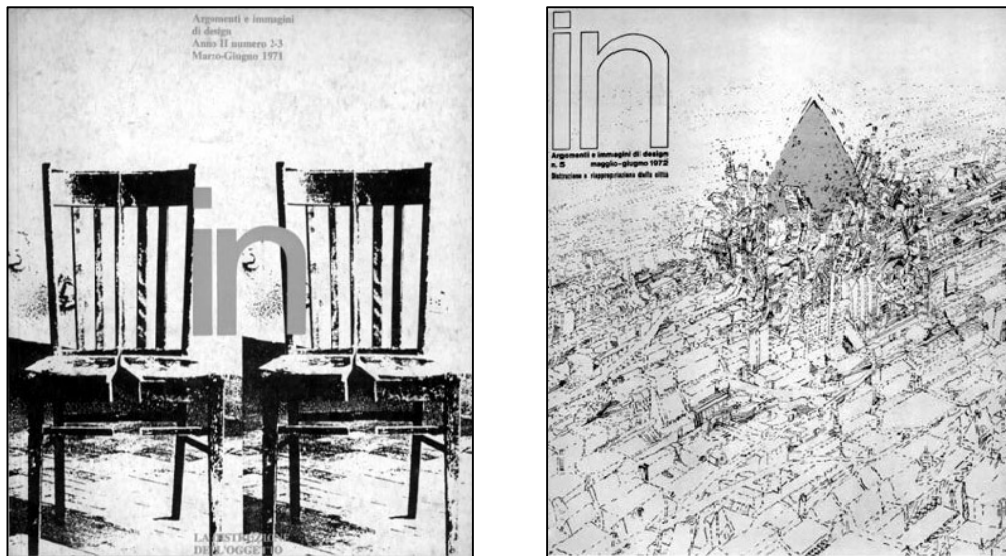
5.2 Ugo La Pietra, *Diversi modelli culturali: il banale il vecchio, il nuovo*, 1978

This section delineates the way in which La Pietra conceived the urban environment, urbanism, and his own role as a versatile practitioner, in order to contextualise his *Investigazioni* in Milan in his production.¹⁸ In so doing, this section creates the ground for demonstrating that La Pietra conceived rural ‘cultural features in the city’ as a positive model of social participation in Milan. La Pietra’s works in the fields of design, architecture and urbanism have been mainly studied within the context of Italian Radical Architecture. Recently, new approaches have discussed the diversity and breadth of research interests of his work, which Marco Meneguzzo considered as lying behind the limited critical fortunes of the artist.¹⁹ Furthermore, scholarly literature has positioned La Pietra’s contribution to the field of urbanism close to the French Situationist International and within Lefebvre’s Marxist understanding of the urban space. This is an approach that I also adopt, and here I discuss his *Immersioni* (1967-1969) in the light of the role that his *Sistema disequilibrante*

¹⁸ The artist himself reveals that the motto of a large part of his practice ‘Abitare è essere ovunque a casa propria’ was inspired by a SI pamphlet read in the 1950s (Ugo La Pietra, *Abitare è essere ovunque a casa propria*, in Rui, *La Pietra*, 94). About La Pietra and Situationist International, see: Francesca Zanella, “Forme e metodi d’intervento nella città” in Casero and Di Raddo, *Anni '70*, 69-88; Detheridge, *Scultori della speranza*, 104; Alessandra Acocella, *Abitare la città. La fotografia nel lavoro di Ugo La Pietra* (2014), <http://www.archphoto.it/archives/3288>, accessed on 26th April 2017; Alexandra Brown, “Immersing, Comprehending, Reappropriating: Milan, Unreformed, in the Alternative Architecture of Ugo La Pietra”, in Chris Butler and Edward Mussawir, eds., *Spaces of Justice* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 132-149. About La Pietra and Lefebvre, see: Enrico Crispolti, in Ugo La Pietra, *Recupero e Reinvenzione 1969-1976* (Milan: Edizione grafica Mariano, 1976), np; Luisa Lorenza Corna, review of *I gradi di libertà* (exhibition at Galleria Laura Bulin, Milan, 26.10.2016 – 27.01.2017), *Domus*, January 23, 2017, http://www.domusweb.it/it/arte/2017/01/23/ugo_la_pietra_i_gradi_di_liberta.html, accessed on 23rd February 2017.

¹⁹ Marco Menguzzo, “Prima e dopo la rivoluzione”, in *Il segno randomico. Opere e ricerche 1958/2016*, ed. Marco Menguzzo (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2016), 11. Ugo La Pietra, *La sinestesia delle arti 1960-2000* (Milan: Mazzotta, 2001); Angela Rui, ed., *Ugo La Pietra. Progetto disequilibrante/disequilibrating design* (Milan: Corraini Edizioni, 2014).

(1967-1980) had in his conceptualisation of the urban environment, and in relation to the contemporary development of kinetic art in Milan.



5.3 – 5.4. Ugo La Pietra, Cover of *In* / *Argomenti e immagini di design*, 1971-1972

In May 1972, an issue of *IN* / *Argomenti e immagini di Design*, titled *Distruzione e Riappropriazione della città* followed *Distruzione dell'oggetto*, thus continuing the magazine's enquiry into the radical approaches to architectural concerns [5.3; 5.4].²⁰ Blurring the boundaries between industrial design, interior design, architecture (for building), urbanism, and visual arts, the aim of this study was to tackle major contemporary social questions, by unmasking 'I meccanismi con i quali si esprimono le relazioni che intercorrono fra i livelli decisionali di intervento politico e il contesto sociale di base.'²¹ *Distruzione dell'oggetto* addressed everyday mass-produced objects as an expression of alienation within consumerist society. The 1972 magazine addressed issues of consumerist society at the level of urban space. The city, together with industrial objects and mass media, were considered the physical expression of the capitalist socio-political engine at work, and the approaches adopted by guest contributors reinforced these overarching ideas.²²

Demonstrating his commitment to the topic, La Pietra acted not just as the magazine's editor, but also contributed an article that provided an account of tools and methodologies of his design for an understanding of the urban environment.²³ A few months later, this same contribution was revisited and published with the title 'La città iperstatica'

²⁰ "La distruzione e la riappropriazione della città", special issue, *IN/ Argomenti e Immagini di design* (1972).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 26-33.

in *Casabella*.²⁴ The article consisted of a theoretical contribution, and of *I gradi di libertà*, an empirical photo-documentary study of the use of urban space in Milan. The article clarified the artist's conceptualisation of the contemporary urban environment in universal terms, focusing on the negative influences it had on its dwellers, and on the role that urbanism played within it.

La Pietra considered the city as the formalisation of political and economic power. 'La città,' he wrote in *Casabella* 'regolata da strutture decisionali ed operative è ormai organizzata attraverso una serie di sistemi, all'interno dei quali le relazioni tra il livelli decisionali di intervento politico economico ed il contesto sociale di base si esprimono attraverso meccanismi di coartazione dei bisogni e delle aspirazioni reali dei gruppi sociali.'²⁵ In other words, the city is the physical space of negotiation between those who can be defined as 'decision makers' and the dwellers who, respectively, physically shape and operate in the urban environment. This idea was developed further in other texts, either by the author writing alone or collaboratively. In Gianluigi Pieruzzi's text that accompanied La Pietra's work in *Distruzione dell'oggetto* (1971), the 'decision makers' are divided into two categories: the political group, which is in charge of the political and economic decision-making; and the architect-designers, whose task it is to deal with the spatial relationship between dwellers, objects and environment.²⁶ The urban structure resulting from the decision-making processes of these two categories is provided to the city dwellers, as a given collective exigence. Hence, in La Pietra's view, the formal qualities of a city are a form of imposition, which have a negative effect on the physical and mental wellbeing of its dwellers.

Over time, La Pietra developed a more explicit socio-political stance. The structure of the urban environment came to be interpreted as a negation of locals' right of participation in the life of city. In 1972, the urban structure was thought to induce automatic and uncritical behaviours in the city dwellers, and to reduce their sensitivity to its stimuli, whether positive or negative.²⁷ Later in *La lettura di una tipologia urbana* (1974), La Pietra explained that the possibility of effectively acting and transforming the environment as an occasion of identification and participation for the urban dwellers.²⁸ In the exhibition, *Avanguardie e cultura popolare* (Bologna, 1975), the artist focused on collective participation: he documented the community-building role of traditional festivities, and

²⁴ La Pietra, "Città iperstatica", 43-48.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁶ Gianluigi Pieruzzi, "L'oggetto e la volontà critica", in *La distruzione dell'oggetto*: 27.

²⁷ La Pietra, "Città Iperstatica", 45.

²⁸ La Pietra, "Editorial", *La lettura di una tipologia urbana* issue, *Progettare INPIÙ* (1974): 2-10.

bewailed the absence of this kind of events in modern urban society.²⁹ A year later, the traces of creative enactment in and on the physical structures of the city in the form of murals and illegal appropriations are described as a manifestation 'of rebellion and desperation.'³⁰ La Pietra conceived the urban environment as a constraint on the individuals' possibility of self-expression, and as a negation of the dwellers' right to interact with their living environment and to participate in the socio-political life of the city, both individually and collectively.

To a certain extent, the artist's stance resonates with a Marxist interpretation of the modern city held by the Situationist International (S.I.) and by Lefebvre whose texts had been translated into Italian in the 1950s.³¹ While Lefebvre dedicated his influential sociological research to the wider theme of the everyday and to the urban environment as the primary declination of his overarching research, the city had been one of the objects of critique and fields of action of the French avant-garde group, since its previous literary predecessor, the Letterist International group (1952-1956).³² The group developed an architectural theory of urbanism within its revolutionary programme, and crusaded against the functionalist and rationalist organisation of the modern city through the work of the most relevant figures of the group, Guy Debord (1931-1994), Asger Jørn (1914-1973) and Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920-2005).³³

Lefebvre theorised the urban space as an intermediary reality: it is society's objective projection onto space as well as its medium of action and creation.³⁴ Nonetheless, he and the S.I. saw the city as shaped and physically occupied by the dominant powers, which they identified with the state, consumer society and new technologies and media. As such, the modern city is a space of alienation.³⁵ Moving from this assumption, they criticised modern urbanism, especially the model of the functionalist city, which had been formalised by the C.I.A.M. with the Athens Charter in 1933.³⁶ This aimed to codify rational planning, in order

²⁹ Ugo La Pietra, "Creatività collettiva", in *Avanguardie e cultura popolare*, 82-85.

³⁰ Ugo La Pietra, "Istruzioni per l'uso della città", in *Sinesia delle arti 1960-2000*, 100.

³¹ In the Anglo-Saxon world, Lefebvre writing have been only discovered in the 1990s. In Italy, they were translated from French very soon. i.e. *Le matérialisme dialectique* (1940) was translated into Italian and published by Einaudi as early as 1949; *La droite à la Ville* (1968) by Marsilio in 1970. For an introduction to Henry Lefebvre's work, see: Stuart Elden, *Understanding Lefebvre, Theory and the Possible* (London - New York: Continuum, 2004); Kanishka Goonewardena, ed. *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henry Lefebvre* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Łucasz Stanek, *Henry Lefebvre on Space. Architecture, Urban Research and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis - London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

³² For an introduction to S.I., see: Simon Ford, *the Situationist International. A User's Guide* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2005); Elisabeth Sussman, ed. *On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: THE SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL 1957-1972* (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 1989).

³³ Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 1998c).

³⁴ Henry Lefebvre's "Du Rural a l'Urbain" quoted in Stefan Lipfer. "Urbanisation, Everyday Life and the Survival of Capitalism: Lefebvre and Gramsci and the Problematic of Hegemony", *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 13:2, 139.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 47; *Understanding Lefebvre*, 116.

³⁶ See: Paola Di Biagi, editor. *Manifesto e frammento dell'urbanistica moderna* (Rome: Officina, 1998); Kenneth Frampton, *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1993), 174-178.

to achieve an idealistic and rather unrealistic construction of a rational and democratic society while reorganising the urban environment. As Simon Sadler noted in his *The Situationist City*, both the S.I. and Lefebvre criticised the way in which rationalisation was translated into a dissection of the city into its functional parts, and of Le Corbusier's notion of the city as a 'machine for living'.³⁷ In his 1967 *Society of Spectacle*, Debord writes: 'urbanism is capitalism's seizure of the natural and human environment. If all the technical forces of capitalism must be understood as tools for the making of separations, in the case of urbanism we are dealing with the equipment at the basis of these technical forces'.³⁸ This critique was influenced by the legacy of Surrealism, but also by what Sadler defines as those 'fashionable concerns for playfulness and festivity', induced by the reading of Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938) and Bakhtin's notion of 'carnival'.³⁹ From their perspective, urbanism was wholly complicit with the authorities. Transforming the city dwellers into gears of an engine, rationalist urbanism annihilated individual freedom and imagination, which, in their eyes, was the most lively and essential part of the human being.⁴⁰

La Pietra's graphic works and writings resonate with this concept and critique of urbanism. Along with the French intellectuals, La Pietra dismissed contemporary practices of urbanism *tout court*. In his 1972 article, the adjective 'hyper-static' that qualifies the city in the title suggests the object of his criticism. This idea of the immobility of the city corresponds with the formula adopted by Debord in his *The Society of Spectacle* (1967), to describe the way in which capitalism transforms the space through a process of banalisation into a 'motionless monotony'.⁴¹ While society changes at high rate, urbanism brings about the 'visible freezing of life'.⁴² Thus, La Pietra arrives at his definition of the city: it is a place still trapped in the outdated model of urbanism of rationalist architecture, and cannot be defined in ways other than static.

³⁷ Sadler, *Situationist City*, 22-33. About Le Corbusier's theories of urbanism, see: Le Corbusier, *Maniera di pensare l'urbanistica* (Bari: Laterza, 1965).

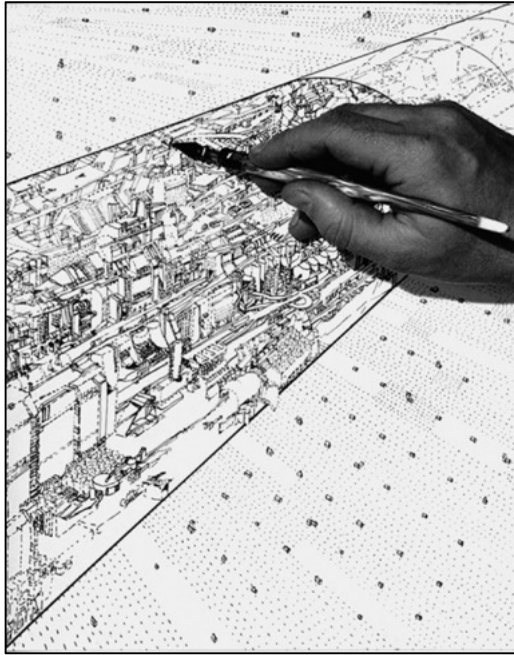
³⁸ Debord, *Society of Spectacle*, note 169-171.

³⁹ Sadler, *Situationist City*, 34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁴¹ Debord, *Society of Spectacle*, note 166.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 171.



5.5. Ugo La Pietra, *Rapporto tra città e campagna*, 1966 5.6. Le Corbusier and Janneret, *The New Plan Voisin for Paris* (1925)

This paralysed and paralysing model was imposed from above, as featured in a collage from 1966, called *Rapporto tra città e campagna* [5.5].⁴³ Ironically reminiscent of the presentation of Le Corbusier's and Jeanneret's *Plan Voisin* for Paris, it shows a cut-out of a hand, drawing an industrialised urban settlement and the surrounding territory [5.6].⁴⁴ Within what at first seems a muddle of dense urbanisation, we can pinpoint skyscrapers, compact housing units, chimney stacks, sewage treatment plants, and road networks. The drawing hand crafts a dense, functional body constrained within precise boundaries, which is distinguished from the surrounding countryside, scarcely urbanised, yet rationalised. Moreover, in his early writings, La Pietra scornfully renamed architects *formalizzatori*, thus undermining the creative contribution of this profession and its enslavement to the authorities.⁴⁵ The bird's-eye view and the hand imply the urban planner's privileged position, a position that La Pietra did not endorse.

In these circumstances, what was the role that La Pietra attributed to himself as an architect? His position was not dissimilar to those professionals associated with radical architecture discussed in the previous chapter. According to Andrea Branzi (*Archizoom*), radical architects worked autonomously towards the erosion of the disciplinary specificity

⁴³ This work has been associated with Narrative Art (Meneguzzo, *Segno Randomico*, 198). For a definition of Narrative art, see: Enrico Crispolti, "Continuità di esperienze d' 'arte povera' e 'concettuale'", in *Storia dell'arte*, ed. Carlo Pirovano, vol. 3 (Milan: Electa, 1994), 68.

⁴⁴ Frampton, *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, 176.

⁴⁵ Gianluigi Pieruzzi, "L'oggetto e la volontà critica", in *La Distruzione dell'oggetto*, 26.

of the art.⁴⁶ Considering architecture as ‘all the formal, structural, functional and project-related instruments that constitute the terminal act of the professions of architect, urbanist and designer’, radical architecture aimed to abolish distinct discipline-specific tools.⁴⁷ In relation to the urban space, their aim was to overturn the rationalist practice of urbanism. If rationalist urban designers proposed models and utopias with no connection to their effective realisation, radical architecture ‘assume l’utopia come dato iniziale e lo svolge realisticamente [...] accetta le condizioni di una realtà discontinua senza ipotizzarne diverse, si muove sul piano del mediocre rifiutando un destino glorioso.’⁴⁸ Yet, it is La Pietra himself who clarifies the difference between his works and those of other radical architects at the turn of the 1960s:

Architects had three paths that they could follow. There was self-castration, i.e., they would refuse to design for a wrong society and wait for a different society; these architects did not do anything. Then there were those that had a position like Archizoom and Superstudio; they worked and designed for another society, in other words for a society that did not exist. The third position, which was mine and also of [Riccardo] Dalisi and others, was to work and design in this society but against this society. That meant pointing out the distortions, mistakes, and dangers of a consumerist society but against this society.⁴⁹

According to La Pietra, the architectural professionals had to work within contemporary circumstances and to pinpoint the issues of the present society. His position and operative strategy were soon organised as a model, named *Sistema disequilibrante* (1969-1970), or a system that verifies by magnification the organisation of the urban environment and its unbalanced relationship with its inhabitants.⁵⁰ The model aimed to bring awareness, thus freeing urban dweller’s behaviour from the existing conditionings.⁵¹

Raising the awareness of the city dweller was a concern shared by the S.I. and Lefebvre. Debord and Constant conceived the idea of ‘Unitary Urbanism’ (developed and later rejected in Constant’s *New Babylon*, in Alba, Piedmont), and devised a series of

⁴⁶ Andrea Branzi, “Introduzione” to *Architettura Radicale*, special issue, eds. Paola Navone and Bruno Orlandoni, *Casabella*, (1973):14

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 11-12

⁴⁹ *Clip Stamp Fold*, 356.

⁵⁰ La Pietra’s overall production is now interpreted through his idea of *Sistema disequilibrante*. See the 2014 monographic exhibition at the Triennale di Milano titled *Il progetto disequilibrante* [Angela Rui, ed., *Ugo La Pietra. Il segno disequilibrante* (Milan: Corraini Editore, 2014)]. Luciano Inga, “Introduction” to *La Pietra, Il Sistema disequilibrante* (Milan: Galleria Toselli, 1970), np.

⁵¹ Ugo La Pietra and Gian Luigi Pieruzzi, “Distruzione dell’oggetto attraverso un atteggiamento ‘per crisi’”, in *Distruzione dell’oggetto*, 30.

strategies to subvert the everyday experience of the urban space.⁵² As Sadler has noted, the difference between them and their reciprocal critique of Lefebvre and the S.I. was connected with their attitude towards ‘situations’, a term appropriated from Jean Paul Sartre, meaning a given situation which can affect the individual consciousness and will.⁵³ While the S.I. valued the possibility of creating scenarios (which were more discrete than art environments), Lefebvre had a more passive, possibly more realist position, of ‘experiencing moments when they happen to arise.’⁵⁴ With his *Sistema disequilibrante*, La Pietra appeared to have embraced both the creation and the acknowledgment of these ‘crucial situations’ through two distinct means: the invention of *ad hoc* situations in his *Immersioni* (Immersions), and sociological analysis, *Investigazioni*.

This model, especially its name, might bring to mind the installations of the *Groupe de Recherche D’Art Visuel* (G.R.A.V.) in Paris, due to its reference to balance and unbalance in the name of the system itself, and in the interest in the urban space. It is, after all, worth considering that La Pietra, living and studying at the Politecnico in Milan, was immersed – to use a term common in the artist’s vocabulary – within the Italian faction of the International kinetic art movement, which had been spreading across Europe and the Americas since the 1950s.⁵⁵ These practices and their theoretical foundation, I suggest, provided La Pietra with strategies of audience engagement to address issues within urban environment.

Since 1959, *Gruppo T* and, later, the group M.I.D. (Antonio Barrese, Anfonso Grassi, Gianfranco Laminarca and Alberto Marangoni) developed practices which explored the possibility of working between art and technology, supported by Olivetti and following in the footsteps of Bruno Munari’s and Enzo Mari’s previous independent research.⁵⁶ According to Marco Meneguzzo, this group’s research had a national connotation, due to the notion of *programmata*. This adjective was associated with the kinetic definition of their practice when they participated in a small but influential exhibition, *Arte Programmata 1962*, curated by Munari in the Olivetti store in Milan. It was also emphasised in Eco’s presentation of the group in the *Almanacco Bombiani* earlier that year.⁵⁷ Whilst the idea of movement, or ‘the kinetic’, was used strategically, the term *programmata* not only evoked modernity and electronic automation, but referred to the artists’ set of principles at the base

⁵² Sadler, *The Situationist City*, 45-46; Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes. Camminare come pratica estetica* (Turin: Einaudi, 2010), 58-86.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 45; 175.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 45.

⁵⁵ See: Guy Brett, *Kinetic Art* (London: Studio Vista, 1968); Frank Popper, *Art, Action, Participation* (Paris: Chêne 1975); Clair Bishop, *Artificial Hells* (London; New York: Verso, 2012) 84-104.

⁵⁶ Zevi, *Peripezie*, 180-183 ; 189.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 189-190, for the controversy about the term “programmata”.

of their practice: firstly, programming the possible reactions to an action; secondly, programming an efficient language; thirdly, programming a practice for social change.⁵⁸

La Pietra's *Sistema disequilibrante*, particularly his *Immersioni*, resonates with the work of these collectives. He used synthetic materials and new technologies, and, like other kinetic artists, he presented his work in the form of *environments*. His work also aimed to distort and redirect sensorial experience, in order to achieve both short-term and long-term changes in the viewer's perception of the surroundings.

Following the lead of Lucio Fontana's *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera*, the exhibition *Lo spazio dell'immagine*, held in Foligno 1967, provided an overview of the Italian experimentation with *environments*.⁵⁹ The exhibition, curated by Umbro Apollonio, Maurizio Calvesi, Giorgio De Marchis and Dorfler, hosted the work of nineteen artists. In addition to Pino Pascali's *32mq di mare circa* and Luciano Fabbro's *In-cubo*, environments *cinetici-programmati* were presented, among others, by M.I.D. (*Ambiente stroboscopico programmato*), Gianni Colombo (with *After-Structure*), Gabriele De Vecchi (*Ambiente a strutturazione virtuale*), and Davide Boriani (*Camera stroboscopica multimediale*). These works created environments with the use of artificial materials (plastic and mirrors) and light, which provided the audience with a distorted, and at times disorienting experience of space, inducing science-based visual experiences that challenged visual perception. For instance, Davide Boriani's work was a cubic space with black perimeter walls, articulated by mirrors, and irregularly illuminated by strobe lights projected from the ceiling [5.7]. M.I.D.'s environment was black as well, but with a strobe-system that projected blue, red and green lights [5.8; 5.9].

Unlike these environments, La Pietra's *Immersioni* were not room-size *environments*, but human-size devices designed to seclude an individual beholder, and provide a magnified experience of the urban environment. Designed to be portable *environments* that could be placed around the city, they isolated the user from the urban surroundings. Simultaneously, the *Immersioni* artificially induced a condition of discombobulation to simulate the 'neurotic', claustrophobic real-life experience of the city. While works like *Immersione uomouovosfera* (1968) and *Immersione* (1968) simply isolated the beholder from the urban context, *Immersione nel suono* (1970) and *Immersione nella luce* (1970) proposed the disorientating individual experience of the noise and the neon lights of the city; *Immersione 4* and *Immersione 5* worked as cumbersome helmets positioned on a grounded structure in which the public entered their

⁵⁸ Marco Meneguzzo, eds. *Arte cinetica e programmata in Italia 19158-1968* (Verona: Grafiche Aurora, 2000), 13-14.

⁵⁹ Zevi, *Peripezie*, 281-283; Tommasoni, ed. *Lo spazio dell'immagine e il suo tempo*, 53-58.

heads (or their bodies) and found themselves in an artificial snowstorm or a flood [5.10; 5.11; 5.12; 5.13; 5.14].⁶⁰



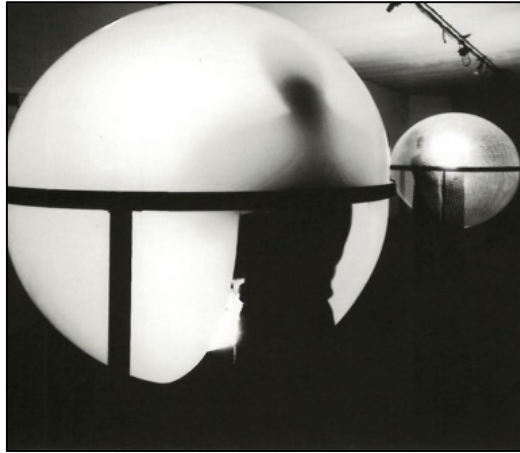
5.7. Davide Boriani, *Camera stroboscopica multimediale*, 1967



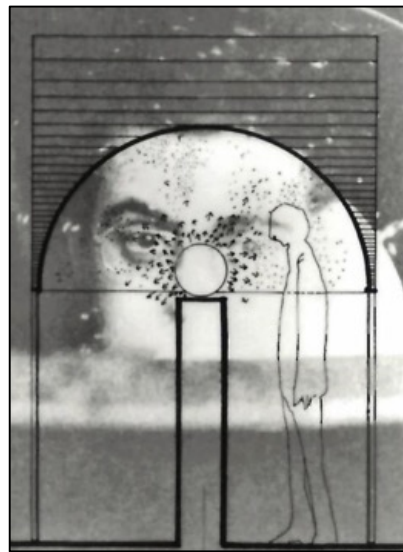
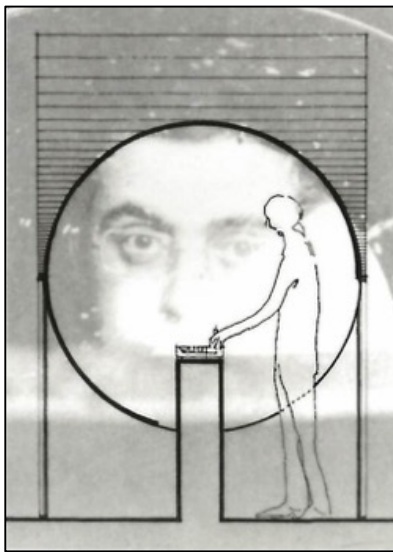
5.8-5.9. M.I.D., *Ambiente stroboscopico programmato*. 1967

Preparatory digital image (left) and photographic documentation in Foligno (right), 1967

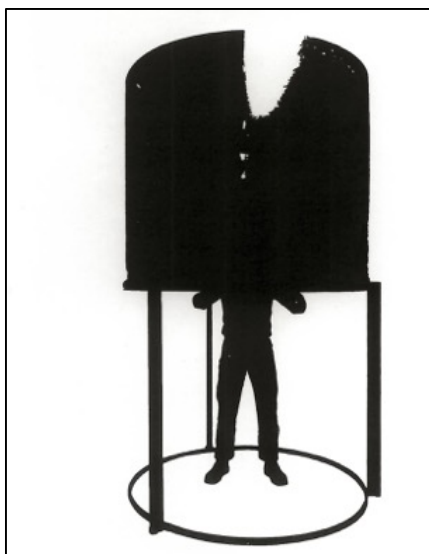
⁶⁰ In La Pietra, *Il Sistema disequilibrante*, np, the *Immersioni*, together with the *Emergenze* are listed as *modello di comprensione*.



5.10 Ugo La Pietra, *Immersione nel suono* and *Immersione nella luce*, 1970



5.11 – 5.12. Ugo La Pietra, *Immersione nel suono*, and *Immersione nella luce*, 1970 (collages)



5.13 – 5.14. Ugo La Pietra, *Immersione 4*, 1970

Both kinetic environments and La Pietra's engines provoked a disturbing, disorientating or claustrophobic experience. While the kinetic work addressed perception *per se*, La Pietra redirected these perceptual challenges to the audience's experience of the city. About *Immersione 5*, the artist wrote: 'L'isolamento in questi ambienti induce una serie di operazioni sensoriali e simboliche che esplicitano, da un la crisi di disadattamento ambientale e dall'altro il potenziale di intervento della forma nella rottura di equilibri preconstituiti.'⁶¹

La Pietra's approach adopted in these engines was consistent with his contribution to *Metodologia della struttura urbana*, an academic publication aimed at devising methodologies for the study of the city, edited by Cesare Blasi in 1969.⁶² In this publication, La Pietra argued for both the communicative and the epistemological potential of working across multiple media, by adopting the visual and theoretical contributions of disciplines other than architecture, and by working on different degrees of complexity – from the object, to the environment, and the city – that different fields of art explore. Furthering Lucio Fontana's proposal in *Manifesto Blanco* (1946), La Pietra suggested that the '*Concetti spaziali* sono esprimibili più facilmente al livello dell'oggetto che a livello di campo urbano,' because in the urban environment there are more categories of use and behaviour, and thus a higher degree of complexity at play.⁶³ From this perspective, engaging with the "mondo delle rappresentazioni", ci avviciniamo alla definizione di un campo sperimentale ove studiare in astratto i fenomeni.'⁶⁴ Thus, in La Pietra's view, adopting and experimenting with artistic media other than the traditional tools of architecture was an efficient means of representing and designing the city and, with the *Modello disequilibrante*, of experiencing it.⁶⁵

In the urban space shaped by the joint forces of rationalist urbanism and economic and political powers, La Pietra created a model for understanding the city by devising a series of portable *environments* that could raise the beholder's awareness of what was conceived as the imposed and oppressive urban environment. Contemporary and complementary to his *Sistema disequilibrante*, he initiated his project *I gradi di libertà*, an investigation into existing traces of creativity in the urban space of Milan, which will be discussed in the next section.

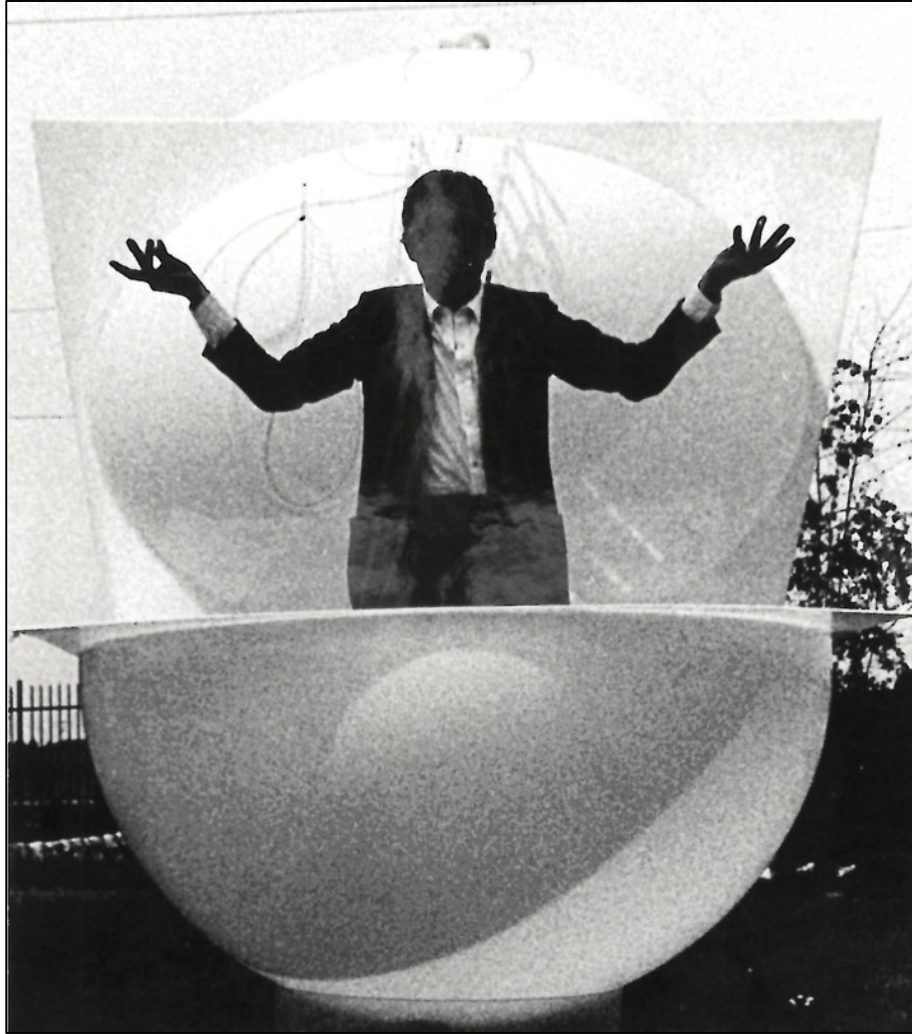
⁶¹ *Ibid.*, np.

⁶² Cesare Blasi, ed. *Metodologia della struttura urbana* (Milan: Studi e ricerche, 1969).

⁶³ Ugo La Pietra, "Traducibilità dei nessi intercorrenti all'interno di una struttura urbana in visualizzazioni spaziali", in Blasi, *Metodologia della struttura urbana*, 206.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

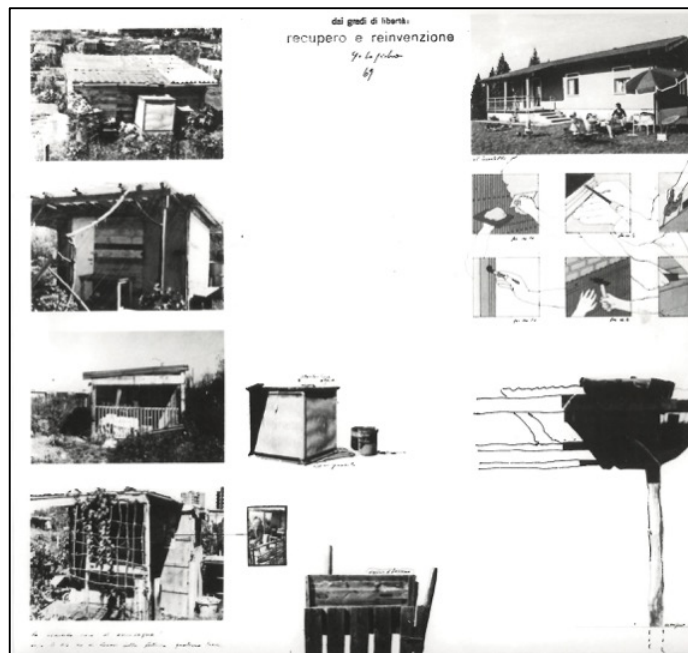
⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 208.



5.15. Ugo La Pietra, *Immersione uomouovosfera*, 1968

Milan and the Countryside in the City

La Pietra's research project about the social and environmental conditions in Milan began in 1967, as part of his *Investigazioni*. In a way, this project was not uncommon in artistic practices that engaged with the urban environment, under the influence of Lefebvre's sociological analysis.⁶⁶ Through the combined use of different media, his studies unveiled specific aspects of the physical organisation of the urban environment of the northern Italian city, which appealed to his sensitivity as artist and architect [5.16].



5.16. Ugo La Pietra, *Recupero e Reinvenzione*, 1969

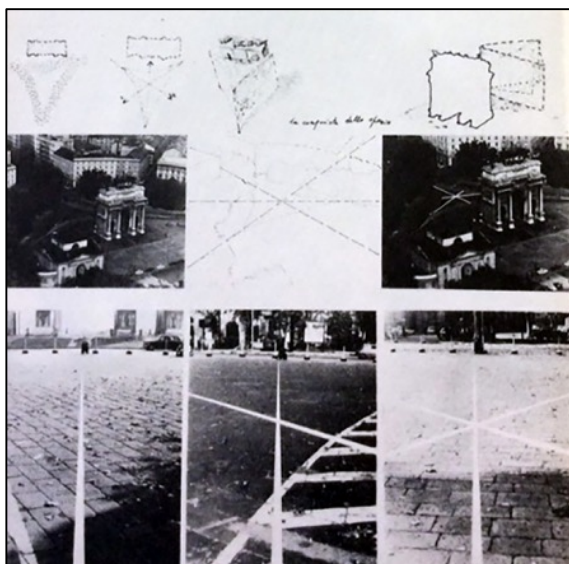
La Pietra analysed the material manifestation of behavioural and use patterns in urban spaces, such as streets, green areas, and wastelands. The visual materials created from these investigations in Milan were meant to raise awareness of the existing interferences in the rigid and static organisation of the city, in order to suggest the possibility of agency and to inspire action.⁶⁷ Despite being presented in different contexts and formats, the resulted photographs and drawings were mostly presented as a vehicle of clear information, as if they conveyed an explicit message. In this context, the *Seconda casa*

⁶⁶ As mentioned before, Crispolti first refers to Lefebvre when discussing La Pietra's work. Sadler refers to the British *Independent Group* (1951-1955) Sadler, *The Situationist City*, 19-20; however, Catherine Spencer attributes a different origin to the IG's anthropological approach, see: Catherine Spencer, "The Independent Group's 'Anthropology of Ourselves'", in *Art History*, 35, 2, April 2012, 314-335. Marie Ange Brayer defines him "artist anthropologist" (Rui, editor. *Progetto disequilibriante*, 61).

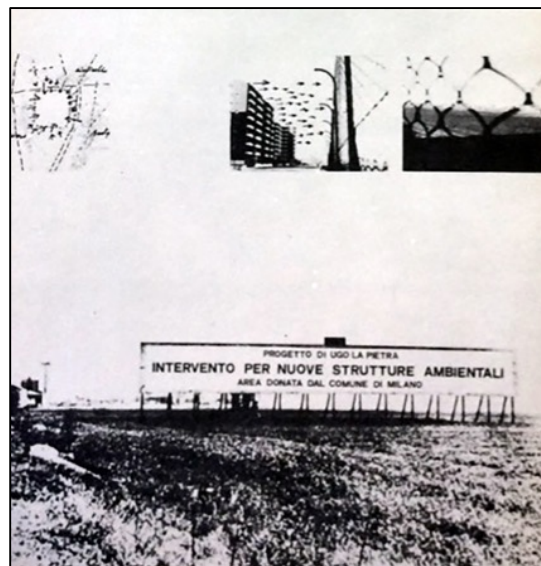
⁶⁷ La Pietra, "Città iperstatica", 46.

di campagna acquired a positive, exemplary connotation. These dwellings were an element of disruption to the suburban fabric of Milan, and a failure in the system of power that shaped the city. As such, the rural culture they expressed encapsulated a potential for revolution.

Following his article in *Casabella*, La Pietra organised his visual material under the title, *I gradi di libertà*.⁶⁸ In *I gradi di libertà*, La Pietra sought and analysed the existing spaces of agency and collective creativity within the urban fabric of Milan. Later presented as a series of collages, this investigation finds a conceptual precedent in his *Elemento segnale* (1970) and *La Conquista dello spazio* (1971), both operations being part of the wider model *Sistema disequilibrante*.⁶⁹



5.17. Ugo La Pietra, *La Conquista dello spazio*, 1971



5.18. Ugo La Pietra, *Elemento segnale*, 1970

Both projects consist of an empirical individuation of urban spaces, which were not constructed or abandoned, but were residual after the formalisation of the political, economic and urban authorities. This acknowledgment of available space for action was followed by the creation of an *Emergenza*, the installation of an element that differentiated the individuated spaces from the surrounding urban environment. In *Elemento segnale*, La Pietra intervened in an area on the periphery of Baggio, north-west of Milan, which had resulted from a political *impasse* caused by unregulated real estate investing [5.18]. This was a phenomenon of territorial mismanagement that negatively impacted on the urbanisation of Milan during the postwar period, and it will be explored in relation to Baruchello's work

⁶⁸ La Pietra, "Città iperstatica", 45-48.

⁶⁹ La Pietra, *Il sistema disequilibrante*, np.

in Rome in the next section of this Chapter. In *Emergenza*, the artist activated the space by simply recognising the complexity of the forces at play and by giving it a new meaning. He did this through a very simple operation, which involved placing a signal with the text 'Progetto di Ugo La Pietra. INTERVENTO PER NUOVE STRUTTURE AMBIENTALI. Area donata dal Comune di Milano' in this residual piece of land.⁷⁰ In *Conquista dello Spazio*, the artist did not go so far as to receive a donation of public ground, as had been the case in the previous project [5.17].⁷¹ Instead he marked with removable tape the paved area where Porta Sempione, a grandiose Neoclassical monument dedicated to the main events of history of Italy, is located on the northern edge of Parco Sempione. In these works, acknowledgment, as a form of disruption of the given understanding and perception of the urban space, is the first step towards a form of possession, as suggested by the title of the 1971 project, and action.

In *I gradi di libertà* the artist took the concept of reclaiming space further, not only looking for residual spaces for possible action, but also for collective and individual forms of possession and agency on the existing structure of the city. La Pietra named these forms *tracce*, as he explained in his *Città iperstatica*.⁷² He classified these traces into five different categories, according to the different ways in which local dwellers had physically engaged with the urban space and its material-scape: *Manipolazione, Itinerari preferenziali, Recupero e Reinvenzione* and *Desiderio di possesso*. Reasoning with contemporary experiences in the field of visual arts, this work verifies the limits of the modern city and of its model of urbanism, and addressed issues that were among the main socio-political concerns of the time.

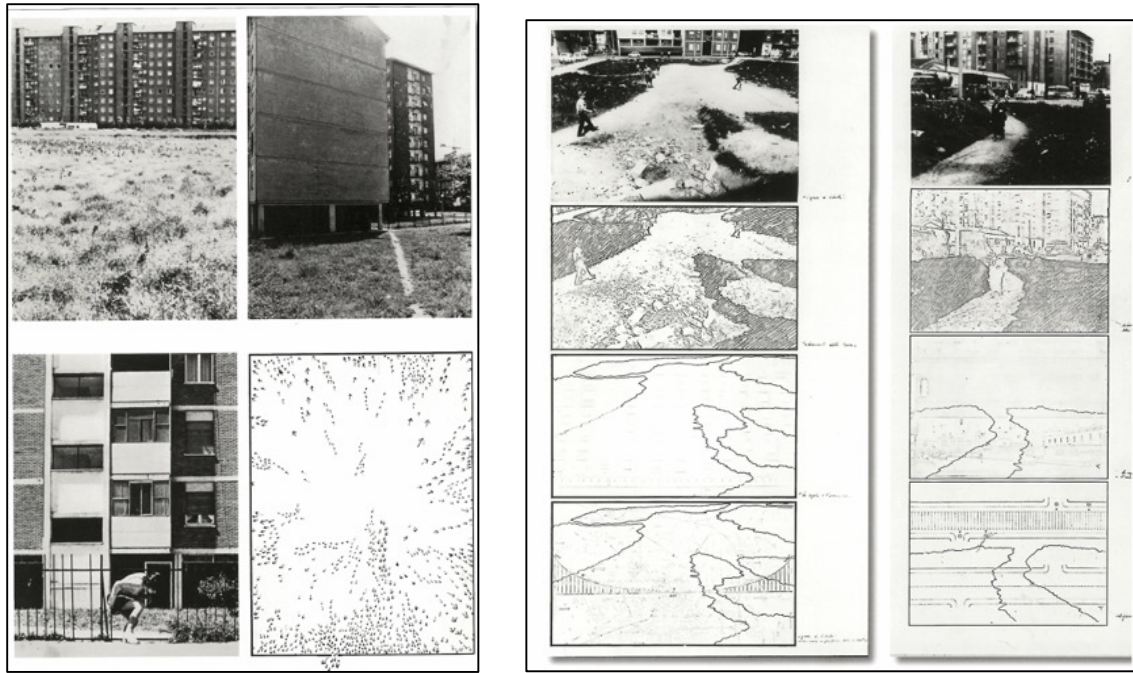
Itinerari preferenziali investigates the system of walking paths and shortcuts that served as alternatives to the official, planned road system [5.19; 5.20; 5.21]. The urban street network, designed specifically for motor vehicles and aiming at the most efficient traffic circulation, was largely regarded in a negative way within Marxist critiques of urban space. It was considered one of the aspects that influenced social and urban fragmentation on the grounds that it elided the possibility of human interaction, and creative detours.⁷³ The alternative system of walking pathways, as contrasted against the traffic jams of the city, is displayed in several of La Pietra's 1969 and 1970 collages [5.19; 5.20; 5.20].

⁷⁰ Meneguzzo, ed. *Il segno randomico*, 176

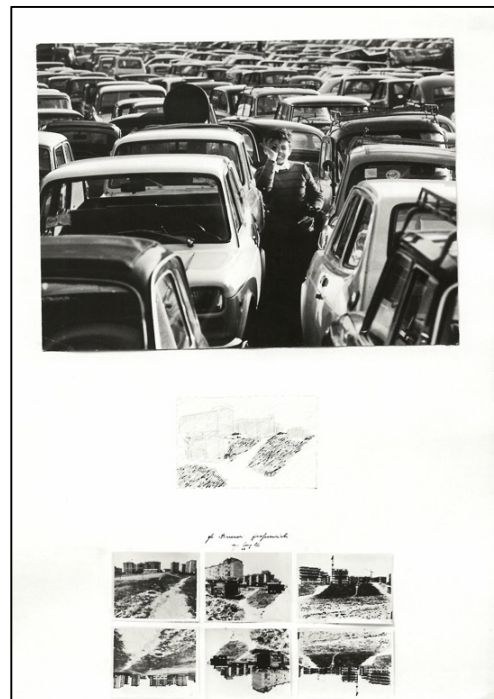
⁷¹ Meneguzzo, ed. *Il segno randomico*, 177

⁷² La Pietra, "Città iperstatica", 45.

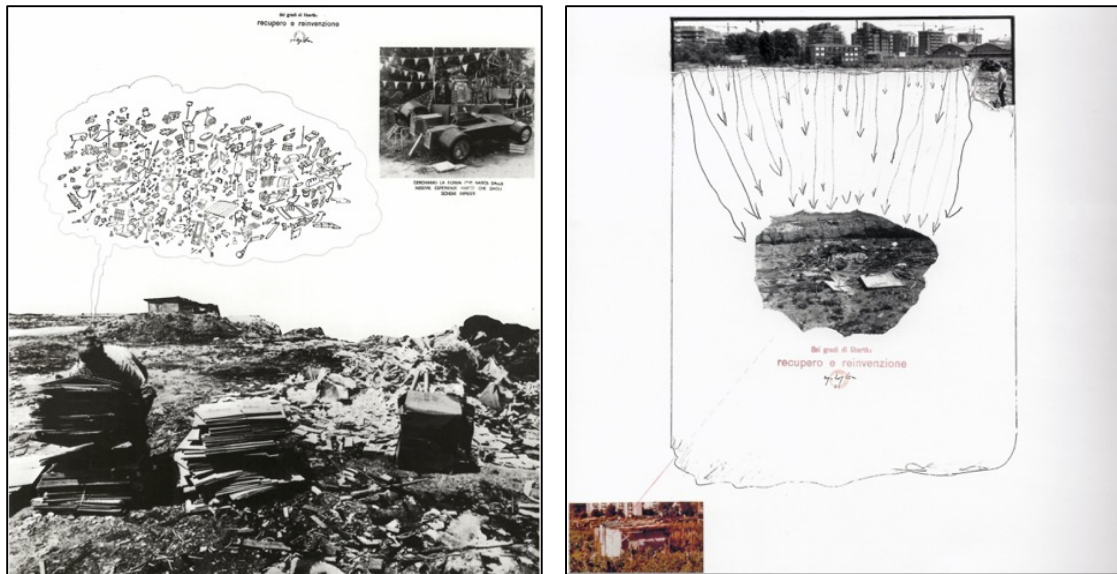
⁷³ Sadler, *Situationist City*, 25.



5.19- 5.20. Ugo La Pietra, *Itinerari preferenziali*, from *I gradi di libertà* 1969



5.21. Ugo La Pietra, *Itinerari preferenziali*, from *I gradi di libertà*, 1970



5.22. Ugo La Pietra, *Recupero e Reinvenzione*, 1968
from *I gradi di libertà*, 1968

5.23. Ugo La Pietra, *Recupero e Reinvenzione*,
from *I gradi di libertà*, 1975

Informed by Lévi-Strauss's ideas about the savage mind as well as the *bricoleur*, *Recupero e Reinvenzione* investigates the reuse of materials found in wastelands, and the way in which locals had recovered them giving them a new life in the construction of huts [5.22; 5.23].⁷⁴ The series of collages visualises the links between these huts and the urban environment. With a didactic organisation of the picture plane of his collages, the artist carefully decomposes the huts into their primary construction materials, and clarifies the life path of the huts using arrows, photographic documentation and drawings. These urban shelters represent the locals' creative rehabilitation of the waste of consumerism.

La Pietra appreciated the ingenious quality of these ephemeral architectures. He also attributed an aesthetic appeal to them. This use of unorthodox construction materials in the huts finds a counterpart in works of artists associated with Celant's *Arte Povera*, and in Riccardo Dalisi's *Architettura Povera*.⁷⁵ At the same time, the careful framing and treatment of the documentary images contribute to promoting an aesthetic appreciation of their construction. The series of door locks and handles in a collage from the 1975 series *Recupero e Reinvenzione* expresses a sensitivity not only towards the ingenious use of the materials, but also a visual carefulness in framing these elements in compositions that visually echo Alberto Burri's *Legni combusti* [5.24].⁷⁶

⁷⁴ See the difference between the engineer's mode of thinking and making and the bricoleur's ones in: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972), especially chapter one.

⁷⁵ See: Riccardo Dalisi, "La Tecnica Povera in Rivolta: La cultura del sottoproletariato", *Casabella* 365 (May 1972), 29; Sara Catenacci, "Riccardo Dalisi tra architettura, design e animazione", *L'uomo nero. Materiali per la storia delle arti e della modernità*, XII, 11-12 (May 2015), 182-201.

⁷⁶ About Burri's work, see: Massimo Duranti, *Alberto Burri, Form and Matter* (Perugia: Effe Fabrizio Fabri, 2011)



5.24. *La Pietra, Recupero e Reinvenzione*, from *Riappropriazione dell'ambiente* (1976)

While manipulation was conceived by La Pietra as the simplest mode of physical modification of the environment, 'desire of possession' was connected to the need for ownership. For the architect, this need was epitomised by the huts with a vegetable garden built on the outskirts of the city. These constructions were associated with rural, traditionally agriculture-based, dwellings. La Pietra photographed and mapped the huts and the vegetable gardens extensively. These gardens were interpreted by the artist as the city dweller's attempts to recover a life-style that was closer to nature, and an expression of the urban desire for reconnecting with natural rural cycles. In these urban examples, La Pietra found the existing counterpart to the technological greenhouse design proposed by Gruppo 9999 at the 1972 exhibition in New York.⁷⁷

⁷⁷About Gruppo 9999 project, see: Ambasz, *The New Domestic Landscape*, 276-281; Rossi, "Crafting a design counterculture", 147-153.



5.25. Ugo La Pietra, *Recupero e Reinvenzione series*, from *I gradi di libertà*, 1972



5.26. Ugo La Pietra, *Recupero e Reinvenzione series*, from *I gradi di libertà*, 1969

Not only had the modern housing complexes rendered impossible the owning of a piece of land in the city, but a more urgent need for affordable housing was at the forefront of the social protests and urban conflicts in Milan from the general strike in 1963 onwards.⁷⁸ 'No social movement was larger than that concerned with housing', as Paul Ginsburg stated.⁷⁹ This socio-political cause, which imbued Antonio Paradiso's *Atemporale* work about the Murgia Materana, was supported by art and intellectual activists in the circle of La Pietra, such as Collettivo Autonomo della Facoltà di Architettura di Milano (*Una Lotta per La Casa*, 1972), and the radical Gruppo Strum in *Struggle for Housing*, a sociological investigation in the form of a photo-story presented and distributed in New York at *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* [5.28; 5.27].⁸⁰



5.27. Gruppo Strum, *Diritto alla città*, Poster, 1972



5.28. Collettivo Autonomo della Facoltà di Architettura di Milano, *Una lotta per la casa*, 1972

Despite not being overtly political, La Pietra's investigation of Milan has a socio-political, transformative potential. 'Ogni pianificazione urbana si comprende soltanto come campo della pubblicità-propaganda di una società' he wrote in his 1975 introduction to the book, *I gradi di libertà*, quoting the S.I. members, Attila Kotányi and Raoul Veneigen, 'vale a dire organizzazione della partecipazione a qualcosa a cui è impossibile partecipare.'⁸¹ In his investigation, La Pietra declared that he is documenting the manifestation of a desire 'di riconquistare un ruolo individuale e collettivo nei processi di definizione e trasformazione della realtà che quotidianamente lo circonda.'⁸² Thus, in this research project, La Pietra makes the huts' latent creativity emerge, without losing track of the aesthetic and

⁷⁸ Lumley, *States of Emergency*, 15-16; Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 323-326.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁸⁰ Collettivo Autonomo della Facoltà di Architettura di Milano, "Una lotta per la casa", *Distruzione e Riappropriazione della città*, 50-57; Gruppo STRUM, in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* (New York City: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 254-257, later published in *Casabella* (368).

⁸¹ La Pietra, *I gradi di libertà. Percorsi preferenziali e sistemi di comunicazione*, np.

⁸² *Ibid.*

architectonic aspect of these experiences. Considering creativity in Marxist terms as the ability of humans to transform their surroundings to respond to their own needs, *I gradi di libertà* records the social needs of local dwellers and the creative ways in which they had fulfilled them. In return, locals became exemplary of their capacity to re-appropriate the physical space of the city, as well as their own creative potential.

Read through the lens of Henri Lefebvre, these dwellings have themselves the potential to transform the capitalist system and its alienating power.⁸³ Lefebvre's dialectical humanism detected aspirations for a non-alienated, fully-lived experience in the everyday and in the city, one that was creative, self-determined and sensual. He also clearly linked these aspirations to a critique of the social order.⁸⁴ From his perspective, the right to individual difference corresponds to the right to the city. Even if, he claims, difference exists as an alienated and isolated fragment within the capitalist system, asserting the right to difference, and thus transforming a minimal difference into a maximal one, can be a moment of counter-hegemonic politics. La Pietra's acknowledgment, documentation and verification of examples of spaces, collectively constructed, and which do not resign to the norm of urban alienation, responds to the same logic.

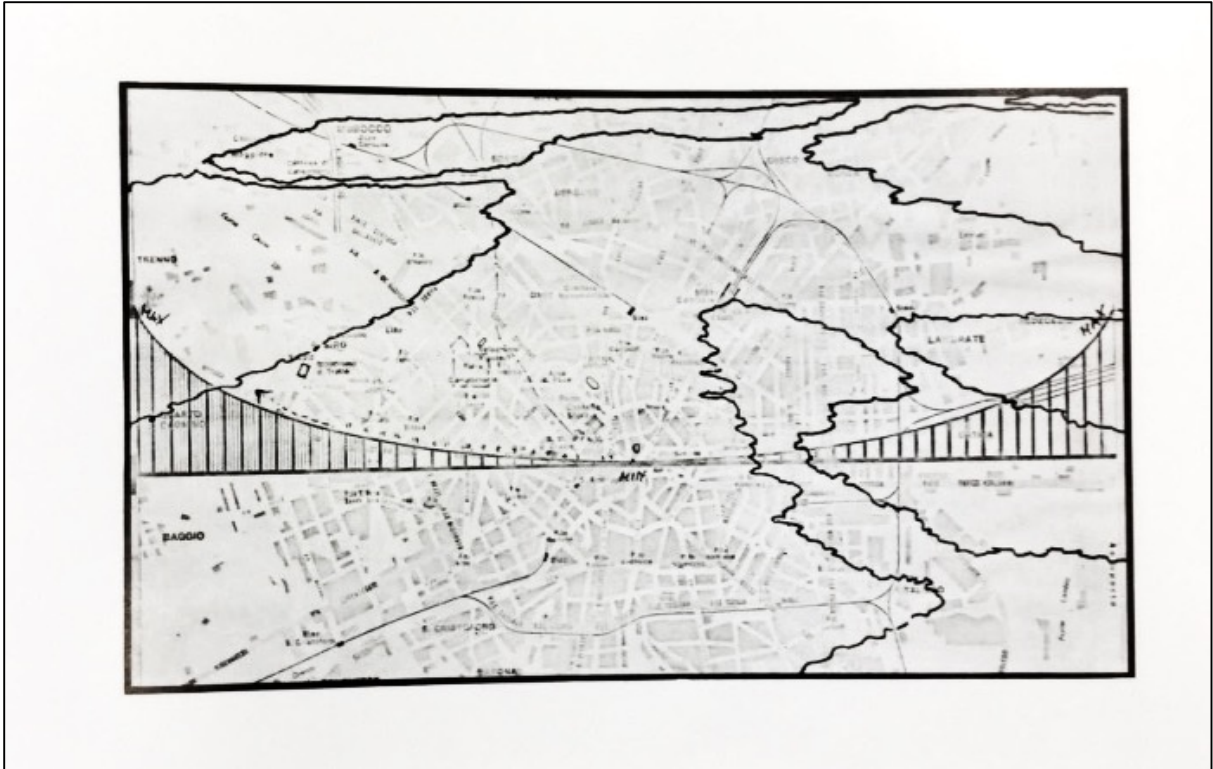
This investigation of rural dwelling also had a socio-political value, if we consider the suburban areas of 1960s and 1970s Milan that La Pietra explored, and their public perception. He observed that the further he moved from the centre, the more freedom the inhabitants had to act [5.29].⁸⁵ This interpretation of the deflation of urban powers towards the edges of the city reflected Lefebvre's diagrams for understanding the urban environment in his *The Urban Revolution* (1970), and a positive interpretation of the lack of infrastructure and services that accompanied the absence of decentred political and administrative authorities.⁸⁶

⁸³ Lipfer, "Lefebvre and Gramsci and the Problematic of Hegemony", 117-149

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ La Pietra, *I gradi di libertà. Percorsi preferenziali e sistemi di comunicazione*, np.

⁸⁶ Henry Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (London: Minnesota University Press, 2003), 15.



5.29. Ugo La Pietra, *I gradi di libertà* (Map of Milan and diagram), 1976

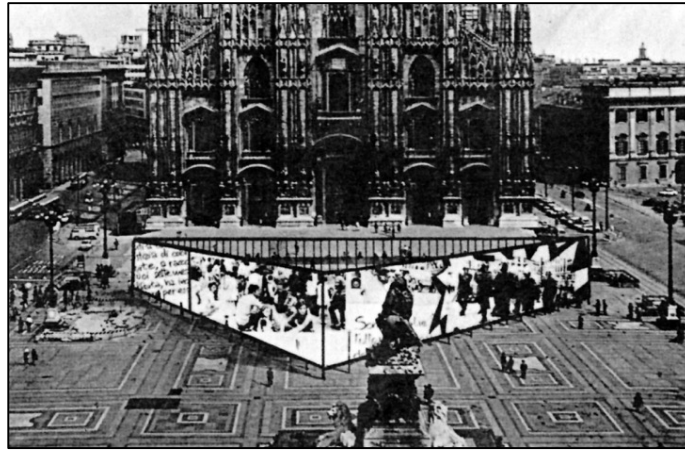
La Pietra collected his images of interventions in the areas of Baggio, in the central, western peripheral area of Milan. Since the beginning of the first industrialisation in the city at the start of the twentieth century, Milan had undergone two major urban expansions, associated with immigration from other parts of the country.⁸⁷ The first wave of industrialisation and migration took place in the 1910s, around the time when Umberto Boccioni painted his *La città sale* (1910).⁸⁸ The second wave, which started in the 1950s, shocked the city: around 500,000 newcomers moved there between 1950 and 1970, and Milan duly expanded its boundaries to accommodate them, albeit without providing suitable living conditions.⁸⁹ Although very limited, this second periphery had been the field of sociological studies. In 1972, *Milano, Corea*, a collection of interviews by the Breda factory worker Franco Alasia and Danilo Montaldi with the dwellers of the new areas of urbanisation in Milan, raised awareness of and concerns for the precarious living conditions

⁸⁷ Foot, *Milano dopo il miracolo*, 156-157.

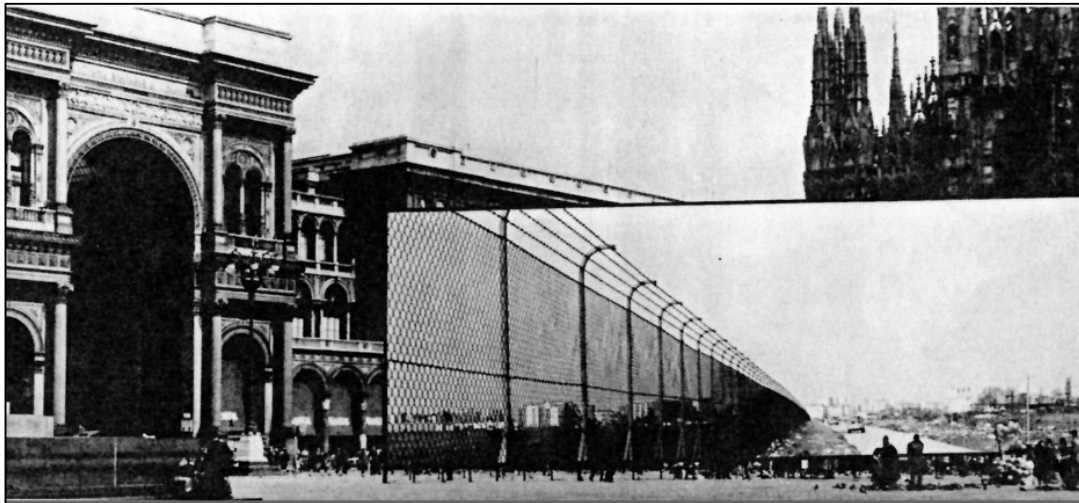
⁸⁸ About the urban history of Milan, see: Lucio Gambi and Maria Cristina Gozzoli, *Le città nella storia d'Italia. Milano* (Bari: Laterza, 1982), especially pages 333-334 for the Futurist myth. A very negative view of the first wave of immigration is provided by Francesco Coletti, "Zone grigie nella popolazione di Milano", in *L'Italia in formazione. Ricerche e saggi sullo sviluppo urbanistico del territorio nazionale*, eds. Carozzi and Mioni, 107-112.

⁸⁹ Gianfranco Petrillo, "The Two Waves. Milan as a City of Immigration, 1955-1995", in *Italian Cityscapes. Culture and Urban Change in Contemporary Italy*, eds. Robert Lumley and John Foot (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 31-40; John Foot, "Revisiting the Core. Self-construction, Memory and Immigration on the Milanese Periphery 1950-2000", in Lumley and Foot, *Italian Cityscapes*, 46-60.

of the area.⁹⁰ Similarly but only since the end of the 1960s, extra-parliamentary political groups, often with the support of militant artists, produced documentary materials that recorded and denounced the living conditions in the urban suburbs.⁹¹ For the wider audience, a glimpse into the universe of the peripheries of Milan had been made possible by Visconti's poetic, dramatic images in *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1960).⁹² Even though little known, as John Foot has noticed in his monograph about the city, the peripheries and their inhabitants were perceived differently, and generally in a negative way.⁹³



5.30. Ugo La Pietra, *Modello di comprensione*, 1972



5.31. Ugo La Pietra, *Modello di comprensione*, 1972

La Pietra was aware of the stigma associated with the outskirts of the city and its inhabitants, and of the critical, political potential involved in working on these topics. For

⁹⁰ Franco Alasia and Danilo Montaldi, *Milano, Corea* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010).

⁹¹ For instance, Gianfranco Baruchello produced a video for Potere Operaio about the occupations in Quarto Oggiaro. Conversation with the artist, 20th April 2015.

⁹² Foot, *Milano dopo il miracolo*, 161.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 156-178.

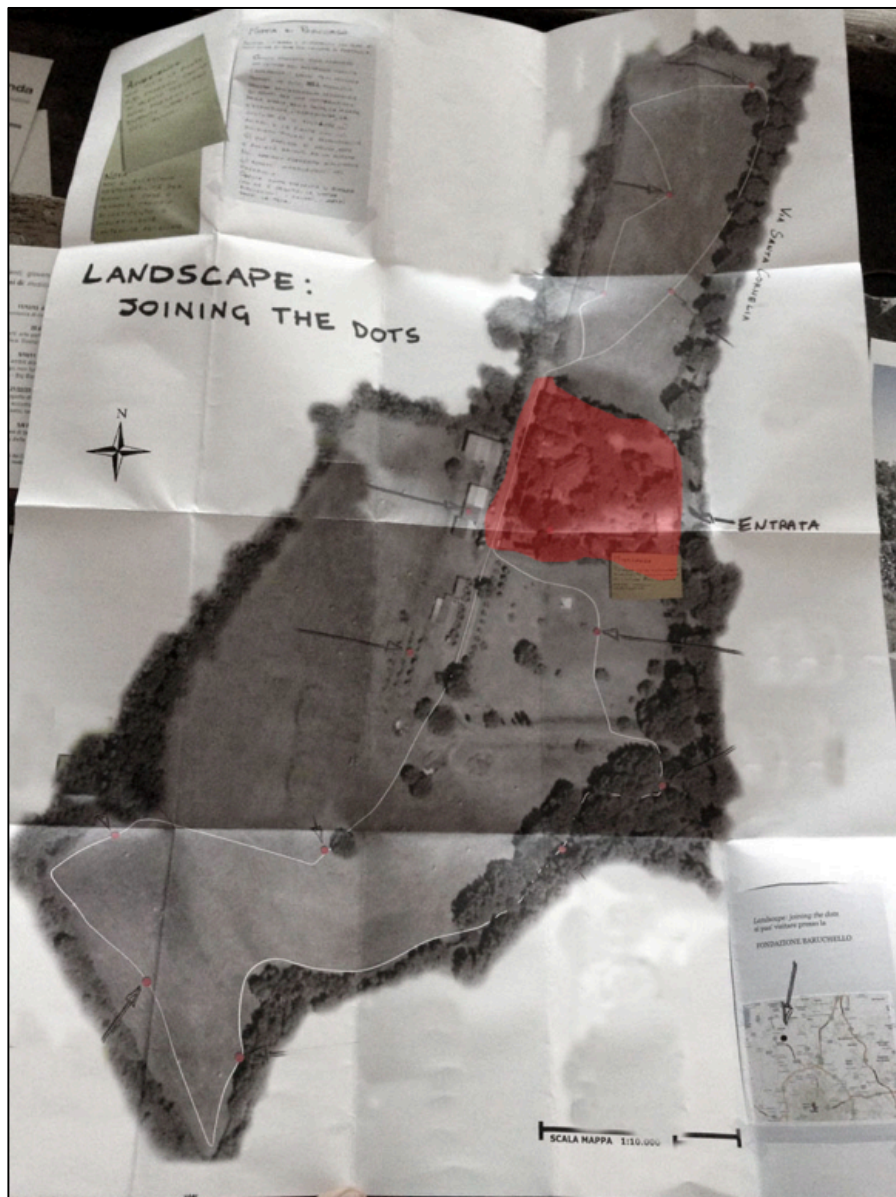
Christmas 1972, he was commissioned by Milan City Council to make an intervention, and he proposed *Verso il centro*, a video installation created in Piazza Duomo, the symbolic heart of the city.⁹⁴ The work, originally presented as *Modello di comprensione 1*, like his other projects related to the *Sistema disequilibrante*, consisted of three screens positioned to create a triangle (a shape often used by La Pietra as a visual element of disturbance) on which images of the political, social and cultural life in the outskirts of Milan were projected [5.30; 5.31]. The installation represented counter-information: 'Tutto ciò che normalmente succede all'interno di una città e che non viene diffuso attraverso i normali mezzi di informazione di massa,' he wrote.⁹⁵ In this project more than in his other public presentations, the artist promoted images about the periphery of the city, invested with critical socio-political relevance as an alternative model of agency within the urban space. Unlike this public installation, *I gradi di libertà* did not have a disruptive effect, but was instead a subtler way to challenge perceptions of the city.

Though the educational clarity of the artist's presentation of his research, *I gradi di libertà* was to propose a model to redefine the lenses through which it is possible to look for values, such as creativity, self-determination and participation in the urban environment. Thus, before reframing the rural huts on the periphery of Milan as a more neutral expression of vernacular architecture, these were conceived as an expression of individual needs beyond the imposition of the system, and as signs of disruption and potential revolution in the existing urban order. Acknowledging the existence of rural dwellings in the urban outskirts of Milan, La Pietra valued these constructions as manifestations of hope for future change. In his operation, the city itself was 'una grande struttura didattica al di fuori del sistema didattico,' and the urban-rural dwelling a model of collective creativity and of resistance against the impositions of the modern city.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Menguzzo, *Segno randomico*, 178; La Pietra, *Città iperstatica*, 46-47.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹⁶ La Pietra, *Città iperstatica*, 46.



5.32. Diego Bonetto,
LANDSCAPE: Joining the Dots
 Fondazione Baruchello, 2010

Aerial view of
 Baruchello's Estate (now Fondazione Baruchello).
 In red,
 the initial area of the villa in 1973

Gianfranco Baruchello and the Dysfunctional Farm

Palomar s'è distratto, non strappa più le erbacce,
non pensa più al prato: pensa all'universo. Sta
provando ad applicare all'universo tutto quello che
ha pensato del prato. L'universo come cosmo regolare e
ordinate o come proliferazione caotica. L'universo forse
finito ma innumerabile, instabile nei suoi confine, che apre
entro di sé altri universi. L'universo, insieme di corpi celesti,
nebulose, pulviscolo, campi di forze, intersezioni di campi,
insiemi di insiemi...
Italo Calvino, *Palomar*, 1983⁹⁷

Based on the first urban plan of the city (1909), the *Grande Raccordo Anulare* (GRA) is a highway in the shape of a ring that runs around the expanding body of the city of Rome.⁹⁸ Its aim, since it was first conceived, is to divert the traffic flow from the city centre to the Agro Romano. Started in 1946, the GRA marks the boundaries of the more compact metropolitan area of Rome, and functions as a modern, permeable wall for the city. Once off the main road, and driving north through the urbanised countryside towards the Etruscan town of Formello and the Parco del Veio, it is possible to reach via Santa Cornelia 695, and the countryside villa where Gianfranco Baruchello set up his *Agricola Cornelia Spa* farm in the 1970s.

Since 1998, the estate of *Agricola Cornelia* has been the headquarters of the artist's art foundation, the Fondazione Baruchello, whose mission is to foster research on art, nature and ecology [5.32].⁹⁹ Between the 1970s and today, several projects were developed on the eleven hectares of land of this estate. Nonetheless it was in the early existence of this rural enterprise that agriculture and farming defined what *Agricola Cornelia* was, and created the premises of what the Fondazione is today.

Between 1973 and 1981, Baruchello explored thoughts on art, life, and politics, whilst making different use of agriculture in these same explorations, as narrated by the artist in his book *How to Imagine. A Narrative on Art and Agriculture* (1984).¹⁰⁰ This melting pot of theoretical activities that intersected with farming in the 1970s is what was first named *Agricola Cornelia* by the artist, and it was presented at the exhibition with the same title at the Galleria Milano in Milan in 1981.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Italo Calvino, *Palomar*, 34.

⁹⁸ For a definition and description of the GRA, see: Italo Insolera, *Roma moderna. Da Napoleone I al secolo XI* (Turin: Einaudi editore, 2011), 383-384.

⁹⁹ <http://www.fondazionebaruchello.com/lafondazione-fondazionebaruchello/>, accessed on 1st May 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Gianfranco Baruchello and Henry Martin. *How to Imagine. A narrative on Art and Agriculture* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985).

¹⁰¹ Gianfranco Baruchello, *Agricola Cornelia Spa* (SI: Exit, 1981).

Agricola Cornelia, and more generally Baruchello's artistic production, has been receiving increasing public attention since the late 1990s.¹⁰² In the past decade, the artist went from being an underground and interstitial figure in open dialogue with several of the most important intellectuals of his generation, such as Marcel Duchamp, Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, and Jean-François Lyotard, to being publicly recognised as one of most relevant artists in the Italian postwar art scene.

Reconsidering the recent interpretation of Baruchello's painterly production as 'maps of the mind', this section suggests and adopts a 'way of looking' at *Agricola Cornelia*, and focuses on the vision that underpinned several farming activities that were carried out during the ten-year period when *Agricola Cornelia* was the name of joint stock company created by the artist and his partner at the time. This section pinpoints and focuses on at least two very different ways in which the artist dealt with agriculture, one of the many activities that he used as artistic media over the course of those years.



5.33. Gianfranco Baruchello, *Agricolantipotere* (documentary materials), 1976. Installation at earthrise exhibition (Turin, Parco dell'Arte Vivente, 2015)

Early in 1973, Baruchello used agriculture as a kind of 'pseudo-political happening', as a medium for militant actions.¹⁰³ Often forgetting that Baruchello soon rejected this first part of his work, critics agree on considering Baruchello's early activities a reaction to the *speculazione edilizia* in the metropolitan area of Rome, and that Baruchello's life in the countryside was a fresh start for his artistic career and political engagement.¹⁰⁴ Later in

¹⁰² Alessandra Mammì, "Finalmente è il momento di Baruchello", *L'Espresso*, 10th December 2014, <http://espresso.repubblica.it/visioni/cultura/2014/12/09/news/finalmente-e-il-momento-di-baruchello-1.191104>, accessed on 1st April 2017.

¹⁰³ Carla Subrizi, "Piccoli sistemi", in Bonito Oliva and Subrizi, *Baruchello. Certe idee*, 77.

¹⁰⁴ Baruchello destroyed all the documentation of the first phase of the project, and recalled to have done so in his book *How to imagine. A Narrativa on Art, Agriculture and Creativity* published in 1983.

1976, he used agriculture to test the boundaries between usefulness and uselessness of art, while producing a series of paintings in which the paradoxes and incongruences of his thoughts about reality and about his experience of *Agricola Cornelia* coexist.¹⁰⁵ These farming activities also triggered the idea of a series of manifestos under the name of *Agricolantipotere*, and suggested to promote agriculture among the members of the art system as a way to promote a useful, political art [5.33].¹⁰⁶ Leaving the first, 1973, phase of the project to the next section for reasons that will be clarified in the chapter, this section proposes the contradictory notion of ‘dysfunctional farm’ to interpret a number of Baruchello’s agricultural activities in *Agricola Cornelia*.

Baruchello moved to the Roman countryside in 1973.¹⁰⁷ Before then, agriculture had never played a role in his artistic practice. He started his artistic path as a self-taught artist in the 1950s, when he decided to leave the management of his bio-chemical company in Tuscany. His early works reflect a tension towards new forms of expression beyond Abstract Expressionism. Already at the end of 1950s his personal artistic vocabulary, indebted to Neo-Dada, started to take shape, in the form of assemblages and canvases.¹⁰⁸



5.34. View of part of Baruchello’s library in via Santa Cornelia

¹⁰⁵ Gianfranco Baruchello, *Agricola Cornelia S.p.A.* 973-1981 (Bologna: exit, 1981), 11.

¹⁰⁶ Baruchello and Martin, *How to imagine*, 31; Gianfranco Baruchello, “Una risposta alla domanda: che vuol dire?”, in *Baruchello* (Rome: La Margherita, 1977), np.

¹⁰⁷ For the artist’s biography, see: Bonito Oliva and Subrizi, *Baruchello Certe idee*, 370-410.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 38-46; but also: <http://www.luca-cerizza.com/txt-texts/141-painting-the-mind-mind-the-painting-an-introduction-to-gianfranco-baruchello-s-pictorial-space>, accessed on 31st March 2017.

Baruchello's library, today in his Fondazione, demonstrates the breadth of his reading [5.34]. Ranging from semiology and psychology, to philosophy and anthropology, they gave substance to his diverse but erudite artistic practice, which had found its inspiration mainly in words and ideas more than in images.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, two artists did influence his work, in very distinct ways: the Surrealist Chilean painter Robert Matta and Marcel Duchamp.¹¹⁰ As Baruchello himself recalls, Matta was the first to direct him to explore the semantic potential of the association of different, often apparently incongruent, objects and iconographic elements, which soon became the essential feature in his practice.¹¹¹ The latter was Baruchello's friend. They met in Milan in February 1962 and remained in contact until Duchamp's death in 1968. The older artist was more than an artistic father for him, as Baruchello explained in his book from 1984, which was dedicated to his relationship with the French artist.¹¹² Duchamp's notion of art as a challenge to the bourgeois notion of art and of the art establishment informed Baruchello's entire practice. The aspect that Baruchello appreciated the most was the 'alternative [that he offered] of a kind of painting that can serve as a main spring of philosophy.'¹¹³

Within Baruchello's extensive body of works in different media, which encompasses assemblage, video, performance, installation, and Dada provocations, paintings and drawings indeed hold a crucial relevance in his practice. Paintings are, Baruchello himself stated 'one thing that is constant in my work. Other things come and go, and the paintings are the place where they leave a trace behind them.'¹¹⁴ Despite the not-irrelevant technical and stylistic changes over time, his painterly works can be described as carefully-crafted accumulations of signs (diagrams, images and words), depicted on neuter surfaces (often white-painted) [5.35; 5.36; 5.37; 5.38].

Analysing Baruchello's painterly works in the light of Svetlana Alpers's *The Art of Describing* (1983), the art critic Luca Cerizza has recently interpreted the artist's works as a form of cartography.¹¹⁵ In the same way as experiencing Dutch landscape paintings that Alpers qualifies as a form of cartography, the viewer's eye should slowly 'travel' through his

¹⁰⁹ "Una conversazione tra Umberto Eco e Gianfranco Baruchello", in *De Consolatione Picturae*, ed. Galleria Schwarz (Milano: Galleria Schwarz, 1970), 12

¹¹⁰ Gianfranco Baruchello and Henry Martin, *Why Duchamp: An Essay on Aesthetic Impact* (New York: McPherson and Company, 1985).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 15; 48.

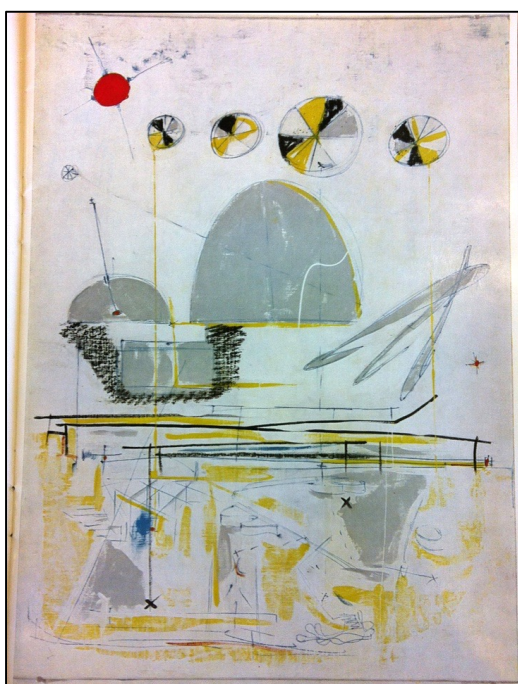
¹¹⁴ Baruchello and Martin, *How to Imagine*, 10.

¹¹⁵ Luca Cerizza, 'Thought Maps', 19th May 2013, in <https://frieze.com/article/thought-maps>, accessed on 20th April, 2017; Luca Cerizza's presentation in Bergen (Kunsthalle, 26.05-16.08. 2016): <https://vimeo.com/171321432>, accessed on 20th April, 2017; and the critic's contribution to the catalogue: Luca Cerizza, 'An Introduction to Baruchello's Pictorial Space', in *Gianfranco Baruchello. New works* (Bergen: Bergen Kusthaller, 2016), np., http://www.kunsthall.no/Dokmntr/2016/N05_8GBaruchelloDIG_FIN2.pdf, accessed on 1st May 2017.

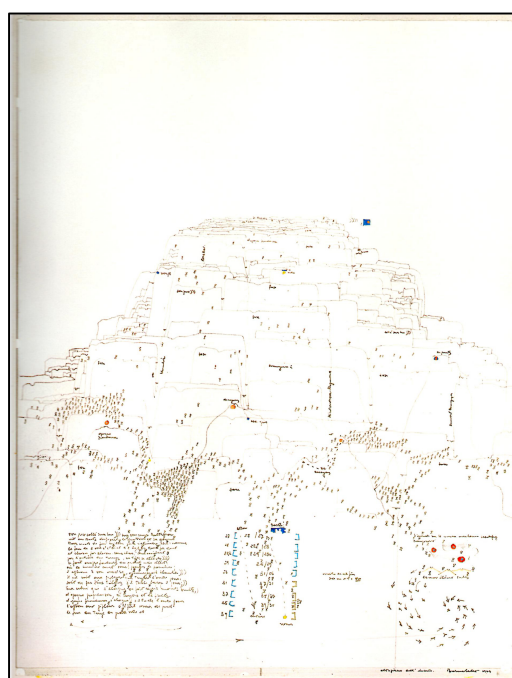
multi-centred anti-hierarchical spaces, where Baruchello patiently unfolded the itineraries of his mind.¹¹⁶ When, however, the artist was recently asked if he considered his paintings maps, he replied:

Non sono vere e proprie mappe, sono spazi... è chiaro poi che la mappa ha in qualche maniera la pretesa di riferirsi a uno spazio preciso. La mappa è una cosa 'vera', un quadro non indica nulla. Per questo la mappa sfugge: è troppo utile, necessaria, mentre un quadro può essere necessario solo a chi lo fa, o a chi eventualmente scopre che quel lavoro è importante per lui. Insomma, non mi interessa tanto, e mi fa un po' ridere, la mappa¹¹⁷

Confirming the spatial, almost topographical nature of his paintings, in his comment Baruchello touched upon two important aspects of his practice: the relationship with the viewer, and the dichotomy between usefulness and uselessness, which is a recurrent element in his work.



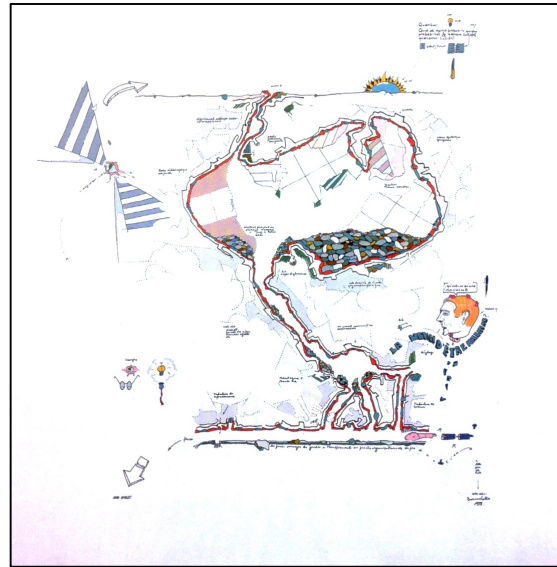
5.35. Gianfranco Baruchello, *La convenzione dei suoni*, 1963



5.36. Gianfranco Baruchello, *L'altopiano dell'incerto*, 1964

¹¹⁶ This is not the first time that critics linger on this analogy between the mind and both physical and pictorial space. See: Tommaso Trini, *Introduzione a Baruchello. Tradizione orale e arte popolare in una pittura d'avanguardia*, in Gianfranco Baruchello (Milan: Galleria Schwartz, 1975), 15; Gilbert Lascault, *Baruchello ovvero del diventare nomadi* (Mantova: Chiodo Arte Contemporanea, 1977), np; Andrea Cortellessa, "Paesaggi invisibili e attività del verde", *Il Manifesto*, 7.02.2017, <https://ilmanifesto.it/baruchello-paesaggi-invisibili-e-attivita-del-verde/>, accessed on April 30th, 2017.

¹¹⁷ <https://zero.eu/persona/gianfranco-baruchello/>, Accessed on April 4th.



5.37. Gianfranco Baruchello, *Piccolo tramonto morale*, 1964 5.38. Gianfranco Baruchello, *Agricola Cornelia. Cross Section with Underground System*, 1978

Baruchello did not appear concerned with the possibility of communicating contents to the beholder through his paintings. The fragments synthesize the artist's situated experience of developing on the canvas both the logic and the unconscious implications of the artist's rhizomatic thinking process.¹¹⁸ They have a meaning, for the artist himself and for those who are very well acquainted with his thought and the rationale behind his works. Hooked by the apparent readability of some fragment or other, a viewer less informed with the artist's biography keeps investigating the individual images and words. These individual figures, words and signs in his work have been described by Francois Lyotard as 'deposits of narrative energies' and 'ideals of sensibility', which encapsulate a potential narrative as Kant's monograms.¹¹⁹ Kantian 'monograms' are ideas of sensitivity, uncommunicable ghosts, and inimitable models of possible empirical intuitions.¹²⁰ For those viewers less familiar with these contents, Baruchello's paintings do not manifest a narrative urgency, and as such they have been recently described as 'non-tales', or 'ambigrammi' (meaning ambiguous linguistic elements), for each sign being on the edge of existing as a possible linguistic code.¹²¹ Whether comprehensible or not, the interpretation of the individual fragments of Baruchello's accumulations as well as the meaning of their overall composition were left to the viewers.

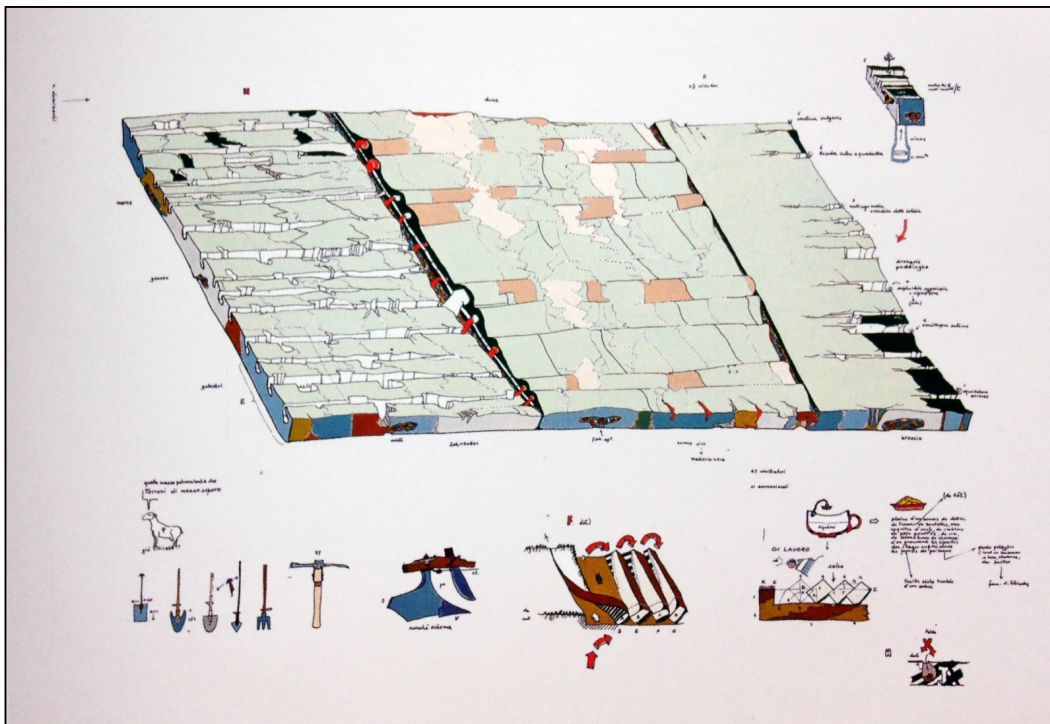
¹¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Mille piani: capitalismo e schizofrenia* (Rome: Cooper srl, 2003), 35-65.

¹¹⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *La pittura del segreto nell'epoca postmoderna* (Milan: Edizioni Gian Giacomo Feltrinelli, 1982); Jean-François Lyotard, *Monogrammes* (Paris: Galerie Le Dessin, 1982), np.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Paolo Fabbri quoted in Andrea Cortellessa, "Paesaggi invisibili e attività del verde".

Where is it possible to find ‘meaning’ in Baruchello’s work? The critic Henry Martin tried to compile an iconographical legend in *Fragments of a Possible Apocalypse* in 1978.¹²² Other critics have focused on the overall composition of the work. However, it is very difficult to combine the two. There is in fact a tension between the scale of the painting, the overall composition and the size of the individual figurative elements. Yet it is the physical and mental realm of this tension that suggests a way to look at this work. Baruchello’s works demand a kind of continuous physical and mental engagement with the work. Very few commentators have escaped the need to advise others about the best way to look at his paintings. Duchamp first said that ‘you need to look at them from very close, and for a very long time’; Tommaso Trini has described his experience as a constant moving closer and away from the work, between the microcosms of the individual fragments and the macrocosms of the ethical and political system.¹²³ This perceptive and epistemological tension, however, is unresolved. Yet it *is* the artwork that makes what the experience of the painting, and the meaning it conveys, a mirror of the looking self.



5.39. Gianfranco Baruchello, *Agricola Cornelia - Plowing Techniques and Alias*, 1978

In *Plowing Techniques and Alias*, for instance, one of the four paintings of a series explicitly dedicated to *Agricola Cornelia* in 1978, the viewer can easily recognise the five

¹²² Henry Martin and Gianfranco Baruchello, *Fragments of a Possible Apocalypse* (Milan, Multipla, 1978).

¹²³ Trini, “Introduzione a Baruchello”, 13.

tools for digging on the left lower corner of the painting; a pick, and the blade of a plough [5.39]. The tools are followed by two drawings synthesizing the mechanics of ploughing. In the upper portion of the work, it is possible to recognise a representation of a geologic section of a segment of land. There are also smaller drawings (a goat, a dish of polenta, and a cup), and microscopic written texts in different languages, mainly Italian and French, that accompany the illustration, but it is possible to see them properly only by getting very close to the painting, thus, losing track of the overall composition. From Baruchello's writings about *Agricola Cornelia*, we can gather that the painting reflects the artist's interest in the underground, especially in grottos and their symbolic and psychoanalytic sexualised meaning, and refers to the early farming activities, but this does not appear sufficient.¹²⁴ Each of these fragments and their composition trigger questions about the content of the painting. What is the connection between the main part of the composition and the smaller text in the right lower corner? why are there these differences in the scale of the part of the paintings? What is Baruchello communicating? Even in paintings whose content is easily ascribable to the artist's experience, these questions tend to find no answers within the picture plain, neither the artist provides tools to navigate these non-hierarchical spaces he created.

The viewer's enquiry into the painting becomes a process of self-questioning. 'Un critico illustre mi ha detto,' Baruchello recounts in a conversation with Eco "sai io in genere ho l'impressione di fare la psicoanalisi ai quadri e all'autore; invece quando si tratta della tua pittura ho l'impressione che sei tu che fai la psicoanalisi a chi guarda." Questo è molto divertente, ma in fondo non è vero.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, it is not the artist neither his work that are guiding this process but the incommunicability of his images. As Baruchello himself suggests, 'il quadro o l'oggetto infatti finiscono in realtà per raccontare quello che chi lo guarda vuole farsi raccontare.'¹²⁶ In other words, it is the viewer who is asked to construct the meaning of a painting, whose incommunicability is the essence of its epistemological relevance.

To overcome this postmodern epistemological impasse in this chapter, it appears sensible to take a distance from the works themselves and look at them in the wider perspective of what they are within an art-historical perspective. Similar to Duchamp's, Baruchello's works appear unresolved epistemological challenges to perception and to the traditional ways to think and look at art as a contemplative experience. They are attempts to

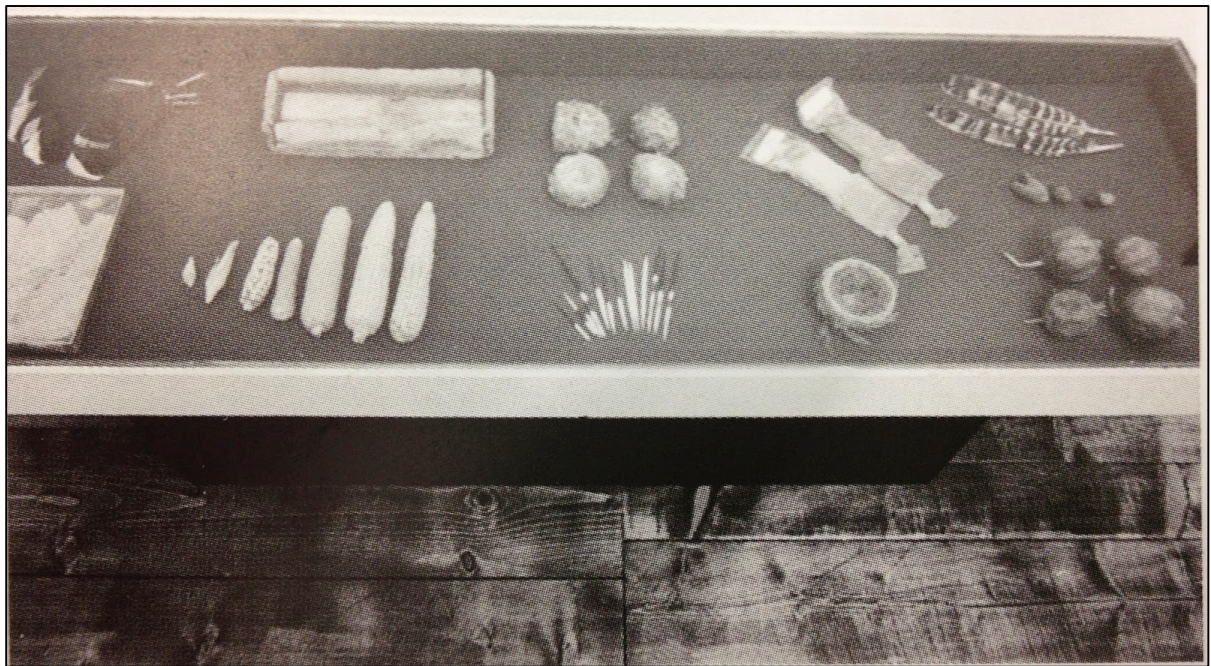
¹²⁴ These activities are recorded in Baruchello's *How to Imagine*; the archive of the Fondazione Baruchello preserve Baruchello's wide collection of research materials on the topic.

¹²⁵ "Una conversazione tra Umberto Eco e Gianfranco Baruchello", in *De Consolatione Picturae*, 20-21.

¹²⁶ Gianfranco Baruchello, "Una risposta di Baruchello alla domanda: Che vuol dire?", in *Sulla Perdita d'amore* (Rome: Galleria La Margherita, 1977), np.

transform the visual experience of the painting into a philosophical enquiry. In turn, Baruchello's farm *Agricola Cornelia* is an empirical space where this is manifested at the intersection between the art sphere, agriculture and its market.

Looking at *Agricola Cornelia* through the artist's agricultural activities, the farm became a hybrid space where the artist decided to adopt a less utilitarian approach to agriculture, and to test the boundaries between what useful is and what is not within the empirical system of knowledge that agriculture is.¹²⁷ His reflections on the Marxist notion of use value, once applied to art, developed into a non-utilitarian use of agriculture.¹²⁸ It is in these kind of activities that is possible to trace Baruchello's political endeavours more clearly, and that marks the difference between his work and the that of his mentor: Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) 'was a gesture that had contained a criticism of all of the bourgeois culture of his epoch, and what I wanted to do was to go even beyond that with a gesture that also criticized the social and political aspects of bourgeois culture.'¹²⁹



5.40. Gianfranco Baruchello, Case at the *Agricola Cornelia S.p.A.* exhibition (Milan – Galleria del Sale), 1981

The farm *Agricola Cornelia Spa* became a controversial, unusual and dysfunctional example of a farm, if we consider a farm as the place where a relationship with nature is at its most

¹²⁷ Baruchello and Martin, *How to Imagine*, 33-34.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* Baruchello also proposed artists' mobilisations as potatoes growers in order to produce an art that was useful to society.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

utilitarian. Within the exhibition at the Galleria Milano in 1981 which presented *Agricola Cornelia* for the first time, a heterogeneous corpus of over fifty works synthesised a number of these experiments [5.40].¹³⁰ Among these, there was a glass case displaying several fruit and organic material, and an unusual object. This incoherent display of things had its coherence in the activities of which they were a *memento*. A piece of crystallised beehive, several corncobs, a stone rabbit trough, several porcupine needles, four bird nests, two packages of space food, four dried pomegranates, three dried tangerines, a malformed lemon, and feathers of various bird species were relics of several of Baruchello's experiments with farming. Each of the activities pursued by the artist became a change for new research, but, at the same time, a possibility to test the empirical knowledge on which farming is based. Working in the footsteps of Bronisław Malinowski's fieldwork, Baruchello explored the magic art of faming, using the word magic to refer to the unpredictability of nature, compared to working in a factory.¹³¹ Among the many anecdotes recounted by Baruchello in his books or interviews, beetroots and a flock of sheep, corn and goats become the testing ground for reconsidering the relationship between scientific knowledge, technology, nature and empirical knowledge, and for more universal considerations about human existence [5.41; 5.42].¹³²



5.41. Gianfranco Baruchello, *Agricola Cornelia*, 1976

¹³⁰Baruchello explains the meaning of this heterogeneous collection of objects in a video-recorded interview held during the exhibition, and which I was able to consult at the Fondazione Baruchello.

¹³¹ Baruchello, *Agricola Cornelia Spa*, 7.

¹³² Baruchello and Martin, *How to image*, 55-56; 69-70.



5.42. Gianfranco Baruchello, *Agricola Cornelia*, 1976

Furthermore, being a registered company, the product of the farm participated in the local market of farm products, for instance in the production of dairy products as well as handmade delicatessen produced by Baruchello and his partner.¹³³ In so doing, the artist also shifted his epistemological enquiries into agriculture to the wider understanding and testing of the position of farming as an activity within the market economy. However, he did not follow the rules of efficiency or productivity, and *Agricola Cornelia Spa* ended up going out of business. By 1981, *Agricola Cornelia* had ceased trading. This was not the result of Baruchello's incompetence in the field of agriculture, but rather another outcome of his experimentations. What was economically unacceptable in a society based on productivity and efficiency, was instead epistemologically valuable in another field of knowledge. Again, as for his paintings, the unresolved tension between these two levels of reality was crucial to the work.



5.43. Gianfranco Baruchello, *Artiflex*, 1968

¹³³ See Baruchello's lists in Baruchello, *Agricola Cornelia Spa*.



5.44. Gianfranco Baruchello, *Artiflex – Products for Teatro Pacco*, 1967-1968

An attempt to subvert institutional systems had already been tackled by the artist in other previous projects. As Baruchello confessed in an interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Baruchello's previous organisation, *Artiflex*, not only resonates with *Agricola Cornelia*, but offered a precedent to the artistic functioning of the artist's farming project [5.43; 5.44].¹³⁴ *Artiflex* started a series of performative events at the Galleria La Tartaruga in Rome. It used magazines such as *Marcatrè* for promoting its activities, and was registered as an anonymous organisation that had been set up in 1967.¹³⁵ Using neo dada provocations, the individual activities disrupted the common interaction between people, socially accepted behaviour, or the exchange value of objects through chance operations. For instance, at the Galleria La Tartaruga participants bought five-lira coins for ten liras. Through his *Teatro-pacco* advertised in magazines, he sent anonymous boxes which contained curious selections of objects, with instruction and a survey form, and collected people's responses in return, thus creating circuits of exchange [5.44].¹³⁶ With this kind of experience, Baruchello was testing the boundaries between institutional authorities and factual practicability, as in the case of *Agricola Cornelia*, but also unsettling social conventions.

Baruchello's *Agricola Cornelia* overturns the notion of farming, whilst testing the empirical system of knowledge and the principles of efficiency and productivity on which a farm and the market are based. From this perspective, it is possible to consider *Agricola Cornelia* as a dysfunctional farm. A farm, with its paradoxes and incongruences, which is not

¹³⁴ Andrea Cortellessa, "Gianfranco Baruchello: paesaggi invisibili", *Doppiozero*, 5.03.2017,

<http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/gianfranco-baruchello-i-paesaggi-invisibili>, accessed on 27th July 2017.

¹³⁵ Subrizi, *Piccoli sistemi*, 70; Ilaria Bernardi, *Teatro delle mostre: Roma Maggio 1968* (Scalpendi editore, 2014)

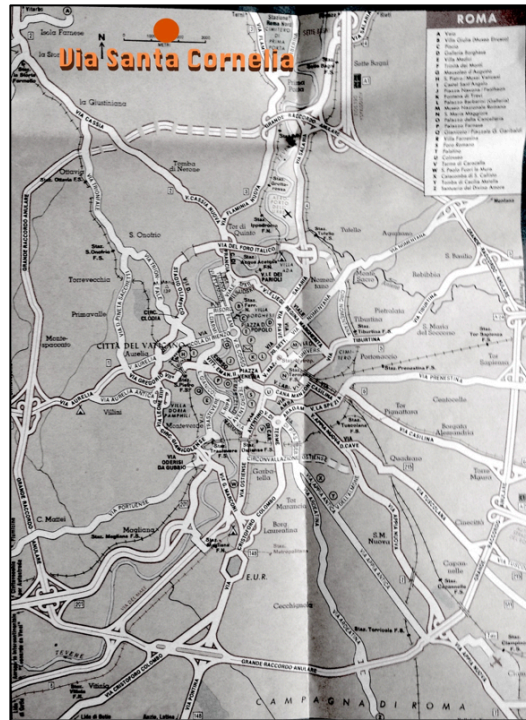
¹³⁶ Enrico Crispolti, ed. *Extra Media: Esperienze attuali di comunicazione estetica* (Torino: Studio forma, 1978), 34; Alain Jouffroy, *Baruchello, Navigateur en solitaire*, in *Gianfranco Baruchello* (Rome: Galleria Margherita, 1977), np

a system of production but a model of philosophical enquiry that has the potential to disrupt the notion of art as well as agriculture and its principles, in ways similar to his paintings.

Within the wide range of activities pursued by Baruchello, however, the 1973 'political happenings' of land occupation and cultivation appear unusual when compared to the rest of the project. They lacked provocative charge and philosophical sophistication, yet giving to the whole operation a political, context-related undertone. Nonetheless, these happenings provide an insight in the issues of territorial management in the Roman countryside and in the performative aspects of urban political action at the time.



5.45. Baruchello's Villa (1970s)



5.46. Map of Rome (July, 1970) - the red dot indicates Via Santa Cornelia (approx.)



5.47. Baruchello's Villa (view in April 2015)

Agriculture as 'Pseudo-Political Art'

In 1973, Baruchello and his partner moved to Via Santa Cornelia. It was in this new setting that agriculture as a political artistic act first came into play in the artist's practice. In 1978, the Italian critic Enrico Crispolti interpreted Baruchello's work as an 'extra-media art'.¹³⁷ According to Crispolti's framework, the use of multiple media is justified by regarding art as a communicative act in response to a specific audience. From Crispolti's perspective, Baruchello's farming activities resulted from the '*occasionalità*' of the work, with this term meaning the temporal, spatial and relational peculiar conditions in which the artwork is created, and primarily responded to the need to express ideas efficiently in context.¹³⁸ This theoretical framework, which does not appear to adapt completely to the rest of Baruchello's agricultural activities, appears valuable in the understanding of Carla Subrizi defined as 'pseudo-political happening' in 1973, and documents how this urban phenomenon acquired a rural declination, and bore visible and immediate ecological consequences.

Since 1973, Baruchello farmed the land in via Santa Cornelia, with land art in mind. As with the artists discussed in Chapter Two, Baruchello did not conceal his disapproval of it, with his disappointment especially raised by Christo's intervention proposed for *Contemporanea*, an 1974 exhibition curated by Achille Bonito Oliva which took place in the underground car park of Villa Borghese in Rome.¹³⁹ Alongside Antonio Paradiso and Claudio Costa, Baruchello took part in the event by presenting his 1968 movies (*Costretto a scomaprire; Norme per gli olocausti; Per una giornata di malumore nazionale; Tutto, tutto nello stesso istante*) and the work *Mi viene in mente*. On this occasion, the Bulgarian artist Christo wrapped Porta Pinciana, a portion of the Aurelian walls, and one of the only two public green areas of the whole city [5.48]. This was the first work of such a scale that had been created in the public space of Rome, and it suffered of act of vandalism: twice in a month, the installation was set on fire.¹⁴⁰ In his 1984 book *How to Imagine*, Baruchello commented:

The disturbing thing about land art is that it is so completely aesthetic and all on a such a terribly wrong scale. Anything that is enormous doesn't make any sense any more if it's entirely without awareness of the social realities inside of

¹³⁷ Crispolti, ed. *Extra media*, .11.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹³⁹ Achille Bonito Oliva, ed. *Contemporanea* (Florence: Centro Di Edizioni 1973). Luigi Lonardelli, "Sotterranea, *Contemporanea*", in Lancioni, ed, *Anni 70. Arte a Roma*, 94-105.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

which and all around which it operates [...] I mean in Rome... at a time, when there wasn't enough money and political determination to build new schools and housing.¹⁴¹

Along with Paradiso, Baruchello criticised the lack of commitment of Christo's project to the socio-political context of Rome at the time. Without engaging with the reasons and degrees of complexity behind the work, it was dismissed for its association with North American culture, which was associated by left-wing intellectuals with capitalism, imperialism and consumerism.



5.48. Christo, *The Wall - Wrapped Roman Wall*, 1973-1974

However, despite his superficial rejection without appeal, Baruchello's comments pointed at social problems, which were actual negative effects of a wider political phenomenon, connected with the urban environment and the dynamics of its unprecedented expansion after the end of the war: the *speculazione edilizia*, and several consequences of it.¹⁴² In Rome, more than any other Italian metropolis but equally to Milan, the *speculazione edilizia* resulted in a series of 'urban pathologies': the dramatic lack of social housing, public green spaces, public transport, and services (among which were schools and recreational centres for young people).

Speculazione edilizia was not exclusive to Italy. On the contrary, it had (and still has) an important role as a source of income in postwar Europe.¹⁴³ In postwar Italy in particular,

¹⁴¹ Baruchello and Martin, *How to Imagine*, 27.

¹⁴² For a history of the *speculazione edilizia* in Italia, see: Paolo Bendini, *Breve storia dell'abuso edilizio in Italia. Dal ventennio fascista al prossimo futuro* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010).

¹⁴³ Giuseppe Campos Venuti, "Tre generazioni urbanistiche", in Giuseppe Campos Venuti and Federico Oliva, ed. *Cinquant'anni di urbanistica in Italia 1942-1992* (Bari: Laterza, 1993), 22-27.

it played an overwhelming role within the national economy. As the Urban theorist Giuseppe Campos Venuti has noted, while authorities in other European countries balanced investors' interests with services and social housing for less wealthy social groups, in Italy the interests of private companies and landowners (especially urban ones) became one of the driving forces in policy making during and after the postwar reconstruction period. Thus, the *speculazione edilizia* was a socio-political and ideological issue that was manifested in the shape of the city, more than a financial one. As such and from a perspective that looks at the actual organisation of the city, territorial planning is a complex phenomenon, in which the institutional planning plays a relatively small part, and *non-governo* (literally meaning non-government, or lack of political policy-making) becomes a form of government in itself.¹⁴⁴

The story of Rome's *Piano Regolatore Generale* (essentially the urban plan elaborated on the basis of National and Regional laws) epitomises the grey area of *non-governo* in the territorial planning of the city, which can be synthesized in a disheartening succession of institutional delays, revisions and adaptations to the existing circumstances and to the contemporary exponential expansion of population, density and urbanised areas.¹⁴⁵ Not only did the city expand in an unregulated way, but there had been scandals involving urban investments since the early 1950s at least. In fact, this was one of the main reasons why the city often appeared in the headlines of national newspapers.¹⁴⁶

Rome had seen a series of urban plans since the unification of the country. Until 1870, the city had preserved a configuration similar to its Medieval one.¹⁴⁷ But since the subtraction of the city from the property of the Vatican, and up until the 1970s, Rome had no less than three different urban plans and innumerable minor and case-specific alterations. Following the first plan signed by Giolitti, Nathan, Sanjust in 1909, the second plan, conceived in the Fascist period and approved in 1931, is considered the most influential on the current image of the city, and cause of the so called urban massacre between 1945 and 1960.¹⁴⁸ Another plan was thought necessary after the end of the war and, with the institution of the Italian Republic, it was approved in 1962, and 1967. From analytical studies of the maps of the actual expansion of the city, the architect Leonardo Benevolo, however, noticed that, in Rome, the PRG had played more of a role in rehabilitating and homogenising the irregularities and incongruences that had occurred

¹⁴⁴ Luciano Vettoreto, "Pianificazione/Non pianificazione", in Ferlenga and Biraghi, *Comunità Italia*, 121.

¹⁴⁵ For a definition of PRG, see: Barocchi, *Dizionario di urbanistica*, 146.

¹⁴⁶ See Insolera, *Roma moderna*, 215

¹⁴⁷ Leonardo Benevolo considers this as the ideal condition of the town, thus denouncing the successive development of the modern city. Benevolo, *Roma dal 1970 al 1990* (Bari: Laterza, 1992), 121.

¹⁴⁸ For a synthetic history of the Roman PGR see: Filippo Ciccone, "Roma capitale senza piano", in Campos Venuti, *Cinquantanni di urbanistica in Italia*, 241-258.

between different versions of the plan itself.¹⁴⁹ In other words, 'L'abusivismo non è uno dei fenomeni di Roma: è il modo stesso di essere della città,' as wrote Italo Insolera in his study about the urban history of modern Rome, in which he explained the average functioning of the capital within the institutional void of regulation.¹⁵⁰

The process of unauthorised urbanisation generally occurred in different phases, as Insolera illustrates. In the first phase, *lottizzatore abusivo*, the owner of a property levels the land and builds a road to connect to the local road network without permission from the authorities in charge. In the second phase, the owner obtain access to the national energy and water network, which did not ask for any official authorization to proceed. At this point, the land is divided in small lots and sold, usually to wealthy buyers. The new landowners commission (again, disinterested in the legal condition of the house) a small villa, a two floor *palazzina*, or a housing complex to a construction company, which eventually enters the real estate market.¹⁵¹

When Baruchello left Rome to move to the countryside in 1973, the *speculazione edilizia* was not at the centre of the political agenda as it had been in the 1960s.¹⁵² The living conditions in the peripheral areas of the city, the suburban *Borgate*, were the core of political concerns.¹⁵³ Baruchello himself dedicated a research project to these marginal areas of the city.¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the condition of the land that surrounded Baruchello's rural property and that he addressed with his work were a direct consequence of inefficient and corrupted political decision and mismanagement of territorial planning. It resulted in environmental issues, and in problems connected with the safety of the area from the possibilities of impromptu fires.

The area where Baruchello's villa is located was highly populated with illegal villas and popular housing complexes.¹⁵⁵ This area of Santa Cornelia was originally intended for agriculture. After the war, the area was divided into smaller allotments of 8000-9000mts. The urban plan in fact intended this land to be used for the construction of private upper-middle class villas. It was a profitable business for the original owner, who was then able to sell these allotments for private middle-class housing. Unfortunately, in the early 1970s, the

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁵⁰ Italo Insolera, *Roma moderna* (Turin: Einaudi editore, 2011), 289.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 285.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 296-311. Calvino, *La speculazione edilizia*, 1958; *Le mani sulla città* (Francesco Rosi, 1963).

¹⁵³ Giovanni Berlinguer and Piero Della Seta, *Borgate di Roma* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1960); Insolera, *Roma moderna*; Antonio Cederna, *Mirabilia Urbis: Cronache Romane 1957-1965* (Turin: Einaudi editore, 1965); Franco Ferrarotti, *Roma da capitale a periferia* (Bari: Laterza, 1979).

¹⁵⁴ Insolera, *Roma Moderna*, 303-311.

¹⁵⁵ Baruchello and Martin, *How to imagine*, 23-24. About the urban expansion in the Roman countryside, see: Franco Salvatori and Ernesto di Renzo, editors, *Roma e la sua campagna. Itinerari del '900* (Roma: Società geografica onlus, 2007), especially chapters 16, 17, and 18.

regulation changed again. The municipality decided to reclassify this area back to farming-type houses. This time, however, the new middle-class owners' hopes of owning a countryside villa in the near future were frustrated, but this change in the regulation resulted in an *impasse*. The size of each allotment was too small for supporting a functioning farm, and no farmer would have bought it. And the current owners were uninterested in cultivating it themselves.



5.49. Gianfranco Baruchello, *Agricola Cornelia*, 1973

In this circumstances, Baruchello commented: '[this is a] perfectly typical example of the way the Roman countryside has been devastated and destroyed, and wrenched away from its natural agricultural destiny.' His reaction was to operate within a Marxist framework in the strategy he adopted.¹⁵⁶ Not only occupying the land, but, as he wrote, 'farming **this** land was supposed to be a way in which it was finally possible to see the full political potential of a work of art.'¹⁵⁷ Baruchello occupied the land surrounding his garden, thus taking action on the property of middle classes, whose only purpose was the use of the villa for their leisure time, and that – once the land use destination was returned back to agriculture – they did not want to do anything with it. At the same time, his action had a political and ecological relevance [5.49]. Putting back into production an area wasted for the

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

entertainment of the middle class was sufficient to become a way of counteracting the spread of a consumeristic lifestyle in the countryside.

Baruchello was not the only artist who was using farming as non-traditional art practice at the time.¹⁵⁸ More articulated farming projects were carried out by Joseph Beuys in Italy, and by Bonnie Ora Sherk in the USA. During the same period in which Baruchello was running his project in the Roman countryside, the German artist was practising agriculture in Bolognano, a remote village in the Abruzzi region of Italy, as part of his wider project *La difesa della natura* [5.50; 5.51]¹⁵⁹ Facing the 1973-1974 oil crisis, Beuys, founder of the Green Party in Germany in 1979, thought the survival of man and the planet in an ecological perspective, and proposed joint social and environmental reforms.¹⁶⁰ From this perspective, agriculture was an activity to rethink and adjust our relationship with the environment for a more balanced, and healthier, existence. In Bolognano, Beuys had found an ideal location where he could experiment with alternative agricultural techniques inspired by Rudolf Steiner since 1976, and to theorise agriculture as a key activity for rethinking our individual and collective relationship with nature, outside the system of capitalist power.¹⁶¹ In a similar way to his *Office for Direct Democracy*, the artist founded the *Fondazione per la rinascita dell'agricoltura* with a speech in Pescara on February 12th 1978.¹⁶² Celebrating Italian agriculture exemplary for its relationship with the environment, Beuys's agricultural project was supposed to become the Italian declination of his *Free International University*, a globalist and utopian educational network started between Scotland and Germany in 1974.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸Other artist-farmers in: Hans Ulrich. Obrist, "L'artista come contadino", in Celant, editor *Arts & Food. Rituali dal 1851*, 690-698.

¹⁵⁹ Antonio D'Avossa, *Joseph Beuys. Difesa della natura* (Milan:Skira, 2001). For Beuys works in Italy, see: Germano Celant, ed., *Beuys: Tracce in Italia* (Napoli: Amelio, 1978).

¹⁶⁰About Beuys's eco art, see: Linda Weintraub, *To life! Eco art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2012), 64-68.

¹⁶¹ The whole experience in Bolognano is documented in: Lucrezia De Domizio Durini, *Beuys Voice* (Milan: Electa, 2011).

¹⁶² About other of Beuys institutions, see: Claudia Mesh, *Institutionalizing Social Sculpture. Beuys' Office for Direct Democracy through Referendum Installation (1972)*, in *Joseph Beuys. The reader*, eds. Claudia Mesch, and Viola Michely (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2007), 198-217.

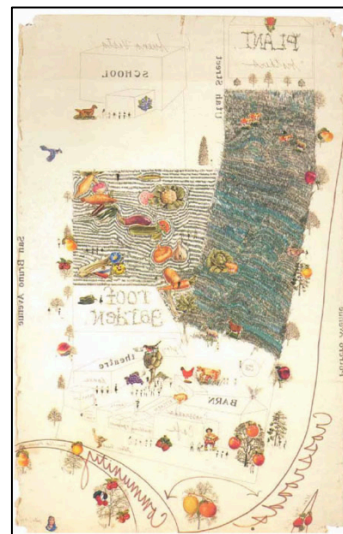
¹⁶³ About Beuys Utopianism, see: Jonathan Harris. *The Utopian Globalists: Artists of Worldwide Revolution, 1919-2009* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p.36.



5.50. Joseph Beuys, *Fondazione per la rinascita dell'agricoltura*, (Pescara, 12th February 1978)



5.51. Joseph Beuys, *Difesa della natura*, Manifesto (Bolognano, 13th May 1984).



5.52 – 5.53. Bonnie Ora Sherk, *The Farm* (San Francisco), 1974-1980 (Documentary image and drawn map)

Meanwhile, between 1974 and 1980, Bonnie Ora Sherk ran *The Farm* in San Francisco. Sherk's *The Farm* was a seven-acre space located under the highway 101 overpass [5.52; 5.53].¹⁶⁴ There, different communities (local and artistic) could gather, and learn about animals and plants. In this project, Sherk translated her ecological vision into an ecosystem in which alternative forms of nature-human relationship could be performed, experienced, and lived within a wasteland space in the urban environment. Although very different, both Beuys and Sherk expressed their environmentalist awareness using farming as a key activity to experience the relationship with nature, with the aim of proposing alternative ways of living together with it. But unlike Sherk and Beuys, in the first phases of his *Agricola Cornelia*, the project had no social dimension and agriculture had little connection with reflections on a relationship with nature. These only were to emerge in later phases of his project.



5.54. Unknown, *Occupation of the Triennale, Milan, 1968*



5.55. Unknown, *House Occupation, Rome 1970*



5.56. Loconsolo Silvestre, *Occupation of Magnetofoni Castelli Factory, 28.04.1968*



5.57 Renato Guttuso, *Occupazione delle terre incolte in Sicilia, 1949-1950*

¹⁶⁴ Bonnie Sherk, *Position paper: Crossroads Community (The Farm)* [1977], in *Art and Social Change: a critical reader*, eds. Will Bradley and Charles Esche, (London: Tate Publishing: In association with Afterall, 2007), 227-229; Johana Blankenship, "The Farm by the Freeway", in *West of Centre. Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977*, eds. Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner (London-Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 43-56.

Baruchello's performances of land occupation and cultivation had the primary concern of critiquing the art system and of political militancy within a Marxist framework of social struggle [5.54; 5.55; 5.56; 5.57]. Even though he carried this out alone and without any public announcement, Baruchello followed the operative modes of activism. The occupation of the land in the early stages of the *Agricola Cornelia* project resonates with the students' and workers' occupations. This form of activism had been taking place in Italian urban and industrial centres since the 1960s, but it escalated during 1968 and the 'Hot Autumn' of protests in 1969 in Rome.¹⁶⁵ At the same time, Baruchello's land occupation echoed the peasant's land occupations that took place in Calabria and Sicily at the end of the 1940s, that were motivated by Marxist revolutionary agendas, often outside the policies of the official Communist Party, and more recently in 1968 and 1969.¹⁶⁶

Even when he moved away from the city to the countryside, Baruchello was still involved with the politics of Rome. He himself was in fact involved in the socio-political unrest that characterised the country at the time, as were several other intellectuals of his generation. He had been a regular member of the Italian Communist Party since before the Second World War. In the late 1960s and until his move to the countryside, he instead sympathized with the extra-parliamentary group *Potere Operaio*, an extra-parliamentary left-wing group started in 1969 whose objectives were the workers' leadership in the civil struggle (and not the student's or proletarians') and the fight against the labour.¹⁶⁷ He was also a close friend with Gian Giacomo Feltrinelli, his editor and founder member of *Gruppo d'Azione Partigiana*, and provided him with support.¹⁶⁸ Like other artists at the time, Baruchello supported the extra-parliamentary groups's activities in different ways. He produced newsletters and manifestos. He subsidized political activities by selling a number of his works. He also produced a series of video documentaries and reports to investigate the *borgate* and the suburbs of Rome and Milan.¹⁶⁹ By adopting strategies of land occupations, Baruchello legitimised his operation as a political action against the bourgeois system, and its territorial articulation.

Baruchello's interventions in the Roman countryside prove that the *speculazione edilizia* did not only affect the urban area of Rome, but also rural ones. His response to the socio-political circumstances of the land involuntarily bring to light the potential ecological

¹⁶⁵ For occupations of factory, university and housing complexes in Rome, see: Insolera, *Roma moderna*, especially chapter 25.

¹⁶⁶ Pucci, "Terra Italia", 315-334. About 1968-1969 protests see: Alfonso Pascale, "Il '68 delle campagne", in Esposito, *Democrazia e contadini*, vol. 2, 462-463.

¹⁶⁷ Balestrini and Moroni, *L'orda d'oro 1968-1977*, 369-374.

¹⁶⁸ I would like to thank the artist for clarifying this point during our conversation on 22nd April 2015.

¹⁶⁹ Carla Subrizi mentions the report on the peripheries in *Baruchello. Certe idee*, 70. Baruchello himself recalls the works he produced over time, but now they are unfortunately lost.

damage caused by middle-class holiday houses in the countryside and by an administrative system that does not prevent it from happening. With this first 'pseudo-political happenings', he expressed his political engagement against these circumstances, the art and social system, from within a Marxist framework. The literality of the project, so unusual in the production of the artist, made this early event an exception in all of *Agricola Cornelia*, but at the same time the premise for the political, circumstantial, relevance of the overall operation. More generally, farming became Baruchello's way to ground his universal questions in matters of the land in the moment of socio-political unrest and ideological crisis that accompanied the topographical and economic changes of the country.

CONCLUSION



6.1. Physical map of Italy

On July 5th 1968, sixty-thousand farmers and peasants from all over Italy gathered in the streets of Rome, and were welcomed by the new urban dwellers, and by architecture students who had occupied Valle Giulia earlier in March.¹ Coordinated by the Alleanza dei contadini, this lively but peaceful parade of people, tractors and livestock manifested their discontent about the Government's lack of a consistent commitment to rural areas, following the Riforma Agraria in 1950. Their march inaugurated seasons of protests that took place across the country between 1968 and 1969.² For the purposes of this account, the parade, and its temporary presence in the capital, can be taken as an emblem of the presence of the artistic projects that have been discussed in the thesis, which brought to urban art galleries and cultural institutions works exploring Italy's distinct rural areas.

As this dissertation shows, each artist expressed different levels of criticism towards their contemporary circumstances. The work of Paradiso, Superstudio, and Baruchello adopted a more explicit political stance, and addressed matters of overt political relevance. In contrast, Penone's installations in the Piedmontese Val Tanaro manifested little engagement with politics. Nonetheless, this body of works exhibits a rising awareness of the socio-cultural, economic and political awareness of Italian rural life, and its transformations, in the postwar artistic scene.

Following the economic miracle and during the socio-political unrest that swept the country from the early 1960s onwards, all of these artists engaged with the land, and with natural and cultural elements of the countryside, each experimenting with new artistic languages. This dissertation has uncovered that this heterogeneous body of works has indeed emerged from the artists' long-distance dialogue with international conceptual and land art movements. Baruchello, Costa and Paradiso's references to Marcel Duchamp's work was also very influential, but interest in American land art in particular cannot be underestimated, as other research has previously demonstrated.³ However, what this dissertation has also uncovered is the way in which contemporary circumstances and Marxist models of interpretation informed these works.

As in Calvino's and Pasolini's work, these artworks suggest that the city and its cultural and material landscapes were widely perceived to be the embodiment of an expanding capitalist cultural paradigm. Paradiso, Superstudio, La Pietra, Costa, and also Pascali, were adamant about this. As such, the urban environment and its physical manifestation were perceived as 'alienating' in Lefebvre's terms. Thus, the city was far from

¹ Pascale, "Il '68 delle campagne", 462-463.

² Previous episode in Verona. Other episodes took place in Taccone di Irsina near Matera, Asti in Piedmont, Avola in Sicily, Battipaglia near Salerno, Orgosolo and Olbia in Sardinia. Ibid., 465-473

³ See Anna Detheridge's *Scultori della speranza*, which has been repeatedly mentioned in this work.

being 'the social and physical space where human creativity finds its maximum potential for expression', as Lewis Mumford had once influentially argued. Indeed, the belief still lingered in aspects of Calvino's writings.⁴ But for many of the artists in this thesis, the city annihilated individual and collective creativity, action, and self-determination. At the same time, Baruchello epitomised the urban as a realm of political mismanagement, urbanists' lack of a socially-engaged agenda (La Pietra, Superstudio), industrial standardisation (Pascali, Gilardi, Costa, Superstudio), and real estate speculation (Baruchello, La Piera, Paradiso).

As with Calvino and Pasolini, they considered the countryside doomed. Nonetheless, these same projects manifested the persistency of its vitality as a cultural model. But 'what' countryside were they talking about? Despite the contemporary hybridisation of the city and the countryside, they individuated the countryside in the places where pre-industrial modes of production were still in place, and where a more direct interaction with nature and the land was possible. This idea that humans can modify a topography in a sustainable and mutually-beneficial fashion was so engrained that agriculture and the ability to build and mould the environment were conceived as essential features of rurality. As such, it could be completely detached from a locality, as in La Pietra's case.

Overall, these artists found the possibility of individual and collective creativity in the cultures of rural inhabitants. For Lai and Penone, their personal rural heritage was a reservoir of, respectively, a poetic relationship with the experience of the land, and of natural energies. Paradiso's association of the shaping of the land with sculptural practice responded to a similar logic. In the case of Superstudio and La Pietra's Lefebvrian perspective, creativity was an expression of self-determination, but also of an ability to create their own living environment. For Costa, it was the expression of an essential, full existence. For these artists, the land enshrined a creative potential that emerged over different timeframes. In Lai, the rural community stood for the time of collective memory, which extended over a few generations. In Penone, it was the time of a tree's growth. Meanwhile, the temporal dimension of Paradiso's works expanded to a geological temporal scale. Thus, the artists' choice to engage with pre-industrial forms and areas of the rural had different aesthetic and ideological components. Nonetheless, artists often grasped the socio-cultural elements of the areas where the work had been developed, with the exception of Pascali and Gilardi, whose works challenged and engaged with representations of the rural idyll.

In this respect, anthropology and folklore played a fundamental role. It expanded the domain of fine art, as well as imbuing the works with political relevance. It also anticipated

⁴ Modena, *Architecture of Lightness*, 60-61; 200.

more recent artistic practices that blur the boundaries between art and anthropology.⁵ The artists that have been investigated in this dissertation adopted ethnographic strategies of representation with different degrees of scepticism towards the epistemological grasp of the discipline, as in the case of Paradiso, Costa, La Pietra, and Superstudio. Baruchello instead described his *Agricola Cornelia* as a sort of artistic fieldwork in its own right, whilst Lai's work relied more on folkloric content than on ethnographic strategies of representation.

Understanding the influence played by Gramsci in this field of studies, and that 'talking about Gramsci was never a scholarly exercise in Italy', sheds a political light on a number of works discussed in this thesis.⁶ For artists such as Paradiso, Costa, Superstudio, La Pietra and Baruchello, the countryside, whether the northern or southern extremities of the country, was never a neutral space, but one that represented a form of passive cultural resistance to the urban, capitalist and consumerist, model.

From a wider perspective, this thesis has emphasised the importance of integrating an understanding of the contemporary manifestation of the countryside in order to enrich the dominant readings of the art history of this period. Pascali's floor pieces, Costa's assemblages, Paradiso's conceptual works, and Superstudio's research acquire a different interpretation in the context of the uneven economic development of postwar Italy. Furthermore, moving beyond established art-historical categorisations helps bring back to light a number of artists whose work has long been forgotten, as with Paradiso and Costa, or who have only recently received attention for the quality of their work, such as Maria Lai.

Most significantly of all, however, this dissertation has brought together a body of works that contribute to rewriting the traditional art-historical map of Italy, and to expanding the urban narrative of the long decade of the 1970s. Turin, Rome and Milan are not the only locations that feature in this account. In addition, the discussion has widened, to include Garessio and the Alpi Marittime woods, Matera and the Murgia Materana, Ulassai and its Tacchi, Monteghirfo and the Ligurian Appenine, Riparbella and the Tuscan hills. These are a few of the non-urban areas discussed in this thesis. No doubt, many others still need to be uncovered. Hopefully, Kublai Kahn will keep waiting for further research.

⁵ See: Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright, eds., *Between Art and Anthropology: Contemporary Ethnographic Practice* (Oxford; New York: Berg publishers, 2010); Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright, eds. *Anthropology and Art Practice* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, c2013).

⁶ Capuzzo and Mezzdra, "Provincialising Gramsci", 34.

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APPENDIX

TRANSLATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Page 1

Tu mi rimproveri perchè ogni mio racconto ti trasporta nel bel mezzo di una città senza dirti dello spazio che si estende tra una città e l'altra: se lo coprano mari, campi di segale, foreste di larici.

[Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili* (Milan: Mondadori, 2008), 156.]

You reproach me because each of my stories takes you right into the heart of a city without telling you of the space that stretches between one city and the other, whether it is covered by seas, or fields of rye, larch forests, swamps.

[Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1997), 137.]

Page 9

Si può affermare con certezza che gran parte dell'attuale paesaggio urbano italiano, quello che oggi viviamo con maggior frequenza, si sia consolidato in quel periodo.

[Giovanni Crocioni, *Il rapporto città-campagna nel dopoguerra. Trasformazioni territoriali e ciclo economico fra il 1945 e il 1975* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1978), 30.]

We can certainly state that a large portion of the current Italian urban landscape, the one that we dwell more frequently today, was shaped at that time.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 19

Con aspirazione al linguaggio urbanistico e al linguaggio della città, perchè ogni operazione che viene fatta, e nella musica, e nella poesia, e nelle letterature, e nell'arte figurativa concorre alla possibilità di costruire l'urbano possibile.

[Nicola Carrino's video statement in the exhibition *Pasolini a Matera. Il Vangelo secondo Matteo cinquant'anni dopo. Nuove tecniche di immagine: arte, cinema, fotografia* (Matera, Museo nazionale d'arte medievale e moderna di Palazzo Lanfranchi) curated by Marta Ragozzino, Giuseppe Appella, and Ermanno Taviani, recorded by the author on January 28th, 2015.]

[we] aspire to the language of urban planning and to the language of the city, because every contemporary operation in the fields of music, poetry, literature, and figurative arts participated in the potential creation of the possible urban environment.

[Translated by the author.]

CHAPTER 1

Page 29

Compatiscimi [...] Tocca alle volte a me e alle capre di attraversare città, ma non sappiamo distinguerle.

[Italo Calvino, *Le Città Invisibili* (Milan: Mondadori, 2008), 152.]

Bear with me. [...] Sometimes my goats and I have to pass through cities; but we are unable to distinguish them.

[Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1997), 137.]

I luoghi si sono mescolati [...] Cecilia è dappertutto.
[Italo Calvino, *Le Città Invisibili* (Milan: Mondadori, 2008), 153.]

The places have mingled. Cecilia is everywhere.
[Italo Calvino, *Invisible cities*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1997), 138.]

Pages 29-30

La critica della ‘civiltà industriale’ si accompagna ad un altrettanto decisa critica a ogni sogno di un “paradiso perduto”. L’idillio industriale è preso di mira allo stesso tempo dell’idillio campestre: non solo non è possibile un ritorno all’indietro nella storia, ma anche quell’ “indietro” non è mai esistito, è un’illusione.
[Italo Calvino, “Introduzione”, in Calvino, *Marcovaldo*, III-XII.]

The critique of the ‘industrial civilisation’ is accompanied by a determined critique of any dreams of a ‘lost paradise’. The industrial ideal it is targeted as it the bucolic one: going back in time is not only impossible, but also that ‘back in time’ has never existed, it is an illusion.
[Translation of the author.]

Page 32

Le tire, à travers le notre jungle technologique, vers un monde meilleur.
[Micheal Sonnabend, *Gilardi* (Paris: Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, 1967), np.]

[His artistic inspiration] drags the artist, through the technological jungle, to a better world.
[Translated by the author.]

Page 43

[Il laminato plastico è] Capace di riportare il calore e il colore della natura dove l’uomo vive, lavora, e viaggia.
[*Domus* 449 (April, 1967).]

[plastic laminate] brings nature’s warm and colour where ‘man’ lives, works and travels.
[Translated by the author.]

Alle cose naturali ci adattiamo; il laminato plastico è adatto a noi. Gli oggetti naturali hanno una superficie; il laminato plastico è una superficie
[*Domus* 449 (April, 1967), np.]

We adapt to natural things; plastic laminate is suitable for us. Natural objects have a surface; plastic laminate is a surface.
[Translated by the author.]

Page 52

A me piaciono le bestie perchè mi sembrano degli intrusi, una cosa che non appartiene alla nostra razza, una cosa che si muove, delle volte in campagna, delle volte in città [...] Un animale, per me, è un cosa stranissima. È già un fenomeno veder passare delle pecore vicino a delle case oppure vicino a un uomo, c’è già uno scarto che non fa parte di quello che è organizzato.
[Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, 15.]

I love animals because they seem like intruders, something that doesn’t belong to our race, something that moves, sometimes in the country, sometimes in the city [...] An animal is a very strange thing to me. It’s already a phenomenon to see sheep passing close

to people's houses or close to a person; something already clicks that's not part of organised life, there is already something else coming forward.

[Carla Lonzi, "I pretend to make sculptures. Interview with Pino Pascali", in *Arte Povera* from the Goetz Collection. Translated by Stephen Sartarelli (München : Sammlung Goetz, c2001), 146]

Page 61

Per noi scrittori e pittori di *Revort 1*, la Pop-Art è quindi un fenomeno tipico e niente altro, come per noi lo sono I luoghi comuni del sesso, della cultura di massa, e della nostra stessa storia dell'arte. La nostra scultura e pittura, a differenza di altri giovani italiani, è critica oggettiva, al di fuori di problemi estetizzanti ed analizza quei fenomeni della nostra società con la presentazione oggettiva dell'immagine.

[Unpublished document. Rome, GNAM, historical archive.]

In our views as writers and painters participating in *Revort 1*, Pop Art is a typical phenomenon, nothing more, in the same way sexuality, mass culture, and the history of art are commonplaces. Our sculptures and paintings, unlike those of other young Italians, are objective critique, beyond aesthetical issues, and they analyse those phenomena of our society through the presentation of an objective image.

[Translated by the author.]

In una civiltà di consumo, le immagini assurgono (falsamente) a simboli e creano un fenomeno tipico che definisco RETORICA DELL'IMMAGINE.

[Unpublished document. Rome, GNAM, historical archive]

In a civilisation of consumption, images acquire the (false) role of symbols and create a typical phenomenon that I define RHETORIC OF THE IMAGE.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 62

L'uomo che viene in Galleria viene perchè si vanno a vedere le cose in Galleria, perchè vuole mettere una cosa su una sedia o un divano, oppure vuole sembrare stravagante qualche volta o un'altra volta vuole sembrare serio e tradizionale, ma niente altro. Però, se uno mi dice "che cosa meravigliosa, questo quadro mi fa pensare a..." a me quello interessa. [...] E' come quanto uno legge una cosa che non l'interessa e pensa ai propri fatti, oppur quando sente una cosa talmente interessante che scorda la cosa interessante perchè in quella cosa c'era un piccolo punto che ha fatto scattare duemila raggi in diverse direzioni nel proprio pensiero.. uno segue tutti questi raggi e si disperde alle fine, magari, no?"

[Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto* [1969], 113.]

The man who visits a Gallery is there because the Gallery is a place where to go and see things; because he wishes to put something on a chair or a sofa; or because he sometimes wishes to appear extravagant, or, other times, [he wishes to appear] serious and traditional, but nothing else. However, if someone tells me: "What a wonderful thing, this painting makes me think about..." well, that interests me. [...] It is like [the difference between] reading something you are not interested in and thus minding your own business; or when you feel that something is so interesting that you forget all about the interesting thing itself because there was something in that same thing that, at some point, had triggered two-thousand rays in different directions within your mind... one follows these rays and may get lost in the end, no?

[Translated by the author.]

Page 64

Ho l'orrore della tecnica come ricerca... L'industria? Certo molto importante io sono molto attento a tutto ciò che vedo per utilizzarlo. Tutto si può utilizzare, trasformare."

[Carla Lonzi, Tommaso Trini, and Marisa Volpi Orlandini, "Materiali e Tecniche", in *Marcatré*, May 1967, p. 73]

I am horrified by "technique" as research... The industry? Obviously, it is very important. I am very careful with everything I see to use it. Everything can be used, transformed."

[Translated by the author.]

CHAPTER 2**Page 69**

Quando dico di aver scelto come oggetto di questa trasmissione la forma della città, il profilo della città, la struttura della città, voglio proprio dire questo: voglio difendere qualcosa che non è sanzionato, che non è codificato, che nessuno difende. Che è opera del popolo, dell'intera storia del popolo di una città, di un'infinità di uomini senza nome, che però hanno lavorato all'interno di un'epoca, che ha prodotto i frutti più estremi, più assoluti nelle opere d'arte d'autore

[Pier Paolo Pasolini, *La forma della città* (10'12),

[http://www.teche.rai.it/2015/01/pasolini-e-la-forma-della-citta-1974/.](http://www.teche.rai.it/2015/01/pasolini-e-la-forma-della-citta-1974/)]

When I say that I have chosen the form of the city, the skyline of the city, as the subject of this TV show, this is what I mean: I want to defend something which is not sanctioned, not codified, and that nobody defends. This something is the work of the people, of the whole history of the people of a city, of an infinity of man with no name, who have been working during a certain era. This period produced signature works of art as its highest and most absolute fruits.

[Translated by the author.]

Il problema della forma della città e il problema della salvezza della natura che circonda la città sono un problema unico.

[Pasolini, *La forma della città*.]

The issues of the form of the city and the issues of the salvation of the nature that surrounds the city are one single problem.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 73

Il mio nonno paterno, per esempio, faceva degli splendidi lavori di arte. Eccone alcuni: strada scavata nella roccia per 500 metri, seguendo il percorso del rio del Manico per congiungere un bosco a una strada comunale; rimozione e interrimento di grandi massi per adibire un terreno a prato; innesti di circa 1500 alberi; deviazione del Rio del Manico per ottenere un'area coltivabile; mietitura annual di circa 16000 metri quadrati di terreno; mungitura a mano di una media di circa 18 mucche al giorno; taglio dei boschi eseguito nel periodo invernale; trasporto del legname come carrettiere; costruzione di una casa colonica di circa quindici camera; concimazione di alberi.

[Mirella Bandini, *1972. Arte Povera a Torino* (Turin: Allemandi & C, 2002), 66.]

My grandfather, for instance, used to make wonderful works of art. Here are some: he dug a road in the rocks for 500 meters following the riverbed of the Rio del Manico to connect a wood with a municipal road; removal and burial of boulders to use a piece of land as a meadow; grafting 1500 trees; rerouting the Rio del Manico to obtain a cultivable area;

harvesting 16,000 square meters of land every year; milking an average of 18 cows a day; pruning woods in the winter; wood carting; construction of a 15-room cottage; fertilisation of trees.

[Translated by the author]

Page 75

[Nel lavoro di Penone] non si distingue tra un atteggiamento estetico e retaggio contadino. Tra pensiero riflessivo, speculativo e i mezzi e le tecniche della messa in opera. [Jean-Christophe Bailly, "Il tempo visibile", in Ida Giannelli, ed. *Il giardino delle sculture fluide* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2007), 61.]

[In Penone's work], it not possible to distinguish between an aesthetic attitude and a peasant heritage, between reflective and speculative thinking and production techniques.

[Translated by the author.]

Page

Arte in processo, dove la scultura è insieme azione, situazione, evento.

[Tommaso Trini, "Anselmo, Penone, Zorio e le nuove fonti di energia nel deserto dell'arte", *Data* (Summer 1973): 62.]

Art in process, where sculpture is at the same time action, situation, event.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 79-80

Ogni anno penetrano circa 160-170 ore di lavoro in questa terra. In 88 anni sono penetrate circa 14,520 ore di lavoro. Questa terra ha accumulato una forza animale incredibilmente alta e con altre 11160 ore di lavoro della stessa natura acquisterà senza dubbio la capacità di capire e di agire umanamente.

[Germano Celant, *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art*, np.]

160, 170 hours of work go into this land every year. In 88 years about 14,520 hours of work have been put in it. Is the accumulation of brute force such that this land, with 11,160 more hours of work of the same nature, might resemble and express what is human?

[Gianfranco Maraniello, and Jonathan Watkins, eds., *Giuseppe Penone: Writings 1968-2008* (Bologna: MAMBo-Museo dell'Arte Moderna di Bologna; Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 2008), 90.]

Page 85

Per realizzare la scultura è necessario che lo scultore si adagi, si sdrai per terra lasciandosi scivolare, senza scendere in fretta, dolcemente, a poco a poco e finalmente, raggiunta l'orizzontalità, concentri l'attenzione e gli sforzi al suo corpo che premuto contro il terreno gli permette di vedere e sentire contro di sé le cose della terra; può poi allargare le braccia per potersi godere interamente la frescura del terreno e raggiungere il grado di quiete necessaria al compimento della scultura [...] Lo scultore penetra... e la linea dell'orizzonte si avvicina agli occhi. Quando si sente con la testa finalmente leggera, il freddo della terra lo taglia a metà e gli rende leggibile con chiarezza e precision il punto che stacca la parte del suo corpo che appartiene al vuoto del cielo e laparte che è del pieno della terra. È allora che avviene la scultura

[Gianfranco Maraniello, ed. *Giuseppe Penone: Scritti 1968-2008* (Bologna: MAMBo, 2009), 56.]

To make sculpture the sculptor must lie down, slipping to the ground slowly and smoothly, without falling. Finally, when he has achieved horizontality, he must

concentrate his attention and efforts on his body, which, pressed against the ground, allows him to see and feel with his form the forms of the earth. He can then spread his arms to take in the freshness of the ground and achieve the degree of calm necessary for the completion of the sculpture. [...] The sculptor sinks...and the horizon line comes closer to his eyes. When he feels his head finally light, the coldness of the ground cuts him in half and reveals, with clarity and precision, the point that separates the part of his body that belongs to the void of the sky from that which is in the solid of the earth. It is then that sculpture happens.

[Giuseppe Penone, "Six Statements for Maritime Alps (1968)", in *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972*, exhibition catalogue, Richard Flood and Francis Morris, eds. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center and London: Tate Modern, 2001), 298.]

Page 87-88

Yves Klein non mostra mai il processo dell'energia. Prende tuttavia il colore blu come energia, ma tratta sovente una cosa come contrappunto a un'altra.

[Giovanni Lista, *Arte Povera. Interviste curate e raccolte da Giovanni Lista* (Milan: Abscondita Srl, 2011), 110]

Yves Klein never showed an energetic process itself. However, he took the colour blue as energy, but he often treated a thing in contrast to another.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 89

Ho fatto un lavoro con il bosco, uno studio all'aperto,
un coltivo di opera, l'ho seminato di idee, pensieri,
lavori a venire, produce.

Sono piccole cose, sorprese, ricordi che lascio nel tronco
di un frassino, su un noce, un castagno, un ciliegio
come fosse un innesto, con la cura
e la delicata precisione di un innesto che aiuto a formarsi.

[Gianfranco Maraniello, ed. Giuseppe Penone: *Scritti 1968-2008* (Bologna: MAMBo, 2009), 113.]

I made a work with the forest, an outdoor studio, a tilled plot of works, I planted it with ideas, thoughts, works to come. They are small things, surprises, memories that I leave in the trunk of an ash tree, a walnut tree, a chestnut tree, a cherry tree as if they were graftings, with the care and delicate precision of a graft that I helped to develop.

[Maraniello and Watkins, eds. *Giuseppe Penone: Writings 1968-2008*, 113.]

Page 91

[Penone] Non ha dovuto svincolarsi da un certo tipo di cultura, perchè già ne possedeva un'altra; ha quindi trasportato i suoi pensieri sul linguaggio che era il più adatto. Questo incontro [con Penone] mi ha dato una grande carica; è stata veramente una conferma che da diverse origini si può giungere a questo punto.

[Bandini, *Arte Povera a Torino*, 109-111.]

[Penone] never had the need to break free from a certain type of culture, because he already owned another one; thus, he transported his thoughts in the language that he conceived more suitable. This encounter [with Penone] gave me a great energy; it confirmed that it is possible to get to this point from different origins.

[Translated by the author]

Page 95

Pastore lui stesso, da ragazzo, Paradiso, di Sant'Eramo (Bari), adopera una folva e scabra pietra pugliese che sa di sole e di grano e ne trae forme primordiali molto espressive: evocano i giganti del mito, la solitudine del sud, i sonni pomeridiani, i tesori nascosti, i rincotcchi barbarici per annunciare l'inizio dei sacrifici umani, i ripostigli segreti dei draghi, il canto delle cicale.

[Dino Buzzati, "Mostre – Antonio Paradiso", *Corriere della Sera*, 24th January 1968, 13.]

A shepherd himself when a boy, Paradiso, originally from Sant'Eramo (Bari) carves Apulia's tawny and rough stone, which feels like sunshine and wheat, to create very expressive primitive shapes: these forms evoke mythical Giants, the loneliness of the South, afternoon siestas, hidden treasures, barbaric bell tolls announcing the beginning of human sacrifices, secret shelter of dragons, and the sound of cicadas.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 98

Le maggiori organizzazioni democratiche e popolari del nostro paese riaffermano l'impegno meridionalista e l'appoggio qualificante alle nostre ragioni.

[Leonardo Sacco, *La questione Materana* (Matera: Edizione Basilicata, 1973), 6.]

The major democratic and popular organisations of our country reaffirm their commitments to the Meridione and their quality support to our regions.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 100

Quando Paradiso mi descrive la dimensione di rapporti, e la dimensione mentale – pienamente autosufficiente- degli abitanti dei Sassi di Matera [...], quando mi fa intravedere con un'ottica non facilmente acquisibile per un "cittadino" tale dimensione, nel suo atavico perpetuarsi perfetta in ogni rapporto, mi sembra d'intravedere anche un'area di contenuti filtrati nella poetica della scultura di Paradiso.

[Enrico Crispolti, *Antonio Paradiso* (Milan: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1969), np.]

When Paradiso describes the dimension of the relationships and the thoroughly self-sufficient mental dimension of the environments of the Sassi of Matera [...], when he makes it possible for me - and in terms of a vision not easily acquired by a city dweller- to take a glimpse of this dimension in all of its atavic perpetuation, perfect in every relationship, it seems to me that I can also see an area of contents that has filtered into Paradiso's sculpture.

[Enrico Crispolti, *Antonio Paradiso* (Milan: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1969), np.]

Page 107

Ho fatto questo lavoro sulla cultura dei contadini dei sassi di Matera, che è bloccata, monolitica, monocale come il loro abitacolo, la caverna e il loro pensiero sulla natura e sulla terra.

[Antonio Paradiso, *Atemporale* (Milan: Ed. Diagramma, 1974), np.]

I carried out this work on the culture of the peasants of the stones [sic] of Matera, a frozen, monolithic, one-level culture, just as their dwelling, the cave, as well as their thoughts about nature and the earth.

[Antonio Paradiso, *Atemporale* (Milan: Ed. Diagramma, 1974), np.]

Page 113

L'assenza del corpo, il suo essere e non essere sempre in riferimento a una realtà concreta e percepibile è qui annullato da questo essere tramite la macchina che, estremizzando l'estensione visiva, si allontana dall'oggetto guardato fino a trasformarlo da esistenza di vita ad esistenza di stampa.

[Anna Maria Cattaneo, "Antonio Paradiso: Corpo faber e Corpo Ludens e la loro dialettica con le mediazioni meccaniche: fotografia e cinema", *Data* (1974): 96-97.]

The absence of the body, its being and not being in relation to a concrete reality, is annihilated here by the camera which, bringing the visual extension to its extreme, sets a distance from the observed object to the point of transforming it from a living existence to a paper one.

[Translated by the author]

Page 115

Dobbiamo naturalmente contestare la legittimità di una concezione che collochi i contadini del Sud e il mondo ideologico fuori dalla storia e dalla civiltà moderna e la concezione di una storia interamente a sé, di un livello etnologico, cioè delle popolazioni contadine locali.

[Maria Minicuci, "Antropologi e Mezzogiorno", *Meridiana*, n. 47/48 (2003), 143.]

Naturally, we have to contest the legitimacy of a conception that positions the southern peasants and their ideological world "outside" of history and of the modern civilisation and the conception of a history of its own, of an ethnologic level, and thus of the local peasant populations.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 116

Troppe ciminiere, troppi guasti alle case [in quella terra che una volta era Galilea]. E le stesse persone non hanno più le facce che ci vogliono.

[Angelo Falvo, "Betlemme con ciminiere", *Corriere della Sera* (5th September 1964): 11.]

Too many chimney stacks, too many damages to the houses (in that land that used to be Galilea). And the same people do not have the faces that are needed [in the movie] anymore.

[Translated by the author]

Page 118

È rimasta invincibile col passaggio di tutte le civiltà nel tempo.

[Paradiso, *Atemporale*, np.]

This culture remained unconquered throughout the times and the civilizations.

[Paradiso, *Atemporale*, np.]

Dove tutto l'inutile non ha senso, dove tutto il sofismo non ha significato, dove tutto quello che si fa ha uno scopo funzionale ed etico, mai estetico.

[Paradiso, *Atemporale*, np.]

Where what is useless has no sense, where sophism has no meaning, where all that is done has a functional and ethic aim, never an aesthetic one.

[Paradiso, *Atemporale*, np.]

Questo gruppo etnico non ha niente a che fare con la città e l'uomo moderno.
[Paradiso, *Atemporale*, np.]

The behaviour of this ethnic group which has nothing in common with the city and the modern man.

[Paradiso, *Atemporale*, np.]

CHAPTER 3

Page 121

A Ersilia, per stabilire i rapporti che reggono la vita della città, gli abitanti tendono dei fili fra gli spigoli delle case, bianchi o neri o grigi o bianco-e-neri a seconda se segnano relazioni di parentela, scambio, autorità, rappresentanza. Quando i fili sono tanti che non ci si può passare in mezzo, gli abitanti vanno via: le case vengono smontate; restano soltanto i fili e i sostegni dei fili.

[Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, 76]

In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or gray or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.

[Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 68]

La letteratura come funzione esistenziale, la ricerca della leggerezza come reazione al peso del vivere.

[Italo Calvino, *Lezioni Americane* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), 33]

Literature as an existential function, the search for lightness as a reaction to the weight of living.

[Translated by the author]

Page 125

“Questa operazione non ha trovato i termini giusti per definirsi, anche se ha analogie con altri avvenimenti in campo estetico. Le Performance e le Operazioni sul Territorio degli anni Sessanta e Settanta avevano lavorato sull'effimero e coinvolto spazi inconsueti per l'arte, ma restavano sempre opere personali dell'autore.”

[Maria Lai, “Legarsi alla montagna. Ulassai 1981”, in *Ulassai: da Legarsi alla montagna alla Stazione dell'arte*, ed. Angela Grilletti Migliavacca (Cagliari: AD per Fondazione Stazione dell'arte, 2006), 23.]

This operation [*Legarsi alla Montagna*] has not found the right terms to define itself, even if there are analogies with other events in the aesthetic field. Performances and ‘operations in the territory’ from the 1960s and 1970s had already worked on the ephemeral and involving spaces unusual for the arts, but they were still personal artworks of their author.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 132

Le linee sono in rapporto tattile con la materia, quando si trasformano in filo.

[Fabrizio d'Amico and Gianni Murtas, *Maria Lai. Inventare altri spazi* (Cagliari: Art Duchamp, 1993), 84]

When lines become threads, they are in a tactile relationship with matter.
[Translated by the author.]

Page 135

Una poesia, fatta di parole, può essere un monumento, perchè non anche fatta con un nastro?

[Maria Lai, "Legarsi alla montagna. Ulassai 1981", in *Ulassai: da Legarsi alla montagna alla Stazione dell'arte*, ed. Angela Grilletti Migliavacca (Cagliari: AD per Fondazione Stazione dell'arte, 2006), 28]

If a poem made of words can be a monument, why cannot one made of ribbon?
[Translated by the author.]

Page 138

Quando riedificano Ersilia altrove tessono con i fili una figura simile che vorrebbero insieme più complicata e insieme più regolare dell'altra.

[Calvino, *Città invisibili*, 76.]

They rebuild Ersilia elsewhere. They wweave a similar pattern of strings which they would like to be more complex and the same time more regular than the other.

[Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 68.]

Page 141

Emittente di risposte autonome e autogestite nella riacquisizione e nel risarcimento di patrimoni culturali specifici.

[Enrico Crispolti, *Arti Visive e Partecipazione Sociale* (Bari: De Donato, 1977), 18]

Transmitter of autonomous and self-managed answers to re-acquire and compensate culturally specific heritages.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 145

Le tante leggende che ogni sasso di Ulassai sembra aver ispirato.

[Giuseppina Cuccu and Maria Lai, *Cose così semplici che nessuno capisce*, 29]

The many legends that every rock of Ulassai seems to have inspired.
[Translated by the author.]

Page 146

L'anima dei defunti, secondo un'antica credenza di Norbio, dopo aver vagato come l'odore di un'erba o un fiore, sceglie una tenera pianta e vi si rifugia.

[Giuseppe Dessì, *Paese d'ombra* (Verona: Mondadori, 1972), 38]

The soul of the deads, according to an ancient belief in Norbio, after wondering in the same way as the smell of a herb or of a flower, chooses a soft plant, and finds shelter in it.

[Translated by the author.]

A vederli dalla strada sembravano tutti uguali: ora invece si accorgeva che per la prima volta erano tutti diversi: avevano ognuno una fisionomia particolare, come le persone
[Dessì, *Paese d'ombra*, 62]

Looking at them from the street, they seemed all the same: now instead he was realising for the first time that they were all different: each of them had a peculiar physiognomy, as people. [Translated by the author.]

Page 147

I rapporti cordiali sono rari, la regola è tenere le distanze. [...]. Vengo trascinata [...] Di casa in casa a parlare, ma più che altro ad ascoltare: storie di malocchio e di furti, di drammi e rancori.

[Maria Lai, *Ulassai*, 29.]

Cordial relationships are rare, and the rule is to keep the distance. [...] I was dragged from house to house to talk, but above all to listen to stories of evil spells and robberies, tragedies and resentments.

[Translation by the author.]

Il nastro celeste mi rivela nuovi rapporti con la realtà dell'arte: bello ma insicuro, non sostiene ma guida, è illogico ma contiene verità, sembra irreale ma indica realtà più profonde [...] Anche le condizioni di Ulassai mi suggeriscono analogie con la realtà del mondo e coi problemi dell'esistenza

[Maria Lai, *Ulassai*, 26-27.]

The blue ribbon reveals new relationships with the reality of art: beautiful but uncertain, it [art] does not support but guides, it is illogical but encapsulates truth, it seems unreal but points at deeper realities [...] The circumstances of Ulassai suggest analogies with the reality of the world and with the issues of human existence.

[Translation by the author]

CHAPTER 4**Page 149**

Le tue fonti educative immediate sono mute, materiali, oggettuali, inerti, puramente presenti. Eppure ti parlano.

[Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Lettere Luterane* (Rome: Garzanti, 2012), 43]

Your most immediate educative sources are dumb, material, objective, inert, merely present. And yet they speak to you.

[Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*. Translated by Stuart Hood (New York: Carcanet Press, 1987), 26.]

Page 149-150

Quelle tazzine avevano in sé una misteriosa qualità, condivisa, del resto, dalla mobilia, dai tappeti, dai vestiti e dai cappellini delle signorine, dalle suppellettili dalle stesse carte da parati: questa misteriosa qualità non dava però dolore, non causava un violento senso di regresso (che poi la notte ho sognato) in epoche anteriori e atroci. Dava anzi gioia. La loro misteriosa qualità era quella dell'artigianato. Fino agli anni Cinquanta, fino ai primi anni Sessanta è stato così. Le cose erano ancora cose fatte o confezionate da mani umane: pazienti mani antiche di falegnami, di sarti, di tappezzieri, di maiolicari. Ed erano cose con una destinazione umana, cioè personale. Poi l'artigianato o il suo spirito è finito di colpo [...] La verità che dobbiamo dirci è questa: la nuova produzione delle cose – cioè il cambiamento delle cose dà a te un insegnamento originario e profondo che io non posso comprendere (anche perché non lo voglio). E ciò implica un'estraneità tra noi due che non è solo quell'ache per secoli e millenni ha diviso padri dai figli.

Pasolini, *Lettere Luterane*, 55-56

These cups had about them a mysterious quality which was shared incidentally by the furniture, the carpets, the ladies' clothes and hats, the furnishings and even the wallpaper. This mysterious quality did not however cause pain or a violent regression (which I dreamt of at night) to earlier and atrocious periods. Instead it caused joy. The mysterious

quality was that of their workmanship. Up to the fifties and into the first years of the sixties that is how it was. Things were still made or put together by human hands: patient old hands of carpenters, tailors, upholsterers, craftsmen who made majolica. And they were things with a human - that is to say, personal - destination. Then suddenly handicrafts and their spirit suddenly came to an end. [...] The truth we must tell ourselves is this: the new mode of production of things - that is to say, the change in things - gives you a basic and profound training which I cannot understand (also because I do not wish to do so). And that implies an estrangement between the two of us which is not merely that which for centuries and millennia has separated fathers and sons.

[Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 34-35]

Page 153-154

Mi ero avvicinato all'antropologia vera e propria attraverso la scienza antropologica, seguendo Lévi-Strauss e seguendo gli schemi imposti. Ora, allo stesso modo, ho pensato di liberarmi di questa scienza, e di risepellire tutto.

[Antonio Paradiso, "Autodocumentazione", in Paradiso, *Teatro Antropologico*, 26]

I became interested in true anthropology through the science of anthropology, following Lévi-Strauss, and the imposed schemes. Now, in the same way, I thought to get rid of this science, and bury everything.

[Translated by the author]

Antropologo diventa, Costa, non per sistemare l'esistente *ab origine*, ma per spingere lo schema delle razionalizzazioni fino al punto del collasso, che fa della griglia un labirinto, che fa dei segni accertati i punti di innesco di uno scorrimento mitico, i luoghi del magico, della sapienza prima, della perfetta artaudiana "densità interiore".

[Flaminio Gualdoni, *Claudio Costa nei materiali dell'uomo* (Genoa: Il Canneto editore, 2014), 11.]

Costa becomes an anthropologist himself, not to give an order to the existing reality *ab origine*, but to push the diagram of this rationalisation to the point of collapse, and to make a labyrinth out of the grid; to make of certain signs the triggers for a mythic shift, the places of magic, of the essential wisdom, of the perfect artaudian "interior" densisty'.

[Translated by the author]

Page 155

Questi oggetti fragili racchiudono in sé il dubbio nei confronti dell' "opera" finita e delle sue pretese. Sono elementary, provvisori, ordinary. Tracce, niente di più. Illustrano una certa vanità del proprio fare, ma appunto questa povertà chiede attenzione. Con poco si può ottenere molto, [...] in particolare perchè, a questo punto, tutte le relazioni tradizionali spariscono, siano esse di natura familiare, sociale, intellettuale."

[Gualdoni, *Claudio Costa*, 68-69]

These frail objects enshrine doubts about the accomplished artwork, and of its demands. They are elementary, temporary, ordinary. Traces, nothing more. They illustrate a kind of vanity, but it is their poverty that requires attention. [...] it is possible to achieve a lot with very little [...] In particular, because, at this point in time, all the traditional relationships disappear, being them of parental, social or intellectual nature.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 160

Non deve essere inteso come un semplice ritorno alle origini, o come regressione freudiana su un piano infantile, ma come un tentativo di prendere coscienza che esiste l'origine delle idee, come esiste l'origine dell'uomo. [Gualdoni, *Claudio Costa*, 15]

It shouldn't be conceived as a simple return to the origin, or as a Freudian regression to childhood, but as an attempt to be conscious that there is an origin of ideas as well as of 'man'.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 161

L'unica mappa possibile, imperfetta ma possibile, è pensare ed esperire il proprio essere corpo, scegliere la centralità del punto di vista del self.

[Gualdoni, *Costa*, 10]

The only possible map, a map which is imperfect but possible, is to think and to experience our 'being body'. It [the only possible map] is the choice of the point of view of one's self as the centre.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 167

Stillicidio di abbandoni, di emigrazione che svuota i villaggi e muta i paesaggi.

[*Work in Regress*. Exhibition catalogue (Genova: Edizioni Unimedia, 1979), 37.]

A dripping of abandonments, of emigrations, that empties villages and changes landscapes.

[Translated by the author.]

L'impronta antica del gesto di fabbricazione. Allora esso [l'oggetto] è capace di suggerire la passata movenza naturale per la quale è nato e della quale tutt'ora vive, assumendo intera la sua tattilità, evocando la fonte primaria di energia da cui è scaurito e per la quale agisce nella coscienza di chi lo può osservare.

[Galleria Apollinaire, ed., *Situazione antropologica*, np.]

The ancient trace of labour. Thus, it is capable of suggesting the natural past attitude for which it was born and by which it still lives today, as it assumes entirely its tactility, and evokes the primary source of energy from which it has originated and by which it acts within the observer's consciousness.

[Galleria Apollinaire, ed., *Situazione antropologica*, np.]

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È un corpo a corpo, è risalire fino all'origine del toccare.

[Gualdoni, *Costa*, 9.]

It is a meele, it is going back to the origin of touch.

[Translated by the author.]

La mano è divenuta morsa meccanica. L'estetica degli oggetti ha smarrito il senso del contatto, è diventata fluida ed esterna, limitando in un unico scivolare di linee la sua tenue perfezione aseptica, nel nome di un'ipotetica perfettibilità funzionale ed estetica.

[*Situazione antropologica*, np.]

The hand has become a mechanical clamp. The aesthetics of objects has lost the sense of contact; it has become more fluid and external, thus limiting in a single sliding of lines, its tenuous aseptic perfection, in the name of hypothetical functional-aesthetical perfectibility.

[*Situazione antropologica*, np.]

Il rapporto che l'Uomo ha con le cose nel mondo come quello con gli individui nella società si basa sempre più sull'alienazione esasperata dello spazio estensibile insito nella Cosa e nell'Individuo, che non sul riconoscimento dell'utilità mentale di questa possibile estensività.

[Gualdoni, *Claudio Costa*, 9.]

The relationship that 'Man' has with the things of the world as well as with other individuals in society is based on an exasperate alienation of the extensible space within the Thing and the Individual, and not on the acknowledgment of the mental utility of this possible extension.

[Translated by the author.]

L'unica traccia che ci porti dati essenziali di una situazione umana non alienante, rimane la narrazione che questi semplici oggetti manufatti dicono nella loro lingua muta, legata alla terra e alla natura, ma libera dalle imposizioni e dai falsi compiti di una civiltà che sta operando, con i suoi stessi mezzi, la sua completa obliterazione.

[Claudio Costa, "La pratica dell'oggetto antico", in *La creazione volgeva alla fine*, 33].

The only trace that brings essential data about a non-alienated human situation remains the narrative that this simple handmade objects tells in their own mute language, tied to the land and to nature, but free from the impositions and false tasks of a civilisation which is operating, through its own means, its complete obliteration.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 175

I due lavori in mostra potrebbero essere letti in contrapposizione: da una parte la crisi pessimistica sui meccanismi e sui destini dell'architettura, dall'altra un'analisi ottimistica per una rifondazione della progettazione costruzione ed uso attraverso la creatività collettiva. I due lavori non devono essere letti in contrapposizione o in contraddizione: insieme rappresentano dialetticamente i nostri tentativi di comprendere per modificare.

[Natalini, in Crispolti, *Immaginazione e megastrutture dal Futurismo ad oggi e crisi dell'antinatura*, 34]

The two works in the exhibition could be read in contraposition: on the one hand, the pessimistic crisis of the destiny of architecture and of its mechanisms; on the other hand, an optimistic analysis for the refoundation of design, construction and use through collective creativity. The two works do not have to be read in contrast or as in contradiction: together they dialectically represent our attempts of understanding to make change happen.

[Translated by the author.]

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Gli oggetti che circondano l'uomo gli creano un universo figurato intorno, significante, comunicante, che creano la sua alienazione. Creando uno spazio e delle superfici neutre, si vuole tagliare con il legame linguistico condizionante [...] Una materia neutra dove tutto si somiglia. Un ambiente materialmente omogeneo permette di recepire come unico fenomeno in atto la propria esistenza biologica ed elettrica come uno sforzo in grado di definire tempo e habitat.

[Gabriele Mastrigli, *Superstudio* (Macerata: Quolibet, 2016), 130.]

The objects that surround man create a metaphoric, signifying, and communicative universe, and create man's alienation. By creating neuter spaces and surfaces, we want to cut this conditioning linguistic tie [...] A neutral material were everything looks the same.

A homogeneous environment that allows to perceive one's own biological and electrical existence as the only active phenomenon as an effort able to define time and habitat.
[Translated by the author.]

Page 188

La città, dopo aver distrutto le sue mura, sta allargando i suoi confini sul territorio, estendendo a tutto lo spazio intorno il suo modello fisico e culturale.
[Natalini, Netti, Poli, Toraldo di Francia, *Cultura Materiale Extraurbana*, 8.]

The city, after having destroyed its walls, is expanding its boundaries into the territory, extending its physical and cultural model over the space that surrounds it.
[Translated by the author.]

CHAPTER 5

Page 197

C'era Ampelio e si chiusero in sala da pranzo, ingombrando tutto il tavolo di carte, presero a fare da capo i conti. La madre era in giardino. I caprifogli odoravano. I nasturzi erano una macchia di colore fin troppo vivo. Se non alzava gli occhi in su, dove da tutte le parti s'affacciavano le finestre dei casamenti, il giardino era sempre il giardino.
[Italo Calvino, *La Speculazione edilizia* [1963], (Milan: Mondadori, 2005), 142]

Ampelio was there, and they locked themselves in the dining room, covering the whole table with papers, and started their calculations again from the beginning. The mother was in the garden. The honeysuckle smelled. Nasturziium was a too lively spot of colour. If she/he did not lift the eyes up, to the windows of the construction site, the garden was always the garden.
[Translated by the author]

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La campagna parla di sè stessa quasi come di una spettrale e spaventosa sopravvivenza [...] Essa è un luogo esotico per atroci weekend e per non meno atroci villette da alternare con l'atroce appartamento in città.
[Pasolini, *Lettere Luterane*, 59.]

The countryside speaks of a spectral and almost timorous survival. Its function (mechanized, industrialized) remains alien to you unless you wish to engage with it professionally. For the rest, it is an exotic place for atrocious weekends and for the no less atrocious little villas to alternate with the atrocious flats in the city (all atrocious to me, naturally).
[Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 37.]

L'urbanesimo è ancora contadino. Il mondo operaio è ancora contadino. Il paesaggio può contenere questa nuova forma di vita (bidonvill, casupole, palazzoni) perchè il suo spirito è identico a quello dei villaggi, dei casolari.
[Pasolini, *Lettere Luterane*, 58.]

Urbanism is peasant. The world of the worker is physically peasant; and its recent anthropological tradition commits no transgressions. The landscape can contain this new form of life (shanty-towns, huts, tenement blocks) because its spirit is identical with that of the villages, the peasant huts. [Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters*, 36.]

Page 202

I meccanismi con i quali si esprimono le relazioni che intercorrono fra i livelli decisionali di intervento politico e il contesto sociale di base.

[“La distruzione e la riappropriazione della città”, special issue, *IN Aggiornamenti e Immagini della città* (1972): 3]

The inner workings that express the relationship between the decisional level of political intervention and the social context.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 203

La città, he wrote in *Casabella* ‘regolata da strutture decisionali ed operative è ormai organizzata attraverso una serie di sistemi, all’interno dei quali le relazioni tra il livelli decisionali di intervento politico economico ed il contesto sociale di base si esprimono attraverso meccanismi di coartazione dei bisogni e delle aspirazioni reali dei gruppi sociali.

[Ugo La Pietra, “Città iperstatica”, *Casabella*, n 366 (1972), 44.]

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[L’architettura radicale] Assume l’utopia come dato iniziale e lo svolge realisticamente [...] accetta le condizioni di una realtà discontinua senza ipotizzarne diverse, si muove sul piano del mediocre rifiutando un destino glorioso.

[Andrea Branzi, “Introduzione” to *Architettura Radicale*, *Casabella*, eds Paola Navone and Bruno Orlandoni, *Casabella* special issue, (1973): 11-12.]

[Radical architecture] Assumes utopia as the first data, and develops it realistically [...] it accepts the conditions of a discontinuous reality without hypothesising a different ones; it moves on the level of mediocrity, refusing a glorious destiny.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 212

L’isolamento in questi ambienti induce una serie di operazioni sensoriali e simboliche che esplicitano, da un lato la crisi di disadattamento ambientale e dall’altro il potenziale di intervento della forma nella rottura di equilibri preconstituiti.

[Ugo La Pietra, *Il Sistema Disequilibrante* (Milan: Galleria Toselli 1970), np.]

The isolation provided in these environments induces a series of sensorial and symbolic operations that make explicit, on the one hand, the crisis of the environmental maladjustment, and, on the other hand, the potential intervention in the rupture of pre-existing [urban environmental] balances.

[Translated by the author.]

Concetti spaziali sono esprimibili più facilmente al livello dell’oggetto che a livello di campo urbano.

[Ugo La Pietra, “Traducibilità dei nessi intercorrenti all’interno di una struttura urbana in visualizzazioni spaziali”, in Blasi, *Metodologia della struttura urbana*, 207.]

Concetti Spaziali are more easily expressed at the level of object than at the level of urban field.

[Translated by the author.]

Un “mondo delle rappresentazioni”, ci avviciniamo alla definizione di un campo sperimentale ove studiare in astratto i fenomeni.

[Ugo La Pietra, “Traducibilità dei nessi intercorrenti all’interno di una struttura urbana in visualizzazioni spaziali”, in Blasi, *Metodologia della struttura urbana*, 208.]

A “world of representation”, we get close to define an experimental field where [it is possible] to study phenomena outside reality.

[Translated by the author.]

Page 221

Ogni pianificazione urbana si comprende soltanto come campo della pubblicità-propaganda di una società [...] vale a dire organizzazione della partecipazione a qualcosa a cui è impossibile partecipare [...] Di riconquistare un ruolo individuale e collettivo nei processi di definizione e trasformazione della realtà che quotidianamente lo circonda.

[La Pietra, *I gradi di libertà. Percorsi preferenziali e sistemi di comunicazione*, np.]

Town planning is only understood as a field of propaganda. [...] This is to say that the organisation of the participation in something in which is impossible to participate. [...] to win an individual and community role back in the processes of definition and transformation of the everyday surrounding reality.

[Translated by the author.]

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Tutto ciò che normalmente succede all’interno di una città e che non viene diffuso attraverso i normali mezzi di informazione di massa.

[La Pietra, *La città iperstatica*, 46.]

Everything that normally took place within the city but is not broadcasted through the common mass media.

[La Pietra, *La città iperstatica*, 46.]

Una grande struttura didattica al di fuori del sistema didattico.

[La Pietra, *La città iperstatica*, 46.]

A great didactic structure beyond any didactic structure of information and communication.

[La Pietra, *La città iperstatica*, 46.]

Page 231

Non sono vere e proprie mappe, sono spazi... è chiaro poi che la mappa ha in qualche maniera la pretesa di riferirsi a uno spazio preciso. La mappa è una cosa “vera”, un quadro non indica nulla. Per questo la mappa sfugge: è troppo utile, necessaria, mentre un quadro può essere necessario solo a chi lo fa, o a chi eventualmente scopre che quel lavoro è importante per lui. insomma, non mi interessa tanto, e mi fa un po’ ridere, la mappa.

[<https://zero.eu/persona/gianfranco-baruchello/>, Accessed on April 4th]

There are not real maps, they are spaces... it is clear that a map attempts to being referred to a definite space. A map is something “truthful”, a painting does not indicate anything. This is the reason why the map escapes: it is too useful, necessary, while a painting can be useful for those who make it and, eventually, to those who understand that it is important for them. In conclusion, it is not really interesting for me, and makes me laugh, this idea of the map...

[Translated by the author]

Page 244

L'abusivismo non è uno dei fenomeni di Roma: è il modo stesso di essere della città.
[Italo Insolera, *Roma moderna* (Turin: Einaudi editore, 2011), 289].

The *abusivismo* is not one of the phenomena that affects Rome: it is the city's way of being.

[Translated by the author.]