LIVING ART AND THE ART OF LIVING:

REMAKING HOME IN ITALY IN THE 1960s

Teresa Kittler

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DECLARATION

I, Teresa Kittler, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the social, material, and aesthetic engagement with the image of home by artists in Italy in the 1960s to offer new perspectives on this period that have not been accounted for in the literature. It considers the way in which the shift toward environment, installation and process-based practices mapped onto the domestic at a time when Italy had become synonymous with the design of environments. Over four chapters I explore the idea of living-space as the *mise-en-scène*, and conceptual framework, for a range of artists working across Italy in ways that both anticipate and shift attention away from accounts that foreground the radical architectural experiments enshrined in MoMA's landmark exhibition *Italy: the New Domestic Landscape* (1972).

I begin by examining the way in which the group of temporary homes made by Carla Accardi between 1965 and 1972 combines the familiar utopian rhetoric of alternative living with attempts to redefine artistic practice at this moment. I then go on to look in turn at the sculptural practice of artists Marisa Merz and Piero Gilardi in relation to the everyday lived experience of home. This question is first considered in relation to the material and psychic challenges Merz poses to the gendering of homemaking with *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) 1966. I then go on to explore the home, as it might be understood in ecological terms, through an examination of the polyurethane microhabitats made by Gilardi. These themes are finally drawn together by looking at a radically different type of work, Carla Lonzi's book *Autoritratto* (1969). By examining the images interspersed throughout *Autoritratto* I consider how this book plays out the lives of fourteen prominent artists to create the semblance of an everyday shared lived experience.

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        Autoritratto (Bari: De Donato Editore, 1969), figure 30, p.119.

4.27   Getulio Alviani, *Interrelazione speculare*, 1965–67. Aluminium Environment. Photograph of the Installation at *Lo Spazio dell'Immagine*, Foligno 1967. Reproduced in Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto* (Bari: De Donato Editore, 1969), figure 67, p.251.

4.28   Mimmo Rotella, Rome. Reproduced in Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, (Bari: De Donato Editore, 1969), figure 19, p.67.

INTRODUCTION

Living Art and the Art of Living: Remaking Home in 1960s Italy

The group show *Arte Abitabile* (*Habitable Art*) opened at the Galleria Sperone in Turin in 1966.[1] It comprised the work of three artists—Michelangelo Pistoletto, Gianni Piacentino and Piero Gilardi—each of whom would go on to be associated with Arte Povera. A photograph taken at the time shows a series of unusual looking structures and fixtures displayed in such a way as to redefine how sculpture had traditionally occupied the gallery space: Gilardi's scaffold platform is just shy of the ceiling in the background; Piacentino's *Blue-Purple Big L* abruptly cuts across the room; and Pistoletto's *Lampada* (Lamp) (1965), visible in the foreground, dwarfs the surrounding smaller domestic light fittings (figure i). If the objects that featured in *Arte Abitabile* appear ill-matched to the domestic setting alluded to by the title, this was partly the point.[2] After all, this exhibition was never meant as a design showroom for the latest objects made for use in the home. Pistoletto was keen to reiterate this when he wrote that '*Arte Abitabile* […] was the first to aspire to a dimension which […] stressed the

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[1] *Arte Abitabile* has rarely received the attention it deserves in the literature in part, as Robert Lumley explains, due to a lack of documentation. Among the few exceptions to this neglect are Robert Lumley, 'Habitable Art: In and Around Piero Gilardi' (paper presented at 'Collaborative Effects', Nottingham Contemporary, 23 March 2013); and Anna Minola, *Gian Enzo Sperone Torino-Roma-New York: 35 Anni Di Mostre Tra Europa E America* (Turin: Hopefulmonster, 2000), pp.22–23; see also Alex Potts, 'Disencumbered Objects', *October*, 124 (2008), p.176.

[2] Potts, 'Disencumbered Objects', *op. cit.* (note 1), p.176. Referring to the title of the exhibition—*Arte Abitabile*—Potts writes: 'the name seems peculiarly apt for objects that so directly have to do with everyday habitation, furnishings for generically simplified and 'disencumbered' patterns of living and social interchange. Such structures and the way of life they imply have been a recurring fantasy in later art, though Pistoletto clearly wanted to broaden the associations beyond ideas of everyday habitation and lifestyle.'

desire to produce art which was not like an armchair but would push one to live together for a moment, to coagulate.'[3] More recently he restates this in somewhat different terms when he explains: 'the notion was only hinted at, but we felt a shared need not just to exhibit but to inhabit the gallery together.'[4] With these words Pistoletto acknowledges a shift that was taking place in artistic practice at that moment, towards performance, installation and collective forms of making and experiencing art. This notion of collective production is encapsulated in the idea of living together, or, in his vocabulary, a moment of coagulation ('coagularsi'), with all that this word connotes of binding or setting together.[5]

Whilst Pistoletto is keen to distance himself from any association with the straightforwardly domestic, he relies heavily on a rhetoric of cohabitation to frame his practice and those of his contemporaries. Of the three works by Pistoletto included in the exhibition (which also included *Scultura Lignea* (Wood Sculpture) (1965–66) and *Semisfere Decorative* (Decorative Semispheres) (1965–66)), *Lampada* perhaps best captures the way in which Pistoletto had sought to transform social relations. The eponymous lamp distinguishes itself from the gallery lighting, as it looms oversized in the foreground. It was, the artist tells us, made to hang just above head height so that anyone standing underneath would feel the intensity of the heat emitted.[6] In putting pressure on an

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[3] Pistoletto explains: 'La mostra di 'Arte Abitabile fatta nel 1966, era la prima mostra che aspirava ad una dimensione che, sebbene non Chiara su quanto sarebbe successo, sottolineava il desiderio di fare un'arte non che fosse come le poltrone, ma spingesse ad abitare un momento insieme, a coagularsi.' Minola, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.102.

[4] 'Michelangelo Pistoletto in Conversation with Andrea Bellini' in Michelangelo Pistoletto et al., *Facing Pistoletto* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2009), p.31.

[5] Minola, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.102; Pistoletto interviewed by Germano Celant in *Pistoletto*, *op. cit.* (note 3).

[6] Lumley, 'Habitable Art: In and Around Piero Gilardi', *op. cit.* (note 1).

everyday lived experience, Pistoletto seems to be targeting any associations that space may evoke with comfort and ease.[7] Despite the artist's apparent statements to the contrary, much of Pistoletto's artistic output in the mid-1960s takes its visual cue from the home (consider for example *Casa a Misura d'Uomo* (House on a Human scale, 1965), *Sfera sotto il letto* (Sphere Under the Bed, 1965–66) or *Quadro da Pranzo* (Lunch Painting, 1966)) and in later years Pistoletto referenced objects specifically found in the home in, for example, *Mobili Capovolti* (Overturned Furniture, 1976). But if Pistoletto's practice privileges the domestic in such cases, it is in order to challenge how that space might be defined and to register the discord engendered by a certain experience of modern living. This is encapsulated in the photograph of Pistoletto's *Quadro da Pranzo* of 1970 (figure ii), where the photographer Nino Longobardi sits head in hand, mimicking the apparently distant and lonely figures that appear in Pistoletto's mirror works.[8]

In a recently published article, Romy Golan addresses this aspect of Pistoletto's practice. She explores the effects of isolation and malaise as they feature in photographic reproductions of Pistoletto's mirror works by putting them in dialogue with Michelangelo Antonioni's trilogy of films on post-war modernity.[9] By pointing to the effects of alienation, as they might have been

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[7] For a history on the way in which the home has been understood in these terms see Beatriz Colomina's discussion of the nineteenth-century interior in 'The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism' in *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp.73–128, esp. pp.79–80; see also Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (London: Heinemann, 1988).

[8] The photograph was taken by Mimmo Jodice and is reproduced in Walter Guadagnini, *Fotografi ed Eventi Artistici in Italia dal '60 all '80* (Bolzano: Edizioni Cooptip, 1988), p.147.

[9] I am referring to Michelangelo Antonioni's Eclipse Trilogy, *L'Avventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1961) and *L'Eclisse* (1962). See Romy Golan, 'Flashbacks and Eclipses in Italian Art in the

experienced in the home, Pistoletto's practice underscores the urgency of an exhibition such as *Arte Abitabile* that had sought to interrogate collective forms of living and experiencing art. To follow Golan, these images seem to want to register the 'psychological disaffection of the economic miracle […] by capturing the domestic trappings of the mirror paintings' surroundings'.[10] One photograph that Golan discusses, which shows *Seated Woman from Behind* (1963) (figure iii) in Pistoletto's living room, suggests how the mirror works might be read in relation to their surroundings.[11] The seated woman's gaze, directed towards a backdrop of household furniture reflected in the mirror, seems both pensive and disconnected. The mirrored surface inadvertently captures the modernity and comfort of a 'new object world', to borrow the words of Golan.[12] In concert with contemporary responses to the work, Golan reads this through the prism of alienation.[13] The poet and art critic John Ashbery had already in 1966 diagnosed such alienation, writing in his review of Pistoletto's Walker Art Gallery exhibition:

1960s', *Grey Room*, 49 (2012), pp.102–127; Karen Pinkus also picks up on this sense of alienation in Antonioni's Eclipse Trilogy. See Pinkus, 'Italy in the 1960s: Spaces, Places, Trajectories', *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 2001), pp.89–90.

[10] Golan, 'Flashbacks and Eclipses in Italian Art in the 1960s', *op. cit.*, (note 9), p.104.

[11] For an analysis of the way that Pistoletto's mirror works register political unrest in these years see Robert Lumley, 'Michelangelo Pistoletto: Stepping Sideways, Changing Direction' in 'Michelangelo Pistoletto: Stepping Sideways, Changing Direction', *Pistoletto Politico: Works by Michelangelo Pistoletto* (London: Luxembourg & Dayan, 2013), pp.8–16.

[12] Golan, 'Flashbacks and Eclipses in Italian Art in the 1960s', *op. cit.* (note 9); for a critique of the commodity in consumer society written in 1968 see Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London: Verso, 2005).

[13] Romy Golan, 'Flashbacks and Eclipses in Italian Art in the 1960s', *Grey Room*, 49 (2012), pp.106–107.

The figures and the décor that are the symptoms of today's strange

and new disease of alienation are the raw material, and perhaps

the end product, of Pistoletto's art […] The décor is that of the

gallery, or your own home […] or whatever surroundings the

mirror surface happens to reflect. Chances are there will be white

walls, modern furniture (Knoll, if the picture is a gallery) and

potted plants. Probably the ubiquitous philodendron.[14]

Ashbery's 1966 review isolates the tension that animates the heart of *Arte Abitabile*. The show claimed to move away from the 'new object world', turning towards the spaces and settings of social interaction rather than the kinds of objects that might be found there. In this way *Arte Abitabile* wholeheartedly sought to reject the kind of domestic setting that had by now become synonymous with Italian design and had been celebrated in the interior design exhibition held just a year earlier, in the spring of 1965, at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence: *La Casa Abitata* (The Inhabited House) (figure iv).[15] At the same time,

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[14] Cited in *ibid*., p.105.

[15] *La Casa Abitata* held in Florence in 1965 has been read as a key moment in the history of Italian design which reached its apex with *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* at MoMA in 1972. As Giuseppe Finessi explains, the show marked an important shift, where as he puts it, 'the question of living was no longer seen as a problem of furniture, but began to be considered as a problem of spaces, questioning the different ways of arranging the inhabited space.' *La Casa Abitata* was organised by Tommaso Ferraris, Pierluigi Spadolini, Domenico Benini and Giovanni Michelucci. Its objective was 'the investigation and verification of a basic problem, that of present-day living in a home.' Fifteen Italian architects including Ettore Sottsass, Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Leonardo Savioli and Leonardo Ricci were invited to propose a room for the domestic interior. The proposals presented in the exhibition consisted of furniture that could be mass-produced and aimed at a larger public of consumers. Finessi outlines a history of Italian interior architecture during the post-war years, particularly as this was conceived in

however, the very title and rhetoric surrounding the show pointed to an enduring interest in the idea of home.[16]

As noted above, much has been made of the way that *Arte Abitabile* had sought to foreground the social relations engendered through the works on show in ways that register a desire to create unencumbered works. Alex Potts has recently interrogated the rhetoric that surrounded *Arte Abitabile* and that was invoked by artists at the time such as Pistoletto, Alighiero Boetti and Pino Pascali with reference to their practice. Potts does so precisely to put pressure on the narratives of sculptural production that foreground the dematerialisation of art, understood as a 'de-emphasis on material aspects' or as effecting a distancing from such notions as uniqueness, permanence, and decorative attractiveness as this was defined by Lucy Lippard.[17] Instead, Potts contends that 'the desire […] to create disencumbered objects'—disencumbered, that is, following Lippard, from late Romantic notions of individuality and creativity—was inescapably bound up with the kinds of encumbrances that such work was purportedly trying to eschew.[18] Potts begins by examining Pistoletto's *Minus Objects* (1965–66) and

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environmental terms, paying special heed to a number of key shows such as *Colori e Forme nella Casa d'Oggi* held in Como, July–August 1957; *La Casa e la Scuola* 12th Milan Triennale, 16 July–4 November 1960; *La Casa Abitata*, held in Florence, 6 March–2 May 1965; *Italy: the New Domestic Landscape*, held in New York, 26 May–11 September 1972; and *Il Progetto Domestico*, the 17th Milan Triennale, held 18 January–23 March 1986. See Giuseppe Finessi, 'Domestic landscapes', *Rassegna*, 16, 58 (1994), pp.80–88; see also Carlo De Carli, *Architettura, Spazio Primario* (Milan: Hoepli, 1982), pp.1012–22; Lara Vinca Masini, 'Mostra della Casa Abitata a Firenze', *Marcatrè*, 16–18, July 1965, p.216.

[16] See the way the exhibition is described by Germano Celant, *Precronistoria, 1966—69: Minimal Art, Pittura Sistemica, Arte Povera, Land Art, Conceptual Art, Body Art, Arte Ambientale e Nuovi Media* (Florence: Centro Di, 1976), pp.52–53

[17] Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (London: Studio Vista, 1973), p.5.

[18] Potts, 'Disencumbered Objects', *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.169.

the artist's writings on these works as they were formulated in a series of essays in 1966–67.[19] If the *Minus Objects* were articulated in terms of an attempt to 'escape from the reification of both the art work and the artist's persona' through one-off objects that insisted on their contingent nature then, as Potts points out, the artist effectively evaded the question of how such works might be invested with any significance at all.[20] At issue here for Potts is the way that Pistoletto's *Minus Objects* at once 'evoke and gainsay […] the desire for pure open immediacy'.[21] If these works suggest a casualness and spontaneity, then for Potts they are also 'just a little obdurate' and 'reify the illusion of a casual or take it or leave it manner' by which he means that the image of an impromptu way of working is objectified into an artwork.[22] For the purpose of my argument, what is of particular salience here is that those fantasies of disencumbrance are projected onto the site of the home in ways that interrogate that social or living space as one necessarily associated, to borrow a phrase from Potts, with an 'openly experienced, disencumbered everydayness'.[23]

Despite the relative lack of scholarly attention *Arte Abitabile* has received, the show has nevertheless come to be regarded as a key moment in the narrative around post-war Italian art, particularly as it is seen to have anticipated

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[19] For an analysis of the significance of the idea of dematerialisation in Italy, specifically as it was connected to the Autonomist and counterculture movement see K. Pinkus, 'Dematerialization from Arte Povera to Cybermoney through Italian Thought', *Diacritics—A Review of Contemporary Criticism*, 39, 3 (2009), pp.63–75; Potts, 'Disencumbered Objects', *op. cit.* (note 1), p.172.

[20] Potts, 'Disencumbered Objects', *op. cit.* (note 1), p.173.

[21] *Ibid.*, p.176.

[22] Potts, 'Disencumbered Objects', *op. cit.* (note 1).

[23] *Ibid.*, p.177.

the founding Arte Povera exhibitions held between 1967–68.[24] In his

reassessment of the period, the art critic Germano Celant would refer to the

exhibition in quasi-mythical terms, as a 'discovery' and as a new 'way of doing

art' that made it 'inhabitable.'[25] Tommaso Trini would similarly look back to this

moment as a foundational one.[26] He credits *Arte Abitabile* with having proposed

a way of rethinking social relations beyond the confines of Pop and Neo-Dada.[27]

Crucially, the affinities between the ideas that underpinned *Arte Abitabile* and

the way that Arte Povera has subsequently been read have also been recognised

in the literature. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, for example, characterises Arte

Povera specifically in terms of 'domesticity, community and habitat.'[28] More

recently, Karen Pinkus has also noted the ubiquity of Arte Povera's 'alternative

dwellings and self-contained habitats (tents, igloos, and so on)' in her catalogue

essay for *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972*.[29] It is perhaps surprising,

then, that there has been no sustained treatment of these themes in the literature

as it relates to Arte Povera and more broadly within artistic practice in Italy

during the 1960s.[30] In the chapters that follow and looking at a range of artists

associated with Arte Povera, but also further afield, I want to begin to address

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[24] I am referring to the series of exhibitions curated by Germano Celant starting in 1967 with *Arte Povera-Im Spazio* held at Galleria La Bertesca, Genoa in 1967; *Collage 1*, held at the University of Genoa, Istituto di Storia dell'Arte, in December 1967 and *Arte Povera* held at Galleria De Foscherari, Bologna in 1968. See Germano Celant, *Arte Povera: History and Stories* (Milan: Electa, 2011), pp.30–65.

[25] Celant, *Precronistoria, 1966–69*, *op. cit.* (note 16).

[26] Tommaso Trini, 'Livable Art, 1982', *Domus*, 625 (1982), p.50.

[27] *Ibid.*, p.50.

[28] Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), p.46.

[29] Karen Pinkus, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.89.

[30] For an important recent contribution on the theme of home in contemporary art see Gill Perry, *Playing at Home: House in Contemporary Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).

this relative neglect in the scholarly literature by exploring the way in which Carla Accardi, Marisa Merz, Piero Gilardi and the critic Carla Lonzi engaged with the problem of living.[31]

<p align="center">◆ ◆ ◆</p>

The idea of living comes to animate a diverse range of artistic practices throughout the 1960s that effected a rethinking of the materials appropriate to art. In 1969, Germano Celant declared that 'animals, vegetables and minerals have cropped up in the art world'[32] at the end of a decade that had seen the otherwise disparate practices of artists including, but by no means exclusively, Richard Serra, Jannis Kounellis and Giuseppe Penone, introduce a range of organic matter and living things into their sculptural work. Crucially, Piero Manzoni had taken the idea of *Living Sculpture* in a different direction in 1961 by both apparently animating and inhabiting the sculptural medium itself. The artist transformed an ordinary body into a *Living Sculpture* by way of a signature, at once signalling the performative possibilities of living art. Indicative of the currency the term 'living' had achieved by the end of the decade, Gilbert and George had pressed the distinction between art and artist further still, declaring *themselves* living sculptures for the 1970 exhibition: *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art* held at the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna in Turin.[33]

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[31] Karen Pinkus suggests that there is every reason to see this as a problem when she writes 'lack of housing was the most significant crisis facing Italian culture at large. Huge numbers of Italians continued to live in shacks, lean-tos, and caves, long into the 1950s and beyond.' See *op. cit.* (note 9), pp.90–1.

[32] Germano Celant, *Art Povera*, first edition (New York: Praeger, 1969), p.225.

[33] Germano Celant, *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art* (Turin: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, 1970), pp.28–31.

By the close of the 1960s, then, the notion of living came to encapsulate a range of sculptural practices that aimed at the redefinition of art. Living was defined here in terms of a metaphorics of energy (famously enshrined by Lucio Fontana in his *Fonti di Energia* (Energy Sources) (1961)), and elsewhere it would come to stand for a range of sculptural work that resembled the biological functions of living systems. It was in this period that Giovanni Anselmo created his *Untitled* (*Struttura che Mangia*) (Structure that Eats) (1968), and *Untitled* (*Struttura che Beve*) (Structure that Drinks) (1968), transforming organic and inorganic materials into sculptures that seemed to want to eat and drink. Conceived in terms of energy flows, Anselmo couched his practice in a rhetoric of escape from the trap of representation when he wrote: 'I, the world, things, life: we are situations of energy, and the important thing is precisely not to crystallize these situations, but keep them open and alive.'[34] A year later Gilardi famously gave this tendency for process-based practices the label *Microemotive Art*.[35] In the version of the essay published in *Arts Magazine* in 1968, and bearing a striking affinity to the way that Anselmo had described his own practice, Gilardi begins with the following words by Mario Merz: 'I search for energy that flows, freed from the shackles of rhythm'.[36] Rejecting what were regarded as the constraints of Minimalism, or as he alludes to it, Primary Structures, Gilardi

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[34] Germano Celant, *Arte Povera* (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta, 1969), p.178.

[35] The article was first published as 'L'Energia Primaria e gli Artisti Microemotivi', in *Ombre Elettriche*, n. 3–4, September 1968, pp. 21–22. It also appeared as 'Micro-emotive art' in *Museum Journaal*, 13 April 1968, pp. 198–202. The article was published in English translation as Piero Gilardi, 'Primary Energy and the Microemotive Artists', *Arts Magazine*, 43, September, 1968, pp.48–52.

[36] *Ibid.*, p.48.

foregrounds primary energy, borrowing his vocabulary from astrophysics, to characterise the practice of a wide range of international artists.[37]

Whilst the notion of animism and process-based practices are central to existing narratives of post-war artistic production, I want to distinguish my own project from this way of approaching the idea of living.[38] My key interest lies instead with the trope of living, as it was able to speak to another set of concerns which, I argue, can broadly be categorised as an engagement with living space as it had been explored through *Arte Abitabile*. In what follows, I trace the way that this latter is played out on the site of sculptural production at a moment when political and social transformations were underscoring the need to rethink the significance and forms of contemporary existence. I consider the way in which the idea of living space serves as the *mise-en-scène* and conceptual framework for a wide-ranging body of works as it resonates in the post-war period around

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[37] *Ibid*.

[38] Recent art historical debates have approached the question of animism in altogether different terms. These debates have centred on Franco Berardi's analysis of semiocapitalism and its capacity to draw its raw materials from the relational, affective and cerebral faculties of human beings (what Berardi calls the soul). Isabelle Graw has drawn directly from Berardi's *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* to explore the implications of what she sees as the widespread anthropomorphism of recent sculptural practice. Describing the widespread view of art-market transactions, Graw observes that artworks tend to be treated like living beings. In this context, value is derived from the living labour of the artist. It is here that the question of animism becomes particularly pressing: where life and value-as-capital are conflated, lifelike attributes are conferred onto the artwork at the same time that the subject put to work by capitalism continues to experience a loss of life. Graw argues that recent sculptural practice seems to want to play out these tensions on the site of sculpture. See Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2009). Ina Blom et al., *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011); Isabelle Graw, 'Ecce Homo', *Artforum International*, 50, 3, November 2011, pp.241–244. For the way that the question of animism has been addressed by visual theorist WJT Mitchell, see *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

issues of urbanisation, habitation, ecology, social relations, work and politics. I explore how these concerns were projected onto the site of home, an area that has come to be important in contemporary art practice.[39] On the one hand, I consider this theme through a material and political interrogation of the everyday, and on the other, the way in which artistic practice was reoriented towards imaginings, utopian or otherwise, of an alternative existence.[40]

Arte Abitabile is central to this set of concerns as registering a turning point within artistic practice toward environment-based works. It was a shift that was perhaps most vividly explored a year later in the 1967 exhibition held in Foligno and titled *Lo Spazio Dell'Immagine*.[41] For the exhibition, nineteen artists who had begun to work with increasingly elastic parameters of sculpture were invited to create an environment for an entire room of the Palazzo Trinci (figure v).[42] *Lo Spazio dell'Immagine* belongs to a narrative of environment-based practice in Italy that has received little attention in the literature on post-war art.[43] The exhibition was one of a number held throughout 1967 that marked an explicit move towards the foregrounding of space within artistic practice. This included *L'Impatto Percettivo: Seconda Rassegna Internazionale di Pittura* held

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[39] See Gill Perry, *Playing at Home: House in Contemporary Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).

[40] On this subject see Gaston Bachelard and M. Jolas, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

[41] Palazzo Trinci (Foligno, Italy), *Lo Spazio Dell'immagine* (Venice: Alfieri edizioni d'arte, 1967); Italo Tomassoni, *Lo Spazio Dell'Immagine E Il Suo Tempo* (Milan: Skira, 2009).

[42] Such concerns with the organisation and function of space understood as a site of social interaction were also taken up within radical architecture at this time. On this subject see Paola Navone, *Architettura Radicale* (Segrate: Milani, 1974); Pietro Derossi, *Per Un'Architettura Narrativa: Architetture e Progetti 1959—2000* (Milan: Skira, 2000); Manfredo Tafuri, *Storia Dell' Architettura Italiana 1944—1985* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982); Pietro Derossi, *Derossi Associato, Racconto Di Architettura* (Milan: Skira, 2006).

[43] One notable Italian-language exception is Tomassoni, *op. cit.* (note 41).

at Amalfi to coincide with the conference titled *Lo Spazio nella Ricerca d'oggi*. As art historian Maurizio Calvesi observed in an essay in the exhibition catalogue for *Lo Spazio degli Elementi: Fuoco Immagine Acqua Terra* (1967) held at Galleria L'Attico in Rome, this was the first exhibition to register a shift from the individual work to the idea of environment.[44] Finally and following the inauguration of *Lo Spazio dell'immagine* in Foligno, the show titled *Nuove tecniche dell'immagine* opened at the Sixth Biennale of San Marino.[45] If these latter did not explicitly reference the home, then they did much to emphasise the environmental and spatial turn that characterised the new work that was being made at this time.[46] In this thesis I want to explore, however, the way in which the shift towards environment and installation based practice does map onto the domestic and an everyday lived experience in the work of the artists and critic under examination. The turn towards environmental sculpture offered a means of escape from the thorny problem of making objects facing artists at the time; the problem of making yet another object that would add to the circuits of production and consumption, but it also risked association with the design of environments by which Italy had come to be known.[47] If one way for artists to avoid this

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[44] See Maurizio Calvesi 'Lo Spazio degli elementi' 1967 reproduced in Luca Massimo Barbero and Francesca Pola, *Microradici del contemporaneo: L'Attico di Fabio Sargentini, 1966–1978* (Milan: MACRO, 2010), pp.50–59.

[45] Sandra Pinto, *Nuove Tecniche d'Immagine: San Marino, Palazzo dei congressi, 15 luglio–30 settembre 1967. [6. Biennale d'arte Repubblica di S. Marino]* (Venice: Alfieri, 1967).

[46] Celant's catalogue essay for the first Arte Povera exhibition: *Arte Povera-Im Spazio* in September 1967 also registered this shift. There, he defined artistic practice as occupying the spaces of an everyday lived experience. See Celant, 'Arte povera–Im Spazio' reprinted in Germano Celant, *Arte Povera: History and Stories* (Milan: Electa, 2011), pp.30–33.

[47] For an interesting account of this subject see Ann Goldstein, *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, Cambridge, MA; London, 1995).

problem was to embrace the widespread utopian rhetoric of alternative ways of living, my argument will consider the ambivalent and often contradictory works which result from those attempts to redefine or remake home.

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One distinction to be made here is between the rhetoric around 'art' and 'life' that coloured the debates of the post-war period and the emphasis I place instead on the idea of living. If the debates around art and life were ubiquitous in the post-war period, Italy was no exception.[48] References to 'art and life' permeate Celant's writing throughout 1967 and 1968 in his catalogue essays for exhibitions held at Galleria La Bertesca in 1967 and at Galleria De Foscherari in 1968 as well as in his manifesto-like article, 'Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War' published in *Flash Art* in 1967.[49] Replete with liberationist vocabulary, Celant's writings of this period can be understood as bearing the hallmarks of a long tradition of avant-gardist rhetoric. In the catalogue essay for *Arte Povera* at the Galleria De Foscherari, he conceives of 'art' and 'life' in terms of parallel lines extending towards an ever-receding horizon line and whose constituent parts are unmistakably kept at a distance.[50] This is of course the point for Celant,

Golan's argument is central to my thinking here; see Golan, 'Flashbacks and Eclipses in Italian Art in the 1960s', *op. cit.* (note 9).

[48] David Hopkins and Anna Katharina Schaffner, *Neo-Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2006); see also Alex Potts, 'Autonomy in Post-War Art, Quasi-Heroic and Casual', *Oxford Art Journal*, 27, 1 (2004), pp.45–59.

[49] Germano Celant, 'Arte Povera. Appunti per Una Guerriglia', *Flash Art*, 5 (1967), p.3.

[50] Germano Celant, 'Arte povera' in Celant, *Arte Povera*, *op. cit.* (note 24), p.48–57. First published in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition held at Galleria De Foscherari, Bologna, 1968.

who, versed in the rhetoric of guerrilla warfare, prepares to do battle in the no-man's-land created by this geometry. Mobilising his 'poor' army, Celant wants to invade, and then occupy, that space which he calls a 'void' between 'art and life'. His cause is primarily the agency of the artist, and 'Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War' (1967) reads like a manifesto that heroically transforms the image of the artist from jester into warrior, able to thwart even the most compromising constraints of the system. Celant put this vividly when he wrote: 'the artist who was exploited before, now becomes a guerrilla warrior. He wants to choose his battlefield, to possess the advantages of mobility to make surprise attacks.'[51] The critic relies on a certain conception of avant-gardist rhetoric for his formulation of Arte Povera which bears obvious affinities to the following characterisation of the avant-garde offered by Jürgen Habermas in 1981:

> The avant-garde understands itself as invading unknown territory, exposing itself to the dangers of sudden, shocking encounters, conquering an as yet unoccupied future. The avant-garde must find a direction in a landscape into which no one seems to have yet ventured.[52]

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[51] Celant begins by describing the artist as 'the newly appointed jester' who 'satisfies refined tastes, produces objects for cultivated palates.' But where once the artist was 'exploited' in this way he now 'becomes a guerrilla warrior'. See Germano Celant, 'Arte Povera. Notes for a guerrilla war' reproduced in Celant, *Arte Povera*, *op. cit.* (note 24), p.35.

[52] Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity—An incomplete Project' in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic Essays on Post-Modern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), pp.3–15, quoted in Johann Lamoureux, 'Avant-Garde: A Historiography of a Critical Concept', in Amelia Jones (ed.), *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), p.191.

Already in 1968, in a letter of response to Celant, the Bolognese critic Pietro Bonfiglioli was keen to point out that whilst the problem of the relationship between art and life was highly topical, it was a framework that had 'largely been exhausted'.[53] Whilst acknowledging the importance of these debates for the historical period with which I am concerned, I also want to depart from the metaphorics of guerrilla warfare that characterises Celant's rhetoric. From a feminist perspective, Carol Duncan and Amelia Jones have done much to critique the assumed heroics and masculinist virility that underpin such conceptions of the avant-garde.[54] In ways that are indebted to these readings, I argue that Celant's conception of 'art' and 'life' ignores a range of practices in this period that relate to the domestic and whose politics have failed to be properly acknowledged.[55] If Celant does, for his formulation of Arte Povera, rely on an idea of the everyday, a term that carries with it the notion of the domestic, then he does not engage explicitly with the question of home. I want to

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[53] Bonfiglio writes: 'the art-life problem is ingrained in the culture of middle-class/capitalistic society…this osmotic void in which the artist is placed is perhaps, once again, determined by esthetic separateness…the unity of art and life cannot be proposed in a theoretical way…only in a revolutionary, political act which breaks the dividing-line of separateness…only then art will be able to identify with life.' See Pietro Bonfiglioli, 'Arte e Vita' in Celant, *Arte Povera*, *op. cit.*, (note 24), pp.62, 64. This was first published in Germano Celant, *Arte Povera* (Bologna: Galleria De Foscherari, 1968) on the occasion of the exhibition held at Galleria de Foscherari, Bologna between 24 February and 15 March, 1968.

[54] See Amelia Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Carol Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting', in Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (eds), *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York; London: Harper & Row, 1982), pp.292–313; see also Lamoureux, *op. cit.*, (note 52); Linda Nochlin, 'The Invention of the Avant-Garde: France, 1830–1880', in Thomas Hess and John Ashbery (eds), *Avant-Garde Art* (New York: Collier Books; London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), pp.1–24.

[55] On this subject see Christopher Reed, *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); Lamoureux, *op. cit.* (note 52), p.193.

foreground this latter to explore the way in which this idea of living space was played out through the practice of the artists and critic I examine.

When Bonfiglioli responded to Celant in his letter published in the catalogue for the exhibition held at Galleria De Foscherari, he accused him of retaining a framework of 'art' and 'life' that, he argued, should be dispensed with altogether. In the chapters that follow I want to take this criticism seriously and thereby depart from the binary logic that underpins Celant's formulation. As has been noted in recent scholarship, Anglo-American accounts of the avant-garde have tended to avoid engaging with the tenet of bringing art into life that had been so central to Peter Bürger's conception of it.[56] A number of important contributions have sought to readdress this blind spot while at the same time problematising its terms.[57] Among these, there have been two important contributions that have been particularly useful for my own project as they have sought to rethink the binary logic at the heart of traditional conceptions of 'art' and 'life' as it was put forward by Celant. Ben Highmore acknowledges that the question of 'art' and 'life' has largely been ignored in responses to Peter Bürger's assessment of the Neo Avant-Garde.[58] If Highmore agrees with many of

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[56] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); for a detailed account see Hopkins and Schaffner, *op. cit.*, (note 48), pp.1–37.

[57] Hopkins and Schaffner, *op. cit.* (note 48).

[58] As Highmore explains, the Anglo-American debate has largely been shaped by responses to Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Theory and History of Literature v. 4 (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Bürger is credited with identifying the connection between art and life as the central trope of the avant-garde. In his account, the aims of the historic avant-garde could be defined as the 'sublation of art in the praxis of life' (see p.51). Instead, the emphasis in the literature has sought to interrogate the assumptions that underpin Bürger's analysis of the neo-avant-garde. Benjamin Buchloh takes issue with the implicit assumption that repetition is necessarily a falsification (at the heart of which lies this fiction of origin). Buchloh interrogates the duality between the original and copy, proposing instead a more complex

the criticisms raised by Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh to Bürger's theorisation of the avant-garde, he also marks a departure from these accounts by foregrounding the very aspect that had been ignored by these critics.[59] He argues that the 'sublimation of art into life praxis' is central to Bürger's characterisation of the avant-garde and yet remains underexplored in the body of scholarly literature.[60] Highmore focuses on 'the praxis of life' in order to offer a more nuanced and ambivalent assessment of 'everyday life', as he puts it, than is

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relationship, based on a Freudian model of repetition read in terms of repression and disavowal. Buchloh also directs his argument towards the issue of the transformation of the audience in the post-war period. He does so to ask whether it might not in fact be the process of repetition that characterises the historical meaning of the art production of the neo-avant-garde. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde,' *October* 37 (July 1, 1986): pp.41–52. Hal Foster also takes the issue of repetition seriously (rather than as the grounds for dismissal of the neo-avant-garde). Central to his reading is an examination of the different moments of repetition. Foster poses historical questions about how to think about the nature of causality, temporality and narrativity in ways other than in linear terms of a before and after. Furthermore, Foster asks whether the so called return through the neo-avant-garde might not in fact be the first time that the project of the historical avant-garde is properly understood.

[59] Ben Highmore credits Bürger with recognising this central aspect of the avant-garde project – the 'aestheticisation of everyday life'. For Highmore, the concept of the everyday underpins the problem of art and life. According to him, Bürger falls short in recognising the avant-garde's attempt to negotiate the complex engagement with the everyday through all its contradictions and ambivalences. Highmore argues that the avant-garde registers neither a celebration nor a condemnation of the everyday. It is this unique position that offers the possibility of a more complex set of practices that seek to transform the everyday. See Highmore, 'Awkward moments: Avant-Gardism and the Dialectics of Everyday life,' in *European avant-garde: new perspectives*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann, critical studies 15 (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000), pp.245–264.

[60] 'To insist on the importance of everyday life for both avant-gardism and the investigation of avant-gardism allows for an assessment of both the limitations and productivity of Bürger's thesis.' See Highmore, *op. cit.*, (note 58), pp.245–6.

allowed for by Bürger's theory.[61]

Another way in which the debate around 'art' and 'life' has been shaped in recent writing is through the question of autonomy. Earmarking autonomy as the central (and now exhausted) issue in recent literature on modernism, Alex Potts reconsiders the question of autonomy from a historical perspective to think of the 'ethical imperatives that made it such a key issue' in the post-war period.[62] He does so in order to interrogate the underlying premise of duality between 'autonomy' and everyday life. In this way, rather than seeing a radical break with the idea of artistic autonomy in the post-war period that gave way to the trope of 'art and life', Potts wants to argue that the idea of autonomy remains central though assuming a very different guise. In his account, the contradictions that emerge between artists' statements about their work and their practice requires an understanding of autonomy as constitutionally split and radically unstable throughout this period. Potts offers a way of rethinking autonomy as it was negotiated and renegotiated by artists in this period. If on the one hand it provided a framework for an uncompromised means of working, then this same autonomy, on the other, precluded the possibility of recuperating a more 'genuine' autonomy that could only be found in the 'arena of everyday life'.[63]

In ways that are indebted to these recent contributions by Potts and Highmore, I want to explore how the set of concerns encompassing the problem

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[61] Highmore explains it in the following way: 'because avant-gardism is often neither a celebration nor a condemnation of everyday life, it sits awkwardly in its historical moment. But this awkwardness, this ambivalence, is what gives avant-garde formations their particular historical vividness. It is this ambivalence that Bürger misses in his account.' This, as he puts it, is 'the uneasy conceptual theme' for his essay. See *Ibid*., p.247.

[62] Potts, 'Autonomy in Post-War Art, Quasi-Heroic and Casual', *op. cit.* (note 48), p.45.

[63] *Ibid*.

of bringing art into life could be transformed in this period beyond Celant's own rhetoric. I turn to this moment of the second half of the 1960s when the debates around art and life re-emerge and are ratcheted up by increasingly felt political tensions.[64] I want to focus on the way that the concept of the living, distinct from this binary framework, becomes as much a kind of testing ground as it does a way of rethinking what the debate over art and life could mean and how it could be figured.

I am driven, and necessarily limited, here by a set of questions. Firstly, I want to examine how the twin concerns of the problem of living and the idea of home come to shape the appearance of the works made. I want to ask how such divergent practices were delineated in spatial terms, as I pose the question of *living* in terms of *living space*. A second aspect of this project considers how the term 'living' is deployed in artists' own statements about their practice and also how it underpins what might aptly be called a work ethic.[65] This moment would seem to suggest that the possibility of a redemption of culture (at a moment when

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[64] For the way that Celant's rhetoric spoke to a wider contemporary context see Nicholas Cullinan, 'From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam: The Politics of Arte Povera', *October*, 124 (2008), pp.8–30; for the way in which the metaphorics of guerrilla warfare was deployed by other cultural critics at the time see Umberto Eco, 'Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare', *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality*, new ed. (London: Minerva, 1995), pp.135–44; on this subject see also Jacopo Galimberti, 'A Third-Worldist Art? Germano Celant's Invention of Arte Povera', *Art History*, 36, 2 (2013), pp.418–441; for an in depth study of the revolutionary politics of Régis Debray, the source of inspiration for Celant's rhetoric see Jack Woddis, *New Theories of Revolution: A Commentary on the Views of Frantz Fanon, Régis Debray and Herbert Marcuse* (New York: International Publishers, 1972).

[65] On this subject see; Helen Anne Molesworth et al., *Work Ethic* (Baltimore, Md: Baltimore Museum of Art; University Park, 2003), in particular Gilbert, Chris, 'Herbie Goes Bananas: Fantasies of Leisure and Labor from the New Left to the New Economy', pp.67–81; see also Helen Molesworth, 'House Work and Art Work', *October*, 92 (2000), pp.71–97; Helen Anne Molesworth and Wexner Center for the Arts, *Part Object Part Sculpture* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

the concepts of 'deculture' or 'acculturation' had become buzzwords) could be found through a search for what has been described by Potts as a 'measure of integrity of purpose' directed towards articulating lived experience.[66] These points are largely conceptual and rhetorical concerns about how the notion of living gains a currency in this period and which is so often qualified by the idea of living differently.

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Within architectural and design practice these issues were of course taken up with renewed vigour in the post-war period. Recent accounts have done much to situate the home at the heart of such cultural and political narratives, whilst also interrogating how Cold War politics has come to be defined. Beatriz Colomina's groundbreaking *Domesticity at War* claims the American home as *the* site upon which Cold War politics were played out, charting the way in which industries and technologies once geared towards war were subsequently re-orientated towards commodity production. Colomina foregrounds the image of homemaking in this period as an aggressive image capable of inciting consumption and consumerism. Characterising the post-war world in terms of a 'cult of domesticity', she explains that the effects of this shift were also registered within architectural practice in a displacement from the form the home should take to the lifestyle it could permit its inhabitants.[67]

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[66] Potts, 'Autonomy in Post-War Art, Quasi-Heroic and Casual', *op. cit.* (note 48), p.46.

[67] Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), p.89.

Colomina focuses exclusively on 'the cult of domesticity' as it developed in the United States. Whilst she has done much to expand and re-interrogate the spaces where Cold War politics were played out, more recent studies have argued that this model of post-war Americanization (as it was presented in advertising in terms of comfort, modernity and hygiene)—ready for export to Europe—was not as straightforwardly adopted outside of the US. Taking up Colomina's argument, Robin Schuldenfrei also poses living as a problem heavily weighted with political and cultural significance in the post-war period. She too considers how an expanded notion of dwelling, both in terms of a politics of domestic space and a domestic culture of politics, was invoked for diverse political ends in the US, but extends her analysis to include Western Europe and the Eastern bloc. Retaining the trope of domesticity but juxtaposing a further issue of anxiety, Schuldenfrei offers a reassessment of modern life in the post-war period expanded to include the psychic and ideological constructions of lifestyle that importantly broadens the context to include Europe.[68]

The issue of Americanisation has been central in post-war accounts of transformation in Italy.[69] Recent scholarship has done much to reinterpret these standard accounts, out of which Italy's own situation emerges as a somewhat fraught relationship with American imperialism in this period in which efforts at Americanisation were 'subject to repeated misinterpretation, negotiation and

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[68] Robin Schuldenfrei, Introduction in *Atomic Dwelling: Anxiety, Domesticity, and Postwar Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp.xi–xiv. There are obvious affinities between Schuldenfrei's reading of the experience of post-war dwelling and the anxieties surrounding the idea of homelessness as the image of modern life that abound in the twentieth century. On this subject see for example *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture* (Montréal; Cambridge, Mass.; London: Canadian Centre for Architecture; MIT Press, 2000).
[69] Paolo Scrivano, 'Signs of Americanization in Italian Domestic Life: Italy's Postwar Conversion to Consumerism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40, 2 (2005), n.1–2.

even resistance'.[70] However, what remains central to these most recent accounts is the importance of dwelling as the site where cultural, social and political issues were played out.[71] This was particularly strongly felt from the mid-1950s onwards when new American models of domesticity were regularly circulated within journals such as *Domus*.[72] Italy's own complex response to this question has to be situated in a broader context that also takes into account its own histories of modernism and design as they were negotiated throughout the 1960s both nationally and internationally—that is in ways that not only address how Americanisation was adopted and resisted in Italy but also how the image of Italian design was exported internationally, including to the US. Whilst it is not within the scope of this project to trace those transformations within Italian architectural practice and design, it ought to be noted that, within this narrative, the issue of living space was arguably most famously articulated—on an occasion that saw Italy exported to the US—in MoMA's 1972 landmark exhibition, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*.[73]

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[70] *Ibid*., p.317.

[71] *Ibid*.

[72] *Ibid*., pp.324–26 and footnote 24.

[73] On the history of Italian design and architectural practice see: Penny Sparke, *Italian Design: 1870 to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988); Penny Sparke, 'Nature, Craft, Domesticity, and the Culture of Consumption: The Feminine Face of Design in Italy, 1945–70', *Modern Italy*, 4, 1 (1999), pp.59–78; Scrivano, *op. cit*., (note 69). For a discussion of the significance of design for Alighiero Boetti see Mark Godfrey, *Alighiero e Boetti* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011), chap.1. For an overview of the exhibition, see the accompanying catalogue: Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.), *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape Achievements and Problems of Italian Design* (New York: Distributed by New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Conn., 1972). For informative accounts of the exhibition see Felicity Dale Elliston Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2007), ch. 5. Scott explains in the previous chapter that this was part of a wider programme initiated by Emilio Ambasz 'to launch MoMA as a

A vast project organised into two parts, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* included eleven environments specially commissioned for the exhibition and 180 objects documenting changing approaches to object design over the course of the 1960s (the responses were perhaps rather unproblematically categorised under the following groups: conformist, reformist and contestatory).[74] Importantly, it was here that 'radical design', the term coined by Germano Celant in the 1960s, was officially recognised. Italy was offered as a 'micro-model', or testing ground, for an American audience encapsulating the critical problems that faced contemporary design at the time. Of particular concern was the need to challenge how design functioned in an affluent society. The contributions to the environment section responded to a call to design a form of contemporary living, whether situated in permanent or in mobile homes. These included a range of approaches calling for the re-articulation of living space, from those demanding social and political change to those committed to design as a way of effecting such change. The distinctions between these two were, however, often difficult to tell apart particularly as the brief only served to further problematise the relationship between design and industry.

Each of the eleven environments of *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* reimagined the domestic space in ways that took into account ecological,

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protagonist in contemporary debates on environment' through a series of projects and exhibitions including this one, see chapter 4, pp.89–90. Jane Pavitt, 'The Future Is Possibly Past, The Anxious Spaces of Gaetano Pesce', in Robin Schuldenfrei (ed.), *Atomic Dwelling: Anxiety, Domesticity, and Postwar Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp.30–31; Andrea Branzi, *The Hot House: Italian New Wave Design* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984); Alex Coles and Catharine Rossi, *EP Vol. 1–The Italian Avant-Garde: 1968–1976* (Sternberg Press, 2013).

[74] Pavitt explains that the display included a 'complex typology of recent objects and prototypes, as well as a set of specially commissioned environments, accompanied by films and other textual layers of explication.' Pavitt, *op. cit.* (note 73), p.30.

psychological and material aspects of life and work. What has emerged in recent scholarship is the rather ambiguous relationship at that time between the utopianism of radical architecture and the simultaneous reliance on industry and commodity production in the proposals exhibited.[75] Whilst this landmark exhibition and the issues that emerged around it have of course been historicised within post-war narratives of architecture and design, these concerns around living space were, I argue, also live within artistic practice in Italy, though they have received comparatively less attention.[76] This project explores how these issues were negotiated on the site of sculpture in Italy around the mid-1960s at the very same time that sculpture was increasingly understood in terms of a habitable space.

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There have been many noteworthy developments in the literature over the last decade that have addressed the complexity and diversity of artistic production in Italy.[77] Among the most significant, the discussion of the spatial landscape of Arte Povera, as this has been developed by Robert Lumley and Karen Pinkus, has been crucial to my own thinking. Lumley has explored this question extensively and in ways that have considered a range of issues from a geographical perspective that takes into account competing cultural centres, right through to an assessment of the new generation of galleries and artist run spaces

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[75] Coles and Rossi, *op. cit.* (note 73).

[76] *Ibid.*

[77] See for example the special issue published in *October* on post-war Italian art: *October*, Spring 2008, issue 124; see also G. Guercio and A. Mattirolo (eds), *Il Confine Evanescente. Arte Italiana 1960–2000* (Milan; Rome: Mondadori Electa, 2010).

that emerged in this period.[78] In the catalogue essay for *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972*, Lumley is interested in the relationship between these geographical centres (for example the Rome–Turin axis) but also the way that the new sites such as the Deposito D'Arte Presente in Turin or experimental events such as *Arte Povera + Azioni Povere* held at Amalfi in 1968 helped to redefine the landscape of artistic production. Significantly, he considers the kinds of relationships that such spaces helped foster, not only between artists, critics, and gallerists, but also as this related to the work of art.[79]

Karen Pinkus has also explored the spaces of Arte Povera paying particular attention to the urban environment and the modern experience of the city.[80] In her contribution to *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972* she begins by considering the legacy of fascist architecture as it haunts post-war Rome in Antonioni's film *L'Eclisse*, observing the palpable feeling of malaise in the scene featuring Monica Vitti (Vittoria) as she walks through the streets of the desolate fascist era housing project, EUR (Universal Exhibition of Rome).[81] In this way, Pinkus goes on to examine the new culture of the road and the political protests

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[78] Robert Lumley, 'Arte Povera in Turin: The Intriguing Case of the Deposito D'Arte Presente', *Marcello Levi: Portrait of the Collector* (Turin: Hopefulmonster, 2005), pp.89–107; Robert Lumley, '"Una Città strana, metafisica": L'Arte Povera e la Torino di Alighiero Boetti, Germano Celant e del Deposito D'Arte Presente', in Luca Massimo Barbero (ed.), *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2010), pp.493–527; Lumley, 'Arte Povera in Turin: The Intriguing Case of the Deposito D'Arte Presente', *op. cit.*; Robert Lumley, 'The Spaces of Arte Povera', in Tate Modern (Gallery) and Walker Art Center (eds), *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 2001).

[79] Lumley, 'The Spaces of Arte Povera', *op. cit.* (note 78).

[80] For an interesting engagement with the way that artists explored the idea of nature and the artisanal within an urban context see Nicholas Cullinan, 'La Ricostruzione della Natura: gli Imperativi Artigianali e Rurali dell'Arte Povera', in Germano Celant (ed.), *Arte povera 2011* (Milan: Electa, 2011), pp.62–75.

[81] On this subject see also discussion above, o*p. cit.* (note 9).

that took place in Turin throughout the 1960s to think of the different ways in which the city could be navigated through walking, driving or marching. In ways that chime with the idea of the spaces of protest, or occupied space, implied by Pinkus's reference to marching in the street, a crucial development within the field came with a recent contribution by Lumley, 'Sit in: Art, Design and Politics in Italy in the 1960s' which considered the politics of domesticity specifically as this related to the circuits of design.[82]

These contributions have been central to my thinking and here I want to extend these concerns with space to the idea of living space particularly as it is imagined in relation to the home, thereby echoing many of the themes recently proposed by Lumley.[83] The scholarship of recent years has done much to challenge and add texture to the standard narratives and I want to further challenge those accounts by considering a group of artists and critics whose practice has continued to be marginalised even in more recent scholarship. I do not want merely to reclaim a place for them here but I want to explore the way in which these artists might offer further challenges to those standard readings. This involves examining how these artists might offer an imaginative and innovative engagement with, as well as work against the grain of, the rhetoric around art making at this moment.

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[82] The paper by Robert Lumley titled 'Sit in: Art, Design and Politics in Italy in the 1960s' was delivered at the third interdisciplinary Italy workshop titled 'Interdisplinary Postmodernism: Re-Thinking the Sixties' held at University College London on Saturday 11th May, 2013 http://interdisciplinaryitaly.com.

[83] If these contributions have done much to challenge the standard accounts, an examination of artist's involvement with film, performance and fashion in this period might further press those narratives.

I will also be drawing on Nicholas Cullinan's research on the political implications that emerge out of Arte Povera's appropriation of particular historical references.[84] Cullinan has done much to restore a political dimension to this moment of artistic practice following the subsequent whitewashing of its politics at the hands of Celant when the movement was re-launched in the 1980s.[85] In his article 'From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam, The Politics of Arte Povera', Cullinan insists on what he describes as an inextricable link between Arte Povera and Italy's political background at this moment. In addition to the internal politics of the group, Cullinan is interested in examining the way in which artists associated with Arte Povera engaged with the twofold political agendas of American imperialism in the art world *and* on foreign soil.[86] These key contributions have begun to take into account the politics of Arte Povera in important ways.[87] Whilst I owe much to these accounts, my own project departs from the lines of enquiry outlined above in its exploration of the relatively

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[84] Nicholas Cullinan, 'Past Imperfect Arte Povera in Italy, 1963–1972'(PhD Thesis: Courtauld Institute of Art, 2010); for an analysis of the political implications of the term povertà (poverty) see Rosalind Krauss, 'Giovanni Anselmo: Matter and Monochrome', *October*, 124 (2008), pp.125–36.

[85] Cullinan, 'Past Imperfect Arte Povera in Italy, 1963–1972', *op. cit.* (note 84); Cullinan, 'From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam', *op. cit.* (note 64); for an overview of the way that Germano Celant came to define the term arte povera particularly in relation to the political unrest of the years 1967–68 see Galimberti, *op. cit.* (note 64), esp. pp.2, 4–7; Lumley, 'Michelangelo Pistoletto: Stepping Sideways, Changing Direction', *op. cit.* (note 11).

[86] Cullinan, 'From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam', *op. cit.* (note 64), p.11.

[87] Christopher G. Bennett, 'Substantive Thoughts? The Early Work of Alighiero Boetti', *October*, 124 (2008), pp.75–97; see also Claire Gilman, 'Pistoletto's Staged Subjects', *October*, 124 (2008), pp.53–74; Jaimey Hamilton, 'Making Art Matter: Alberto Burri's Sacchi', *October*, 124 (2008), pp.31–52; Krauss, *op. cit.*, (note 77); Jaleh Mansoor, 'Fontana's Atomic Age Abstraction: The Spatial Concepts and the Television Manifesto', *October*, 124 (2008), pp.137–56 and Dieter Schwarz, 'The Irony of Marisa Merz', *October*, 124 (2008), pp.157–68.

overlooked politics of domesticity in this period, specifically as it relates to the gendering of space and to the question of subjectivity.[88]

There is a vast literature addressing feminist artistic practices in the 1960s and 1970s specifically as this relates to the frequently troubled politics of domesticity and the gendering of homemaking.[89] These accounts foregrounding the challenges posed by feminist artists to the position of craft-based practices within modernism and the role of women in the home do not need retelling here.[90] What is worth noting is that these issues have remained relatively unexplored in the literature on artistic practice in Italy in the 1960s.[91] This thesis

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[88] I use the term politics of domesticity to encompass the way that the meaning of domesticity is produced, defined, maintained and challenged. These issues have been central to the way that the relationship between domesticity and domestic femininity has been addressed within feminism. Within the scope of this thesis I refer to the politics of domesticity to examine the way the artists under consideration have engaged with these themes through their practice. Also on this subject see the special issue dedicated to this subject: Katy Deepwell (ed.), 'Domestic Politics', *N.paradoxa: International Feminist Art Journal*, 13 (2004). See also Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows, *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture* (Taylor & Francis, 2008); Joanne Hollows, *Domestic Cultures* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008).

[89] This is particularly the case for the literature addressing feminist practices in the US. For some of the more interesting contributions see Norma Broude et al., *The Power of Feminist Art the American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994); Colomina and Bloomer, *op. cit.* (note 7); Cornelia H Butler et al., *Wack!: Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007); Mira Schor, *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

[90] Not least because they have been recently articulated so eloquently by Perry *op. cit.* (note 30); see also Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, new ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010); see also Helen Anne Molesworth et al., *op. cit.* (note 65); Molesworth, *op. cit.* (note 65).

[91] Lea Vergine's important contribution to the Italian-language scholarship is an exception. It is however, limited to the role of women within the historic avant-garde rather than the post-war period under examination. See Lea Vergine, *L' Arte Ritrovata Alla Ricerca Dell'altra Metà Dell'avanguardia* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1982); for an important feminist perspective within artistic debates in the early 1970s see Anne Marie Sauzeau-Boetti, 'L'Altra Creatività', *Data*, 16/17 (1975), pp.54–59; Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art', *Studio*

is motivated by the need to address this under-examined issue within the narratives of post-war Italian art. I want to do this by considering the social and psychic interrogation of home in the work of a range of artists committed in different ways to the politics of domesticity. Whilst I do not engage in depth with the second wave feminist movement as it emerged in Italy in the latter half of the 1960s and 1970s, I do want to consider how the questions around subjectivity that would become so central to that movement were articulated by the selected artists and critics, at times even ambivalently, on the site of their work. These issues are particularly important with regard to the practice of Accardi and Merz. Both these artists describe their work in terms that identify with the largely repetitive roles traditionally associated with female labour. I want to explore how the practice of both these artists might suggest ways in which repetition might be experienced other than as a by-product of mass production.[92] I also ask how the work ethic that underpins their practice might speak against the grain of utopian thinking around leisure, marked by a refusal to work.[93]

The first chapter considers a body of temporary shelters made by Rome-based artist Carla Accardi, between 1965 and 1972. Although rarely shown together, a drawing from 1972 and a group of small maquettes exhibited in 1968

International, 191, 979 (1976), pp.24–30; Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *Data*, 18 (1975), pp.50–55.

[92] For a rethinking of the narratives of post-war art in these terms see Helen Anne Molesworth and Wexner Center for the Arts, *op. cit.* (note 65).

[93] The refusal to work was particularly important for the worker movement in Italy. For a history of the worker movement in the 1960s as it relates to this subject see: Berardi, *op. cit.* (note 38); on this subject see also Agenore Fabbri, *Tempo Libero Tempo di Vita: Note, Studi, Disegni sulla Preparazione della 13 Triennale* (Milan: Tredicesima Triennale di Milano, 1964); Marco Biraghi, *Italia 60/70: una Stagione dell'Architettura* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2010); Paola Nicolin, *Castelli di Carte: la XIV Triennale di Milano, 1968* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2011).

suggest that Accardi had envisaged these temporary habitable structures figuring together in a community. I begin with these works precisely because they resonate so strongly with the utopian thinking of the 1960s as it was underpinned by a rhetoric of alternative living and the popular anti-consumerist image of a life lived free of possessions. Accardi's dwellings relate to the larger tendency to look to other social models and structures as alternative forms of existence.[94] They bear obvious affinities with the emerging discourse on nomadism, the legacy of Buckminster Fuller's dome culture, the anti-modernist rhetoric of the International Movement for an Imagist Bauhaus and the inflatable, lightweight, and adaptable structures that animate so much of 1960s architectural practice.[95] In this context, Accardi's *Tenda* has even been described as a prototype for many of the temporary structures made by artists associated with Arte Povera throughout the sixties.[96] Such narratives have not, however, taken Accardi's innovative way of working into account. Additionally, Accardi's own statements chime with the utopian rhetoric of the counterculture movement. Her *Tenda* at once points to the counterculture phenonmenon, widely known in Italy as the Beats. The term was adopted from the American Beatniks and used indiscriminately to characterise both the mass phenomenon as well as the more

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[94] On this subject see Felicity Scott, 'Bernard Rudofsky: Allegories of Nomadism and Dwelling', in Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault (eds), *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture* (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2000), pp.215–238; See also Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia*, *op. cit.* (note 73).

[95] On this subject see Marc Dessauce and Architectural League of New York, *The Inflatable Moment: Pneumatics and Protest in 1968* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999); Tom McDonough, 'Campo Nomadi: Constant's Design for a Gypsy Camp' (Venice, 2013); Tom McDonough, 'Metastructure: Experimental Utopia and Traumatic Memory in Constant's New Babylon', *Grey Room*, 33 (2008), pp.84–95.

[96] Christov-Bakargiev, *op. cit.* (note 28).

utopian-minded impulse to establish alternative communities such as the short-lived though well-documented attempt to establish a multitude of *tende* in 1966 in what came to be known as *Tendopolis* in the outskirts of Milan.[97]

To what extent, then, do the twin concerns with living differently and being contemporary overlap for Accardi? Chapter One asks how Accardi's proposal for an alternative way of living could be premised on a way of seeing differently. It considers how the rhetoric of alternative existence could be appropriated and made to speak to feminist concerns but it also interrogates in what ways it could signal a radical transformation of art making.

In the second and third chapters, I look in turn at the sculptural practice of artists Marisa Merz and Piero Gilardi in relation to the everyday lived experience of home. Chapter Two considers this question in relation to the material and psychic challenges posed by Turin-based artist Merz to the gendering of homemaking. From the mid-1960s onwards, Merz began to incorporate a range of knitting techniques into her practice, often applying these techniques with threads made of unusual materials such as nylon and copper wire. In an interview from 1966, the artist similarly described the technique used to make *Untitled*

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[97] The Beat generation were also referred to by the following terms: 'Controcultura' (Counterculture), 'Hippie', Beatniks, 'Capelloni' (the Italian word for hippie which refers to hair length). For an in depth study of the alternative community, *Tendopolis* and the negative reception it received in the Italian press see Gianni De Martino, *Capelloni & Ninfette: Mondo Beat, 1966–1967* (Milan: Costa & Nolan, 2008); Luciano Ceri and Ernesto De Pascale, *Mondo Beat: Musica e Costume nell'Italia Degli Anni Sessanta*, 1. ed. (Bologna: Fuori thema, 1993); for an overview of underground movement from the perspective of some of the key protagonists see Matteo Guarnaccia, *Underground Italiana: gli Anni Gioiosamente Ribelli della Controcultura* (Milan: Shake, 2011); Beatrice Barbalato, *La Controcultura Tra Radicalismo E Integrazione. Società Di Massa E Fenomeni Alternativi* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1974); Silvia Casilio, *Una Generazione d'Emergenza: l'Italia della Controcultura, 1965–1969*, 1. ed. le monnier univerisità (Florence: Le Monnier, 2013).

(*Living Sculpture*) (1966) in terms of embroidery. This echoes the way in which the artist's practice has conventionally been read in terms of an extension of homemaking, which in turn has underpinned the marginal position ascribed to her in narratives of the post-war period.

In response to these accounts that have tended to collapse Merz's practice onto a feminised identity limited by domestic roles, I offer an alternative reading of *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*). Firstly, I want to interrogate how *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) as it was installed in the artist's home might both mediate and challenge an everyday lived experience of home. Secondly, I want to ask to what extent Merz's practice might speak to experimental practices in Turin at this moment in the mid-1960s in sites specifically intended to challenge modes of viewing and experiencing art. For this, Alex Potts's *The Sculptural Imagination* has been an important point of departure for my own thinking about the different stagings of *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*), particularly in terms of the ways that these shape the sculptural encounter.[98] Merz's sculptural practice strikingly transforms the materials and techniques she adopts and I explore the different range of contexts in which the sculpture was shown in 1967 to ask how each iteration of the work offered different possibilities of the sculptural encounter.

As discussed above, when Celant published his article, 'Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War', he emphasised the references made by artists to the everyday as a way of bringing art into life. However his notion of the everyday does not take into account how Merz's practice might engage with the domestic and the roles associated with homemaking in ways that challenge the status quo

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[98] Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

in the manner demanded by Celant. Merz transforms our expectations of the

objects that can be made from such practices, which refuse to be fixed, and in

doing so resist any straightforward categorisations. Instead I want to consider to

what extent Gilardi's alternative model of the 'microemotive' might offer a way

of conceiving of Merz's practice in terms that accommodate her own experience

of motherhood. Merz's statements about her practice as intertwined with her

experience as a mother suggests a way in which the psychic colours the lived

experience of the everyday, vividly evoking the tensions between work- and

home-life, and perhaps best countering the notion that living space stands in

distinction to the spaces of work.[99] These are tensions that the artist only

fleetingly evokes but that are visible in the cumulative and broadly serial

character of her work and in the way *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) comes to

occupy the space in which it is made. Through the process of making *Untitled,*

Merz's own living space becomes ever compromised. This is work that threatens

to obliterate the space in which it was created. It points to an experience of

claustrophobia and suffocation as much as it registers the time spent caring for

her daughter, Beatrice Merz. Viewed in these terms, Merz's *Untitled* (*Living*

Sculpture) offers an innovative response to Celant's call to unite these two levels

of existence of 'art' and 'life'.

The third chapter examines the materials and technology that underpin

Gilardi's *Tappeti Natura* (Nature Carpets) to ask in what ways the home might

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[99] I am referring here specifically to the way in which Walter Benjamin in 1935 characterised the 'place of dwelling' as 'for the first time opposed to the place of work' see Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press, 1999), p.8; on this subject see also Beatriz Colomina, 'The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism' in Colomina and Bloomer, *op. cit.* (note 7), pp.79–80; Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.145.

be understood in ecological terms. These lurid and emphatically synthetic polyurethane rugs take their visual cue from the natural world at the same time as they register the shifts within sculptural practice both toward a poetics of softness and environmental sculpture. Gilardi famously spoke of these works as intended for use in the home. The artist's choice of material, associated as it was with the padding in furniture, seems to want to evoke that world of design. Gilardi's practice plays with these associations, and in statements about these works he even mimics the vocabulary of advertising. I want to look here at the way in which he interrogates the materiality of the domestic landscape, particularly as this came to be increasingly defined by synthetic materials and in relation to the circuits of commodity production. Gilardi offers his synthetic ecology in ways that anticipate how these issues would be taken up by artistic and architectural practice in subsequent decades.[100] Here, I explore what it meant for Gilardi to be making these artificial habitats for the home, to be referencing the natural world with the kinds of materials that had already replaced it. The practice of all three artists examined in the first three chapters highlight how the interrogation of these problems on the site of sculptural practice is both complex and contradictory.

The final chapter marks a departure from the previous three by turning to the practice of art critic Carla Lonzi. Published in 1969, Lonzi's work *Autoritratto* collates the interviews recorded by the critic throughout the 1960s with fourteen prominent Italian artists. *Autoritratto* is an experimental project which itself broke down the strict boundaries between practice and criticism,

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[100] For a recent contribution on the politics of ecology see T.J. Demos, 'Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology', *Third Text*, 27, 1 (2013), pp.1–9.

'living' out the lives of the artists included in its pages. The book compiles the interviews held between Lonzi and prominent Italian artists throughout the 1960s (before the critic abandoned the circuits of art to become a feminist activist). These interviews are woven together in such a way as to resemble a single conversation held between all the artists together at a single moment. Lonzi had spoken about *Autoritratto* in terms of a fictional community that registered the feeling of coexistence that she had felt at the time. In the fourth chapter, I consider the way in which images and text function in *Autoritratto* in such a way as to create a domestic setting in which to record the texture of everyday lived experience.

The scholarship around *Autoritratto* has highlighted how it had come to represent an entirely new way of performing art criticism. In response to this text, I want to consider how identity might be differently and contradictorily constructed through this project whose title alludes to self-portraiture. *Autoritratto* is underpinned by the assumption that there is such a thing as unmediated experience which is played out by Lonzi with what, at the time, was the innovative use of a reel-to-reel recorder. In this chapter, I explore the role that technology comes to play in such a construction, to ask whose self-portrait *Autorittrato* becomes. I want to ask what made it possible for *Autoritratto* to be written in such a way as to register the intimacy of home and the proximity of friends and family. In this final chapter, I explore the shifts that had taken place within artistic practice in Italy throughout the 1960s that made it appropriate for *Autoritratto* to be structured in this way at all. *Autoritratto* offers an innovative way of thinking about how the concept of living and the spaces of lived experience come to structure artistic practice, as well as shape art criticism at this

moment. I argue for an extended notion of the domestic (to include social relations) and here I consider how the home becomes the *mise-en-scène* within which Lonzi projects a utopian vision of an artistic community.

CHAPTER ONE

Living Differently, Seeing Differently: Carla Accardi's Temporary Structures

1965–1972

A home is not a house:

In a series of photographs (figure 1.1 and 1.2) taken in the countryside around

Alba in 1965, Carla Accardi, tongue in cheek, assumes a pose that unmistakably

refers to a shelter of sorts. Leaning forward she holds her jacket above her head

with outstretched arms.[1] These photographs were taken at a time when Accardi

was making *Tenda* (1965–1966), a work that has since been claimed as the first

art environment to have been made in Italy.[2] The artist appears to be aware of,

and keen to perpetuate, this version of events, as when she recounts: 'Kounellis

said that there was a discussion about whether [Mario] Ceroli's Cassa Sistina or

my tent was made first and he said: "first came Carla's tent."'[3] Accardi went on

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[1] The photographs are reproduced in Carla Accardi, *Carla Accardi: Musee d'art Moderne de la ville de Paris, 17 janvier–3 mars 2002* (Paris: Paris Musées, 2002), p.33 and Luca Massimo Barbero, *Carla Accardi: segno e trasparenza* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milano: Silvana, 2011), p.22

[2] In an interview with Accardi, Laura Cherubini, notes, 'to return to the small tent, this work is interesting because I think, at least as far as I am aware, it is the first environment work in Italy'. Carla Accardi, *Carla Accardi: Opere 1947–1997* (Milan: Charta, 1998), p.33. This account omits obvious precedents in the history of environment art in Italy, as for example Lucio Fontana's exhibition featuring *Ambiente Spaziale* at the Galleria del Naviglio 1948–49. For an important contribution to the scholarship on environment art which also includes Italy in the discussion see the special issue on art and architecture in *Studio International* 190, no. 977 (October 1975), in particular see Germano Celant, 'Art Spaces', p.123. See also Celant, *Ambiente/Arte dal Futurismo alla Body Art*, (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1976). Accardi was invited to include *Tenda* at the Venice Biennale of 1976 where Celant incorporates it into a broader narrative of environment art in the twentieth century.

[3] My translation of 'Kounellis testimoniò che ci fu una discussione se fosse state fatta prima la

to make three further environments, a total of four by 1972: *Tenda* (Tent) (1965–6) (figure 1.3); *Ambiente Arancio* (Orange Environment) (1966–8) (figure 1.4), *Triplice Tenda* (Triple Tent) (1969–71) (figure 1.5) and *Cilindrocono* (Cylindercone) (1972) (figure 1.6).[4] Together, they mark a striking phase in the artist's practice that registers a shift into three dimensions. And since *Tenda* was first shown at the Galleria Notizie in Turin in 1966, Accardi's environments have regularly featured in both solo and group shows (though rarely all together).[5] If, at first blush, they appear as a heterogeneous body of works—a tent, a yurt, a large cylinder and an installation comprising what Accardi described as 'nearly the contents of a room'[6]—they are all made from the same transparent Sicofoil material, a derivative of acetate. Crucially, the artist has consistently spoken of these works together in terms of offering another way of living. Summing up her practice in 1972, Accardi explained:

> The objects that I made recently are, broadly speaking, tents […] [they] hold a certain fascination for me; they interest me because they represent a way of living [that is] symbolically different—[a] life lived in the open, in contact with nature, with air and light, free and without the

mia tenda o *la Cassa Sistina* di Ceroli e lui disse: "Viene prima la tenda di Carla".' *Ibid.*, p.33.

[4] *Cilindrocono* is the smallest of this group of works, measuring only 120cm x 130cm, it is uninhabitable. For this reason, I have chosen to omit it from my discussion.

[5] In 1966 *Tenda* was shown in three exhibitions. These included *Carla Accardi* at the Galleria Notizie, Turin in May; *Carla Accardi* at Galerie M.E. Thelen, Essen, from 16th September to 31st October; *Accardi* at Galleria dell'Ariete in Milan from 15th November. The catalogue for the exhibition held at Essen describes *Tenda* in the following way: 'the most recent works in transparent plastic are spatial structures. The artist abandons surface, as it is tied to images, to concentrate on a new engagement with space that is reminiscent of the young…Americans making environments.' See Accardi, *Carla Accardi*, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.34.

[6] Danilo Eccher (ed.), *Carla Accardi* (Rome: MACRO, 2004), p.145.

superstructures of civilisation.[7]

In a recent interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Accardi reiterates this when she recounts that 'behind' *Ambiente Arancio* 'was the drive to push one towards something unknown that could become a different kind of living.'[8]

It is of course hardly surprising that she should couch her environments in these terms. The desire to live differently chimes with this moment of their making, capturing the imagination of an entire mid-sixties generation.[9] Although Accardi's statements are largely rhetorical (after all, she hardly offers a comprehensive blueprint for an alternative existence), I want to take these comments seriously and ask how this utopian thinking might play out on the site of the work. I begin with *Tenda* because it encapsulates the very logic behind this project. Perhaps most obviously, it reformulates any question of home or domesticity into one about living differently. This is the lens through which I want to examine the artistic practice of a number of artists working in Italy from the mid-sixties onwards who engage in diverse ways with a politics of domesticity. But rather than simply dismissing the kinds of statements made by Accardi as merely rhetorical, I want to ask what made it possible to think in these

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[7] My translation of 'gli oggetti che ho fatto recentemente sono essenzialmente delle tende, larghe abbastanza per contenere una o più persone… le tende hanno un fascino particolare, per me; mi interessano perchè rappresentatono un modo di vivere simbolicamente diverso, vita all'aperto, a contatto con la natura, con aria e luce, libera e senza le sovrastrutture della civilizzazione.' See Maurizio Vallarino, 'Luminous marks', in *Art and Artists*, June 1972, p.33. This passage is also quoted in Carla Accardi, *Carla Accardi*. (Milan: Charta, 1995), p.358.

[8] Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Carla Accardi, To Dig Deep', *Flash Art (International Edition)* (June 2008), p.98.

[9] Felicity Dale Elliston Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2007), p.1.

terms at all—and to ask it in such a way as to take into account the contradictions that inevitably emerge.

One such contradiction is Accardi's own attitude to the idea of home or domesticity. When, for example, the curator Laura Cherubini interviews the artist she poses the question in this way: 'so the idea came to you to be your own architect […] the form is that of a house, there is the idea of habitation.'[10] Elsewhere Carla Lonzi has described *Tenda* as a cabin ('la forma è di abitacola').[11] These connotations are unsurprising. What is more unusual, however, is the ambivalence with which Accardi responds to such allusions. Accardi replies to Cherubini by describing *Tenda* as 'the simplest idea of home.'[12] *Tenda* also has the secondary meaning of curtain, which literally evokes the idea of homemaking and connects the work to a broader conception of textile as the first architecture put forward by Gottfried Semper in the nineteenth century.[13] This interest in dwelling has continued to inform the artist's practice,

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[10] My translation of 'ti è venuta quindi l'idea di farti la tua architettura. La forma è quella di una casa, c'è l'idea dell'abitare'. Celant explains it in the following way; 'the sculptural modalities have come to include the relationship with architecture and design, in order to render her art functionally and concretely habitable.' See Laura Cherubini in conversation with Carla Accardi in Accardi, *Carla Accardi*, *op. cit*. (note 2), pp.33, 34; Germano Celant and Carla Accardi, *Carla Accardi* (Milan: Charta, 1999), p.25.

[11] Carla Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *Marcatré*, 23–5, June (1966), p.193; the interview is republished in Carla Lonzi, *Scritti sull'Arte* (Milan: Et Al., 2012), pp.471–483.

[12] Accardi, *Carla Accardi*, *op. cit*. (note 2), p.34.

[13] This emphasis on textile appears in Semper's analysis of the *enclosure* as an architectural element and within a broader discussion of polychromy in architecture. Semper claims the importance of textiles for the origins of art and architecture when, in his summary of the literature on the subject, he writes: 'they overlook the more general and less dubious influence that the carpet in its capacity as a wall, as a vertical means of protection, had on the evolution of certain architectural forms […] the carpets remained the original means of separating space. Even where building solid walls became necessary, the latter were only the inner, invisible structure hidden behind the true and legitimate representatives of the wall, the colourful woven carpets.'

which in recent years has included works that directly reference such spaces and the furniture traditionally found there, for example *Casa Labirinto* (Labyrinth House) (1999–2000), *Armadio inutile* (Useless Wardrobe) (2001), and *Armadio Arancio* (Orange Wardrobe) (2004). But with reference to the environments she began making in the 1960s, she had also proclaimed: 'tear down walls … I can't stand houses'.[14] More recently, she has restated this, describing a dislike for the modern home of that time which she found to be 'ugly' and 'heavy', as she put it, further explaining: 'I had been an admirer of the Bauhaus, but I saw that people lived in houses that were tacky'.[15] One is a clear reference to home; the other is a rejection of its traditional structure and its fixed elements, and particularly its contemporary form.

These statements constitute the poles around which I want to frame this group of works made by the artist in the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s. By reading the artist's statements against the environment works she made, I want to ask both what made it possible, necessary even, to speak in these terms of alternative existence but also how this rhetoric might function negatively, as an indication of what was at stake for Accardi. Frederic Jameson said it better in his response to the view that any utopianism could only ever be 'hostage to our own mode of production'.[16] He answers that: 'the best Utopia can serve the

Hanno-Walter Kruft, *A History of Architectural Theory: From Vitruvius to the Present / Hanno-Walter Kruft; Translated by Ronald Taylor, Elsie Callander and Antony Wood* (London: Zwemmer, 1994), p.312–314; Gottfried Semper and Harry Francis Mallgrave, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.103–4.

[14] My translation of 'dynamitant les murs fixes [...] Je ne supporte pas les maisons' in Michèle Causse and Maryvonne Lapouge, *Écrits, Voix d'Italie* (Paris: Des femmes, 1977), p.393.

[15] Obrist, *op. cit.* (note 8), p.98.

[16] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science*

negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment; and […] therefore the best Utopias are those that fail most comprehensively.'[17] Whilst it is not my intention to account for the success or failure of Accardi's utopianism of living differently, I do want to think about how the artist negotiates living space (both imaginary or visionary, as well as everyday) in this body of work.

The rhetoric of alternative existence at this moment is perhaps best encapsulated by the iconic image of the commune, or the intentional community, as this has been called, and enshrined in the form of the nomadic shelter.[18] While communal societies have a long history extending beyond the period under consideration, the moment when Accardi began to make her temporary structures has been described by commentators as one gripped by 'communal fever'.[19] Accardi would evoke this idea of communal living on a number of occasions in her work. For her exhibition in 1968 at the Marlborough Galleria d'Arte in Rome, she made a series of small maquettes of her environments that were shown in the corner of the room and on the floor (figure 1.7).[20] These models are no longer extant, but they anticipate the realisation of *Triplice Tenda*, which

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Fictions, [2nd ed.] (London: Verso, 2007), p.xiii.

[17] *Ibid*.

[18] *Ibid*., p.3.

[19] Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p.xiii.

[20] Referring to the placement of these works, Accardi writes; 'in the same exhibition as the tent, I had put the miniature tents on the floor, at the last minute, almost hidden.' See Anne-marie Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *Data*, 18 (1975), p.51.

Accardi began making only a few years later.[21] A further drawing by Accardi from 1970 also suggests that her temporary shelters were conceived (or at least subsequently imagined) as a body of work (figure 1.8). This work offers a vision of a pre-industrial community, a sparse landscape in which *Tenda*, *Triplice Tenda*, and *Cilindrocono* might all feature.[22] Perhaps the point here is that this drawing comes to stand for an archetypal community, one of so many that were formed throughout this period, and which together have come to stand as a symbol of protest and resistance against what was viewed as the dominant form of society—or at the very least an expression of dissatisfaction with the status quo.[23] Italy would take its cue from the American Beatniks, with an underground press and diverse communities appearing throughout the country.[24] Perhaps one

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[21] For an interesting discussion of the significance of the scaled-down home in contemporary artistic practice see Gill Perry, *Playing at Home: House in Contemporary Art*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), ch. 2.

[22] A further rectangular space, constructed perhaps to house *Ambiente Arancio*, appears in the background of this image. The drawing is reproduced in Corrado Levi, 'Carla Accardi', in Corrado Levi (ed.), *Una Diversa Tradizione* (Milan: Clup, 1985), pp.139–159.

[23] Already by 1966, Herbert Marcuse had offered a less generous analysis of these alternatives when he writes: 'there is a great deal of 'worship together week,' 'why not try God,' Zen, existentialism, and beat ways of life, etc. But such modes of protest and transcendence are no longer negative. They are rather the ceremonial part of practical behaviourism, its harmless negation, and are quickly digested by the status quo as part of its healthy diet.' See Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p.14.

[24] Gianni De Martino's study of the underground press of *Mondo Beat* based in viale Monte Nero in Milan provides a detailed overview of the beat generation and its reception as it took shape in that city whilst the publication was in circulation between 1966–67. This includes an overview of the different groups, as well as spin-offs of the beat movement that emerged in this period. De Martino also distinguishes between what might be understood as a more commercially defined beat movement (through music and fashion) with the more serious-minded beats that were much closer to the American beatniks, the 'angeli fottuti' as they came to be known and whose writings became available in Italy in the 1960s; see Gianni De Martino, *Capelloni & Ninfette: Mondo Beat, 1966–1967* (Milan: Costa & Nolan, 2008), p.8, 9, 13; for an overview of the journals and

of the most famous of these communes closely connected to Mondo Beat, the first journal founded by the underground press in Milan in 1966, would be the scandal of the short-lived tent city, *Tendopolis* or 'New Barbonia' (as it came to be called by the hostile press) of via Ripamonti in the outskirts of the city in 1967 (figure 1.9).[25]

During this time, a familiar utopian call was for a life lived free of possessions. This impulse would be rearticulated in subsequent years within architectural practice. Consider the way in which the radical Florentine architectural group Superstudio spoke about their practice in terms of an escape from the world of consumable objects: 'it became very clear,' they wrote, 'that to continue to design furniture, objects and similar household decoration was no solution to problems of living and not even to those of life.'[26] When Superstudio exhibited their work at MoMA's landmark exhibition, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, they continued to rely on this rhetoric. Their contribution to the exhibition, to quote from their catalogue statement, was intended as a 'critical reappraisal of the possibility of life without objects […] a reconsideration of the relations between the process of design and the environment through an alternative model of existence.'[27] They proposed a microenvironment within a

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publications associated with the underground press see Matteo Guarnaccia, *Underground Italiana: gli Anni Gioiosamente Ribelli della Controcultura* (Milan: Shake, 2011), pp.192–208.

[25] For an overview of the way that the commune in via Ripamonti was established and subsequently demolished see the first hand account given by De Martino in De Martino, *op. cit.* (note 24).

[26] Superstudio, 'Histograms' quoted in Peter Lang et al., *Superstudio: Life without Objects* (Milan: Skira, 2003), p.11.

[27] Museum of Modern Art, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape Achievements and Problems of Italian Design* (New York: Distributed by New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Conn., 1972), p.242.

black felt-lined room in which they created a model of a grid mounted on a platform, to be viewed through a polarised mirror cube (figure 1.10). The grid was infinitely reflected through the mirrors to create a kind of virtual space conceived as a global network that reimagined humanity's relationship to the world through a reorganisation of resources.[28]

Another utopian impulse of the 1960s, though not entirely different from that conceived by Superstudio, would come to be encapsulated in terms of a return to nature.[29] When Accardi proposes another way of living in the work *Ambiente Arancio*, she suggestively describes it as offering a more 'natural' existence.[30] Certainly, the arrangement of *Ambiente Arancio* (1966–68)—which comprises a small parasol, mattress, and cot—could be described as unfettered, but the use of industrially produced materials such as plastic might suggest that this notion of the natural is far removed from that of the naturally occurring.[31] Other artists were also concerned with similar themes at the time, such as Piero Gilardi, whose *Tappeti Natura* (*Nature Carpets*) I will go on to examine in more detail in a later chapter. Another work by Gilardi, *Igloo* (1964) (figure 1.11), explores the kind of home that might appear in a city of the future (Gilardi describes it as a housing unit). *Igloo* is made from polyurethane wrapped in

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[28] On this subject see Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (London: Wildwood House, 1974); see also Eva Díaz, 'Dome Culture in the Twenty-First Century', *Grey Room*, 42 (2011), p.86, note 12. *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* perhaps best evinces the popular techno-utopian argument of this period that technological advances would allow all goods to be readily available and free.

[29] 'Ecology and Revolutionary Thought' in Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (London: Wildwood House, 1974), p.58.

[30] Obrist, *op. cit.* (note 8).

[31] On this issue as it relates to artists such as Piero Gilardi, Giuseppe Penone and Pino Pascali see Nicholas Cullinan, 'La Ricostruzione della Natura: gli Imperativi Artigianali e Rurali dell'Arte Povera', in Germano Celant (ed.), *Arte povera 2011* (Milan: Electa, 2011), pp.62–75.

vinyl, materials that according to the artist conjured up the soft padding of mattresses and packaging, offering the natural remade (or the artificial naturalised).[32] Like *Ambiente Arancio*, Gilardi's *Igloo* seems to want to collapse a notion of nature with materials more befitting of the circuits of industrial production. Acknowledging this seeming contradiction in his practice, Gilardi suggestively explains: 'ecology was not yet widespread and there was still the myth of artificial nature'.[33] With these words Gilardi points to a continued enchantment with synthetic materials, with 'artificial nature typical of the sixties', as he puts it, in the years before the environmental movement had captured the imagination of that generation.[34] The artist seems to embrace a techno-utopia but this habitat nevertheless suggests something precarious.[35] With *Ambiente Arancio*, Accardi evinces similar contradictions about the function of technology. She suggests a conception of the natural as an attitude toward the

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[32] Gilardi explains his choice of materials in the following way: 'the principle reason for choosing […] was that it was the same material as the stuffing in mattresses, a material that provided comfort for the body. I felt a need to evoke, and to create images like those that the body could make use of in a domestic space. See Luca Massimo Barbero (ed.), 'Intervista a Piero Gilardi', *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969* (Turin: Umberto Allenmandi & C., 2010), p.280.

[33] My translation of 'L'ecologismo non era ancora diffuso e c'era il mito della natura artificiale'. Compare this view to Felicity Scott's observation that 'by the 1960s [...] faith in technological progress had increasingly given way to its dystopic counterpart. The progressive social ideals informing the techno-optimism of an earlier generation, including modern architects had been contested by evidence of modern warfare and the haunting prospect of global environmental and nuclear catastrophes.' See *Ibid*., p.278; see also Felicity Scott, 'Bernard Rudofsky: Allegories of Nomadism and Dwelling', in Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault (eds), *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture* (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2000), p.216.

[34] See Luciano Marucci, 'Piero Gilardi E Lo Spazio Virtuale', *Juliet* (1995), p.36; on this subject see also William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (New York: GBraziller, 1972), pp.viii–x.

[35] It was even described by Ettore Sottsass as a form of refuge. See Ettore Sottsass jr., 'Memoires Di Panna Montata', *Domus*, 445 (1966), p.51.

surroundings rather than as determined by its materiality but does not

acknowledge in what ways the material construction of her works might itself be

implicated in this conception.

Accardi was not alone amongst her contemporaries to draw from these

tropes and to couch her work in these terms. Experiments in this period within

architectural design would come in the form of a wide range of inflatable, tensile,

lightweight, and temporary structures.[36] Similarly, throughout the 1960s, artists

in Italy were appropriating the form of the hut or temporary shelter through

visual as well as conceptual references. When Emilio Prini was invited to

participate in *Op Losse Schroeven* in 1969 he proposed a campsite from which to

watch the Stedelijk Museum. Prini's *Camping* (Amsterdam) (1969) (figure 1.12)

reflects on the role of vision in fostering an interplay between a sense of

inclusion or exclusion. Prini surveyed the installation process of *Op Losse

Schroeven* from tents pitched in the parking lot facing the museum. Determined

by its relation to the target of observation, Prini's campsite offers an alternative

approach to the idea of site-specificity; here spatial organisation is structured

according to relations of power. And Prini is able to subvert these relations

between artist and curator; exploring the kind of influence that can be exerted

through surveillance.

Elsewhere, Mario Merz made his first temporary dwelling in 1968,

Giap's Igloo (figure 1.13): a hemispherical shelter constructed with wire mesh,

metal tubing and sandbags, a range of materials that could as easily be put to use

in an environmental or military emergency. The reference to war is further

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[36] On this subject see, for example, Marc Dessauce and Architectural League of New York, *The Inflatable Moment: Pneumatics and Protest in 1968* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).

emphasised by the neon writing running along the top of the dome, 'If the enemy concentrates, he loses ground; if he scatters, he loses force.' These words are from the guerrilla tactics of the Vietcong leader General Giap. This dictum offers both the strength and weakness of each strategic position—but not the solution. Merz offers a visual analogue to the rhetoric Celant deploys in 'Arte Povera. Notes on a Guerrilla War' (echoing Celant's strategy of 'mobility'), conjuring an image of insurgency and in doing so equating the igloo form with a vision of politics—and perhaps also conflating artist with guerrilla warrior.[37]

Tenda, which Accardi had begun making as early as 1965, predates many of these examples and has even been suggested as something of a prototype for such works by Mario Merz (figure 1.13) and Luciano Fabro (figure 1.14).[38]

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[37] Germano Celant, 'Arte Povera. Appunti per Una Guerriglia', *Flash Art*, 5 (1967), p.3. As already noted in the introduction, for an important contribution on the relationship between Arte Povera and politics see Nicholas Cullinan, 'From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam: The Politics of Arte Povera,' *October* 124 (April 1, 2008), pp. 8–30. Cullinan argues for a recuperation of the image of revolutionary politics invoked by artists associated with Arte Povera. Cullinan argues that this connection had been neutralised in the subsequent rebranding of the movement in the 1980s in response to the negative image of revolutionary politics produced in the anni di piombo. This important study came out of Cullinan's doctoral research that considered the political implications of Arte Povera's association with different historical periods see Nicholas Cullinan, 'Past Imperfect Arte Povera in Italy, 1963–1972' (Ph.D Thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2010). For the way in which the rhetoric of Guerrilla Warfare is appropriated in a discussion of mass communication see also Umberto Eco, 'Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare' in Umberto Eco, *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality* (London: Minerva, 1995) pp.135–44. Eco argues for for what he describes as a 'guerrilla solution' in order to keep mass communication in check and prevent the loss of criticality. See also Christian Rattemeyer, 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitutudes Become Form' 1969' in Christian Rattemeyer, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form', 1969* (London: Afterall, 2010), p.29.

[38] Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev writes: 'This may be the most direct precedent of the many Arte Povera works such as Mario Merz's *Igloos* and Luciano Fabro's *Habitats* that focus on place rather than an abstract notion of space, as well as on the nomadic, provisional nature of architecture and experience.' See the essay in Tate Modern (Gallery) and Walker Art Center,

Although these subsequent works do not engage with the theme of home in the same way as Accardi, this connection indicates the need to reappraise the role and concerns of artists beyond Arte Povera and more broadly within the narrative of post-war Italian art. Accardi's *Tenda*, *Ambiente Arancio* and *Triplice Tenda* all take the image of home as a starting point but they also resolutely reject sedentary dwelling. In this way, Accardi obviously speaks to the context of nomadism, a subject of renewed scholarly attention in this period.[39] The forms her environments take are a central theoretical trope in the 1960s; coinciding with a moment in which anti-architecture offered political, intellectual and material possibilities within post-war artistic practice and more broadly within a post-war Europe.[40] The artist's statements even suggest this connection with

Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972 (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 2001), p.26.

[39] As Larry Busbea explains in 1970, René Grousset's major study on nomadism *Empire of the Steppes* was reissued eliciting numerous responses from theorists who turned to the phenomenon of contemporary nomadism. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari responded specifically to Grousset's study in their chapter on nomadology. Busbea also cites Susan Sontag's 'The Anthropologist as Hero' who recognised that 'most serious thought in our time struggles with the idea of homelessness.' However, her article focuses primarily on the methodological approach of Lévi-Strauss rather than the issue of displacement. See Jacques Berque, *Nomades et Vagabonds* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975); Gilles Deleuze et al., *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 1988); Larry Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960–1970* (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT, 2007), footnote 37, p.55; Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp.69–81.

[40] This was also bound up with a discourse around space, its organisation, and the needs of the individual in relation to the demands of the collective. See for example Larry Busbea, *op. cit.* (note 39). Busbea argues that France in the 1960s could be understood as a spatial culture: the philosophical, political, economic and technological discourses developed around the need to understand and organise space and the structures that were designed as a result. Whether from the perspective of embodied experience, politics, relational structures, or as a system of oppression, philosophical debates around space were reconfigured for a consumer society. For an overview of the intellectual landscape constructed around the issue of space see also Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); for a discussion of the 'spatial turn' that occurred through postmodernism see Fredric Jameson,

nomadism, for example when she recounts that 'the fluid nature and the precariousness of these objects […] refuse any fixed definition of territory.'[41] That these temporary structures and by extension the provisional and alternative modes of existence they connote have proved fertile ground in philosophical and ideological narratives of the period is implicitly acknowledged by the artist.[42] Asked in interview whether her environments specifically engaged with the idea of nomadic existence, Accardi points to interpretations that had already been offered by Celant and Achille Bonito Oliva.[43] The reference to 'mobility' is invoked repeatedly by Celant in discussions of Accardi's environments, as when he writes: 'it is true that Tenda, the big umbrella, the bed, respond to the desire for a precarious space, a temporary and mobile architecture, a tipi or a tent that

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Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (London: Verso, 1991); Larry Busbea, *op. cit.* (note 39), p.11. Here to emphasise the importance of this issue, I quote Busbea at length when he writes: 'space would become one of defining themes (if not the defining theme) of philosophical and cultural thought in the post-war period-from bodily, phenomenological space (Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty), to the space of ideology (Lefebvre, Debord, Baudrillard), to the disembodied play of signs and signifiers in semiotic space (Barthes), to the so-called 'death of history' and the new spatial conception of power (Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari). In the ferment of the sixties, all of these writers were struggling with the great philosophical statements about space, place and dwelling, from Plato and Aristotle, Leibniz and Descartes, Kant and Hegel, to Marx, and to Husserl and Heidegger, attempting to integrate them into their own theories or refute them on the grounds of more recent intellectual developments such as structuralism, or the sociological identification of the 'post-industrial' or 'consumer' societies'. Busbea argues, however, that the temporal and spatial fields could not be separated. For a contrasting account see Pamela M Lee, *Chronophobia on Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 2004). Lee argues that primary focus for artists in this period was the issue of the temporal over the spatial. Busbea, however, discusses the way in which most critical accounts of the structuring of space, those that equated structure with the 'insidious logic of capitalist culture' noted the 'suppression of time in favor [sic] of space.' See Topologies, p.28.
[41] Levi, *op. cit.* (note 22), p.34.
[42] Laura Cherubini in conversation with Accardi in Carla Accardi and Vanni Bramanti, *Carla Accardi* (Ravenna: Essegi, 1983), p.34.
[43] *Ibid.*

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can be easily moved by the individual to accommodate their way of life.'[44]

The first major exhibition to explore these ideas at the time was the ground breaking *Architecture without Architects* held at MoMa in 1964. There, Bernard Rudofsky offered nomadism as the means by which to reconfigure the standard modernist narrative connecting uprootedness to the experience of alienation.[45] Mobility in this conception is reconceived not as a uniquely modern condition but as a characteristic of what he calls 'primitive' culture. In this conception, nomadism is offered as an antidote to the experience of alienation. At once it avoids the risk of incorporation into a totalising structure without falling prey to that distinctly modernist condition of 'homelessness.'[46] Holding a

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[44] My translation of 'è pur vero che la *Tenda*, il *Grande Ombrello*, il *Giaciglio*, rispondono al desiderio di uno spazio precario, di un' architettura indeterminate e mobile, un tipo o una tenda che si sposti con la persona e con il suo vivere.' See G.Celant, in *La Repubblica*, 19–20 March 1978 quoted in Claudio Cerritelli, 'Carla Accardi. Le infinite risorse del segno 1947–1997' in Accardi, *Carla Accardi*, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.20.

[45] Scott, 'Bernard Rudofsky: Allegories of Nomadism and Dwelling', *op. cit.* (note 33), p.219. I am indebted to Busbea for drawing my attention to these debates around nomadism. See Larry Busbea, *Topologies,* p.56; the exhibition *Architecture without Architects* ran from 9th November 1964 to 7th February 1965. It was commissioned by the Department of Circulating exhibitions under the auspices of the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art. Attempts to analyse the condition of urban modernity are numerous. See for example Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle,* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983); see also Georg Lukács's analysis of 'transcendental homeless' in 'The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of the Great Epic Literature,' trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1971). As Felicity Scott explains, the modern experience of uprootedness was also a central theme in the work of Theordor Adorno and Martin Heidegger. Scott, 'Bernard Rudofsky: Allegories of Nomadism and Dwelling,' n.18. Scott explains that as 'privileged tropes in both pre and post-war theorisations of the modern condition, uprootedness and mobility were understood as both the disastrous effects and as the liberating potential of industrial technologies. For instance, in 1926, Hennes Meyer claimed mobility to be central to the 'New World'. In 1960, Alison and Peter Smithson again announced that 'Mobility had become the characteristic of our period', p.217.

[46] *Ibid*., pp.218–19. Scott explains: 'Neither homeless (like the uprooted subject) nor integrated into administrative structures, the nomad represented an alternative strategy of occupying

central symbolic function in utopian narratives, the temporary, pneumatic and mobile structures that appear throughout the 1960s propose the means by which this alternative existence could be realised.[47] The point here is that these forms of temporary shelter were bound up in a nexus of debates around urban planning that developed in this period but also with issues around the political and philosophical structures and tenets underpinning Western society. Nomadism and nomadic forms of habitation responded to the call for mobile and multifunctional housing, which could boast portability, lightness, and adaptability in the face of hostile environments and an irreverence for national borders. Additionally, nomadism—the anti-authoritarian symbol—is subsequently equated with revolutionary politics and the possibility of an alternative. These associations are by now well established. More recently, art historian Claudio Cerritelli describes this attitude as a 'cultural given in [the] years 1967–68'.[48] Accardi certainly

territory. Pivotal to conceptions of the nomad were technologies of nomadism, the environmental and inhabitable technologies that enabled the nomad to dwell. By the early 1960s, architectural projects employing tents, trailers, and pneumatic and other lightweight, transformable, or transportable structures were spreading through the pages of architectural magazines'.

[47] See for example Marc Dessauce and Architectural League of New York, *op. cit.* (note 36), p.7. Groups such as Utopie in France proposed 'pnuematic' architecture which was intended to correspond to their leftist political affiliations. Rosalie Genevro writes as introduction that 'in their work they presented a vision for a built world in which buoyancy, ephemerality, and mobility would replace the inertia and repression that they believed characterised the architectural urbanism of the postwar.' The group's interests were brought together in the exhibition Structures Gonflables at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1–28 March, 1968. Although Utopie seem to have forced the connection between radical design and technology and as a result were subject to criticism, the interest in inflatables as a challenge to the 'weight, permanence and expense of architecture' was not limited to the group, as the international range of exhibits in Structures Gonflable make evident.

[48] Cerritelli explains it in the following way: 'that the artistic landscape should be mobile, nomadic, tied to existence and to the temporality of making is a cultural given in those years 1967–68 that was widely experienced in the most up to date experiments in painting as well as in the new artistic experiences, Arte Povera foremost amongst these.' *Carla Accardi, op. cit.* (note

seems wary of any over-determined readings of her work in this way.[49]

Furthermore, visually her environments celebrate the materials of contemporary commodity culture as much as they point elsewhere and the artist's statements perpetuate these seemingly contradictory elements. If the nomadic shelter had once been articulated in terms of a cult of origins in architectural thinking or elsewhere in terms of fantasies of a lost plan then Accardi's tents can also be understood as registering a broad shift away from this conception in the 1960s with the temporary shelter reconceived as a matter of design.[50]

Despite the straightforward connection with the image of the nomadic shelter and the overstated associations with nomadism, there remains much that is compelling about this body of works. Of particular importance is the fact that Accardi's environments are all made almost entirely of transparent plastic material. Although this aspect of Accardi's practice has not gone unnoticed in the literature, it has not been connected to the utopian rhetoric with which Accardi frames these works. Accardi used this transparent material almost exclusively throughout the second half of the 1960s and in subsequent decades, and it is a

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2), p.21.

[49] See also Laura Cherubini, 'Conversazione con Carla Accardi' in *ibid*., p.34; Obrist, *op. cit.* (note 8), p.98.

[50] Vitruvius had first connected the idea of the primitive hut to architectural origins. Subsequent architectural theory continued to situate the primitive hut within a developmental history of architecture. A departure from these accounts came in 1753 when Marc-Antoine Laugier published *Essai sur l'architecture*. There he reclaimed the primitive hut as 'the principle and measure of all architecture', marking a shift from a conception of the primitive hut as starting point to a conception of the primitive hut as prototype. See Hanno-Walter Kruft, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp.152–154, 201; See 'The Cult of Origins' in Mari Hvattum, *Gottfried Semper and the Problem of Historicism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch. 1; for an account of the influence of Adam's house on architectural theory see Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), pp.13, 17; Semper and Mallgrave, *op. cit.* (note 13).

choice that she foregrounds repeatedly in statements made about her environments and her working practice. By considering Accardi's practice alongside statements the artist made about her temporary dwellings, I argue that her conception of living differently was founded on a way of seeing differently. And I consider how this speaks to feminist concerns with which the artist was engaged in this period as well as the politics of making art.

How to make a Home:

That Accardi should turn to plastics to make her alternative homes is hardly surprising. It was precisely in this period that new housing typologies were delivered in this material. The first all-plastic house had already appeared in 1956 in France designed by the architect Ionel Schein, with subsequent competing models produced in the US and Russia underscoring a global belief in this material's potential to fulfil the utopian dream of a new domestic architecture.[51]

　　Additionally, by the time that Accardi began making her first environment in 1965, plastics had long been advertised as a new wonder substance heralding the house of the future in a post-war plastic world; manufacturers promoted this material in largely utopian terms as a means of

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[51] Stephen Phillips, 'Plastics' in Beatriz Colomina et al., *Cold War Hothouses: Inventing Postwar Culture from Cockpit to Playboy* (New York: Princeton Architectural; London, 2004), ch. 4; Beatriz Colomina, 'Unbreathed Air 1956', *Grey Room*, 15 (2004), pp.28–59; Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), ch. 6.

offering a radically different existence.[52] Accardi, however, was keen to reject

any connection to this consumer-orientated world. If she had also couched her

environments in utopian language then she had expressly described how she had

not wanted to create 'false things to dupe people.'[53] For art critic Marco

Meneguzzo, Accardi's use of Sicofoil material unavoidably invited association

with the circuits of design production.[54] The use of this material had initially

elicited some criticism but Accardi would defend her choice, explaining in an

interview with Lonzi that she had wanted to ennoble plastic—as if the artist had

somehow wanted to recuperate this material from its connotations with mass

production.[55] Meneguzzo describes Sicofoil, the 'commercial and out-dated name

of the methacrylate sheets', as both a 'symbol and symptom of those years'.[56]

For him, it belonged to the realm of 'transparent and inflatable' objects that

would become 'emblems of a completely different way of conceiving of

inhabitable space.'[57] It suggests the pervasiveness of the language of utopia

during this period—easily applicable to almost anything. The point here is the

distinction to be made between living well and living differently: on the one

hand, the good life as it was defined in this period associated with comfort,

efficiency and progress as it came to be heralded through advertising (and

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[52] Stephen Phillips, 'Plastics' in Beatriz Colomina et al., *op. cit.*, (note 51); see also Colomina, 'Unbreathed Air 1956', *op. cit.* (note 51).

[53] Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 11).

[54] Marco Meneguzzo and Danna Battaglia Olgiati, *Accardi, Consagra: La Svolta Degli Anni Sessanta* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2007), p.22.

[55] Accardi puts it in the following way: 'to those who say: "so Accardi is getting lost with plastics," I say, "come on it is you who is lost."' Carla Lonzi, Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *Scritti sull'Arte* (Milan: Et Al., 2012), p.473. See also Anne-marie Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art', *Studio International*, 191, 979 (1976), p.50.

[56] Meneguzzo and Battaglia Olgiati, *op. cit.* (note 54), p.22.

[57] *Ibid.*

critically defined by utopian thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse) and on the other, the notion of living differently as a rejection of this.[58]

Accardi's own statements seem at once to embrace and to resist these connections in ways that betray a concern to distinguish her art from other kinds of production (when visual and material distinctions were no longer possible), and the artist from other kinds of roles (such as art critic or designer). She had spoken of *Tenda* in such a way as to resist any association with the circuits of design production, which by this time had come to be regarded as compromised, saying, 'I like the tent because I didn't invent it, I didn't intend to create an object […] besides, naturally it is a tent so is not made of anything solid, has no use, it isn't even an object that can be bought by someone rich, and put somewhere.'[59] But if her environments seem to respond to a need for an alternative they also take their cue from an existing model—her own home—which, she explains, was 'made out of glass, from the ground up'.[60]

When Accardi began to make *Tenda* in 1965, it signalled an important transition in scale from the individual panels the artist had been painting prior to this. The artist has spoken about *Tenda* as the first work she made that could be walked into.[61] Her practice did not, however, alter significantly when she began to make her first environment. She continued to paint and *Tenda* is constructed out of thirty-six painted panels, whose assorted shapes—triangular, rectangular or trapezoidal—together form *Tenda*'s A-Line structure, anticipating the shaped

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[58] See Marcuse, *op. cit.* (note 23).

[59] Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 11).

[60] Accardi writes: 'La mienne est toute en verre, jusqu'au sol…j'aime la transparence…je voulais proposer une alternative.' Causse and Lapouge, *op. cit.* (note 14), p.393.

[61] Adachiara Zevi, 'Carla Accardi: Segni Galleggianti', *L'Architettura: Cronache e Storia*, 38 (1992), p.888.

canvases that the artist would go on to make in later years. Each panel of *Tenda* is made with two sheets of Sicofoil fixed within a Perspex frame. Sicofoil resembles plastic film and resists absorption so the speed and force with which each brushstroke is made is registered on its surface. Accardi had applied water-based fluorescent colour to the reverse sides, all over and monochromatically, with hot pink or acid green waves (figure 1.15a–b). These lines of different thickness run perpendicular to each other so that when placed back to back within a single panel they overlap and appear to interact in a rippling effect, creating a wave-like pattern that befits the supple quality of the material (figure 1.16) with vertiginous results (figure 1.17).[62]

Accardi's experiments with transparent plastic had begun as early as 1964 when the artist turned to Perspex and then to Sicofoil, which she used exclusively thereafter.[63] For the artist this signalled a key moment and a way of responding to the current conditions of painting. The sources that Accardi cites as the inspiration behind *Tenda*, *Ambiente Arancio* and *Triplice Tenda* are

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[62] Lonzi had hinted at the characteristic malleability of Sicofoil in describing the sides of *Tenda* as 'slightly curved' ('appena incurvati'). Luisa Mensi, responsible for the conservation of Accardi's works has explained that these effects have been subsequently suppressed in recent restoration initiatives where the Sicofoil has been secured between sheets of Plexiglas creating the appearance of a rigid structure rather than a supple canopy. See 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi' *Marcatré*, n 23–25, June 1966, pp.193–97 reprinted in Lonzi, *Scritti sull'Arte*, *op. cit.* (note 11), p.471; Luisa Mensi and Mariano Boggia, 'Le Opere Di Arte Ambientale Di Carla Accardi', in E. Di Martino (ed.), *Arte Contemporanea. Conservazione e Restauro. Atti Del Convegno Internazionale* (Turin: Allemandi, 2005), p.224.

[63] Sicofoil allowed the artist to explore a range of different aspects of her practice, as she put it: 'it is not that I only wanted to explore transparency, with the frame etc. […] absolutely not, I also liked light.' Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art', *op. cit.* (note 55), p.50.

historically and geographically diverse,[64] but what unites these is a renewed

conception of the possibilities of painting. In the 1966 interview with Lonzi, she

refers to the year 1964 as a turning point: 'I had a crisis, which had its origins in

the way I had lived.'[65] Accardi describes her way out of this crisis in terms of a

release from the traditions of post-war painting. Writing about *Tenda* in an

interview as published in *Marcatrè* in 1966 (shortly after Accardi's exhibition

opened at the Galleria Notizie in Turin where *Tenda* was first exhibited), Lonzi

describes how Accardi had needed to find a way of distancing herself from

painting (un momento di distacco dalla pittura).[66] According to Lonzi, *Tenda*

offers a way of doing this—allowing the artist to reflect on the conditions of

painting.[67] At the time Accardi put it in this way:

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[64] Accardi recounts: 'Perhaps because of a visit to the Galla Placida mausoleum in Ravenna. I discussed it for a long time with Carla Lonzi. I thought of an ambient that would eliminate the dichotomy […] pronounced at the time, between architecture and the visual arts. Here it is, my first tent, from 1965, red and green, and it has the form of a small temple, I created it completely with my own hands. Elsewhere Celant notes the origins of these environments as 'inspired by Arab tents'. He is of course referring to Accardi's own account when she explains: 'the tent derived from an idea, that came to me when you showed me those images of the Turkish tents from the Museum in Krakow. It made me think that those Turks took those beautiful tents on their war travels, and set them up at moments that I imagine must have been very difficult.' In an interview with Anne-marie Sauzeau-Boetti, Accardi invokes the psychic connection to these works: 'This transparency, the tent, the umbrella, the airy light, I dreamt them (first, as a girl and then at the start of my career)'. See See Eccher, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.145; Celant and Accardi, *op. cit.* (note 10), p.61; Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri* (Milan: Et Al. Edizioni, 2010), p.226; Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *op. cit.* (note 20).'

[65] Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 55), p.482.

[66] Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 11), p.193. Reprinted in Lonzi, *Scritti sull'Arte*, *op. cit.* (note 55), pp.471–83.

[67] Lonzi claims that with *Tenda*, Accardi was able to 'reflect on the pictorial means rather than a way of engaging with them directly.' See Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 11), p.193.

[I had been] mistaken about those preconceived ideas […] those post-war canons, believing with good faith in everything that others had said […] at the time I took it out on my work […] I had said 'it doesn't matter, it's worthless, it isn't important.' After that moment, I can truly speak about lightening my work […] it comes from having been through a kind of trauma, from having uncovered all those mythologies connected to painting.[68]

These statements by Accardi echo what Alex Potts has identified as a widespread need within artistic practice at this time to escape the cultural and historical weight of modernism—those modernist conceptions, as he puts it, 'of a dense, symbolically resonant, aesthetically charged art object and […] late Romantic encumbrances of the art work as being expressive of an artist's individuality or distinctive creative urge.'[69] As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, Potts focuses on the artistic experiments of Michelangelo Pistoletto, as well as Pino Pascali, Alighiero Boetti and Claes Oldernberg to explore the way in which the desire to create 'disencumbered' objects informed their practice in complex ways. He does this by offsetting artists' statements against the kinds of works that were made at the same time as considering how these individual objects functioned in relation to each other in the context of installations. Potts begins

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[68] My translation of 'in quell'anno lì [1964] mi è venuta questa crisi, che aveva origine nella vita per come l'avevo combinata io. In fondo era l'avere sbagliato con le idee preconcette, l'avere seguito i canoni del dopoguerra credendo in buona fede a tutto quello che mi dicevano gli altri. Poi, me la sono presa pure con la mia pittura. Io dicevo "non fa niente, non vale, non ha importanza". Dopo, veramente posso parlare di alleggerimento del mio lavoro. Questa è la posizione di chi è passato attraverso una specie di trauma alleggerendosi di tutte le mitologie connesse alla pittura.' *Ibid*., p.482.

[69] Alex Potts, 'Disencumbered Objects', *October*, 124 (2008), p.171, 173.

with Pistoletto's *Minus Objects* (1965–66) to examine the way in which these works were framed as a 'one-off gesture' in an attempt to liberate the artwork from the signature style and from commodity status. As Potts goes on to argue, such claims to freedom failed to explain how an artwork might be able to have any significance at all. What makes Pistoletto's *Minus Objects* so compelling in Potts's view is the contradictory way in which they at once inscribe and deny the 'pure open immediacy' by which they were invoked. These works at once play out a set of contradictions between an appearance of casualness and stubbornness; between an image of comfort and one of alienation, and between a gesture grounded in an everyday openness and the reification of this openness in the work.[70]

By considering the way in which each artist in turn foregrounded the 'fantasies and anxieties' of disencumbrance in their work, Potts shows that this logic of disencumbrance was double-edged, involving a complex engagement with aspects of contemporary commodity culture that at times appeared contradictory—works that claimed to eschew the constraints of commodity status all the while adopting strategies or a rhetoric that paralleled those of capitalist production or otherwise seemingly reproduced its alienating effects. I want to examine Accardi's body of 'mature' works (as she had called them), the environments she made between 1965 and 1972, in relation to this set of concerns as defined by Potts.[71] I too am interested in the way in which this logic of disencumbrance animates Accardi's practice, both in terms of the political as well as the material concerns of making. And I also want to explore the set of

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[70] *Ibid.*, p.176.

[71] Accardi considers her practice at this moment as 'a sign of maturity, a highly refined maturity'. See Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 55), p.473.

contradictions as they emerge in her work—on the one hand, Accardi has

insisted on the need to be contemporary (a concern that according to the artist

motivated her work) and, on the other, she seemed to want to offer her

environments as a possible alternative, as it was conceived by her in terms of

withdrawal from the realm of commodity culture which had become a

distinguishing feature of everyday contemporary life.[72] Whilst I am indebted to

this way of thinking as argued for by Potts, I would also contend that this logic

of disencumbrance is not able to do justice to everything that is innovative about

Accardi's practice particularly as it relates to the politics of domesticity that is

played out in Accardi's work of the period.

Accardi's interest in the phenomenon of light and her attempt to

define it through her work speaks most closely to this logic of

disencumbrance.[73] The 'lightening' that the artist had sought to achieve is

rendered both palpably and figuratively through her discovery of Sicofoil.

She articulates the breakthrough and the implications for her practice in the

following way:

Someone who wanted to reproduce one of my works brought this

particular material to my studio one day. I was curious, of course. I

thought: I want to try using it so I can unveil the mysteries of art. I was

interested in the transparency [and] you could see the frame. This was the

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[72] For a discussion of the significance of the term 'everyday life' see Ben Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002); Ben Highmore, *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[73] This way of thinking about her practice echoes the rhetoric of artists in this period as discussed by Potts. Pino Pascali, for example, had spoken about the desire to make works that had 'the emptiness and lightness of a soap bubble'. See Potts, *op. cit.* (note 69), p.180.

start of it all, the inspiration. I wanted to make everything around us

transparent. It was the sixties. So I found colours that would stick,

without peeling off, and then I developed a technique I could use to

paint.[74]

The idea of transparency is foregrounded in Accardi's origin story as it takes

centre stage in her conception of a new way of working. Certainly, this was an

innovative move that radically altered Accardi's practice. When Accardi speaks

of transparency, she equates it with being contemporary; 'it was', after all, 'the

sixties'. Moreover, when Accardi speaks of 'unveil[ing] the mysteries of art', the

properties of plastic offer an antidote, in a literal sense, to the perceived

encumbrances of painting. As Accardi puts it, 'you could see the frame'. If the

discovery of Sicofoil occurred by chance, it is clear that the artist had already

been searching for its diaphanous quality, experimenting with PVC and Perspex

in previous years (figure 1.18). Despite attempts to use different materials such

as gauze in one version of *Triplice Tenda*, she writes: 'I don't know why I

always return to plastic.'[75]

   With Sicofoil came the transition from painting to working in three

dimensions—*Rotoli and Coni* (*Rolls and Cones*) are some of the first

experiments that emerge from this development (figure 1.19). They were

exhibited throughout 1965 and 1966 and constitute an unusual group of works—

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[74] Carla Accardi and Puglisi Cosentino Fondazione, *Carla Accardi: Segno e Trasparenza* (Milan: Silvana, 2011), p.33; for technical details see Mensi and Boggia, *op. cit.* (note 62).

[75] My translation of 'ho tentato altre materie oltre la plastica transparente, la garza per esempio. La tenda Triplice ho fatto il progetto in garza…non sò perchè ritorno sempre alla plastica.' See Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *op. cit.* (note 20), p.50.

unlike anything Accardi had made before.[76] Measuring between 70 cm and

130cm in height, these geometric objects—cylinders and cones—were displayed

upright and freestanding in configurations on the ground as well as on low

plinths. Flat sheets of Sicofoil material are painted with bright colours and

transformed into sculptural objects.[77] A photograph taken in the Rome studio in

1966 reads almost like a production manual for these works; the *Rotoli* and *Coni*

dispersed around the room offer themselves as clues for the likely transformation

of the flat sheet in the centre, suggestively curled at one end (figure 1.20). A

material more closely associated with commercial packaging than with art-

making, Accardi would buy it at the local stationers, Vertecchi, where, as she

explains, 'it was normally used for shoe boxes, it was sold by the roll and … I

used to buy an entire roll.'[78] If the form of the *Rotoli* recall those rolled units of

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[76] For an exhaustive account of the exhibitions that included versions of *Rotoli* and *Coni* see
Celant and Accardi, *op. cit.* (note 10), pp.330, 334.

[77] Art historian Daniel Soutif has carried out the most exhaustive research into Accardi's use of
Sicofoil. Soutif explains: 'Dès 1965, une série de *Rotoli* (Rouleaux) avaient fait appel à ce film
plastique transparent que l'artiste continuera d'utiliser presqu'exclusivement jusqu'a la fin des
années 1970, soit en le tendant sur un châssis à l'instar d'une toile traditionnelle, soit pour
l'intégrer à des structures plus complexes comme dan le cas de *Triplice Tenda*. Ce Sicofoil mérite
qu'on s'y arrête un instant [...] Reste ouverte en particulier la question de savoir s'il pourrait
s'agir d'un matériau similaire à celui utilisé au début des années 1960 par Giulio Paolini dan
certaines ouvres célèbres comme ce *Senza Titolo* de 1961, fait d'un pot de peinture inscrit dans
un châssis, justement à l'aide d'un film plastique transparent emballant le tout [...] 'Sicofoil' […]
s'agit-il-alors d'une marque? Peut-être, mais cette hypothèse peut paraître infirmée par le fait que
le Sicofoil qui a servi à la réalisation de la *Triplice Tenda* a été offert par Ludovico Castiglioni
par l'intermédiaire de son entreprise, la quelle s'appelle Mazzucchelli [….] le Sicofoil—le nom,
sinon la chose— semoule […] constituer, quoique non sans un certain mystère, une sorte de trait
spécifique de l'une des périodes essentielles et les plus longues de la carrière de Carla Accardi.'
Daniel Soutif, 'La Vie en rose—Carla Accardi, triplice Tenda, 1969–1971', *Les Cahiers du
Musée national d'art moderne*, 98 (2006), pp.47–48.

[78] Asked how Accardi came to use Sicofoil, the artist responds: 'the experience with Sicofoil
started by chance. I had a project to create a handkerchief with one of my drawings. I never

Sicofoil's mass production, then the effects are quite unlike those that might be expected of modular, geometric sculpture in this period as it came to be associated with industrially produced materials. *Rotoli* have none of that monumentality to which their column-like structure would seem to refer. Difficult to define, they share a vocabulary with sculptural and painterly practices but the results elude both these categories. At once, they release sculpture from its associations with volume and weight, and painting from its adherence to a ground.

This is apparent from a photograph taken in 1967 (figure 1.21), in which Accardi is shown crowded by these backlit objects. The varying density of colour and the patterning of the painted surface of each individual *Rotolo* is visible through the transparent skin, which lets through light, and projects those patterns onto the surrounding floor space. Accardi has often discussed the role of light in her work, as for example when she enthused: 'I have always loved the possible combination of colours and the emanation of light that results.'[79] With these words, she is referring to the bold use of contrasting colours that at times seem to create an almost blinding effect in her work, as in *Tenda*, which seems almost to emit its own light. The artist had spoken about searching for such results in

completed this project, but from it I got the idea of using Sicofoil and painting on it. I used to buy it at Vertecchi, where it was normally used for shoeboxes […] sold by the roll and I used to buy an entire roll. See Lorenzo Benedetti, 'Conversazione con Carla Accardi' in Università degli studi di Roma 'La Sapienza', *Forma 1 e i Suoi Artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato* (Rome: Gangemi, 2000), p.96.

[79] My translation of 'più che i colori io amo da sempre gli accostamenti e l'emanazione di luce che ne deriva.' See Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *op. cit.* (note 20), p.50. See Filiberto Menna, 'La Luce nell'arte', *Qui Arte Contemporanea,* n.17, June 1977, p.11. Menna traces a history of recent artistic practice emphasising the way in which light is foregrounded.

commenting, with reference to working with Sicofoil: 'It was painstaking work [… with colour] and eventually fluorescent paint, which, for me, expresses the gradual search for brighter light'.[80] When asked to reflect on her use of colour in an interview with Maurizio Calvesi for *Marcatrè*, Accardi had spoken of her continual search for a 'practice appropriate to our times.'[81] She writes: 'I […] have always been aware of the fact that today no landscape exists without neon and fluorescent lights and it is for this reason that I arrived at these colours.'[82]

Accardi was not alone in turning to fluorescents and neon: the invention of Day-Glo dates back to the 1930s. As early as 1949 artists such as Lucio Fontana and later Dan Flavin would make fluorescents and neon a staple of their practice whilst Frank Stella had already begun to use fluorescent paints by the time he participated in the 32nd Venice Biennale of 1964.[83] In Italy, the use of fluorescent paints, rather than say fluorescent or neon light, was introduced in the 1950s by graphic designer Armando Testa in his advertising campaigns such as *Serie Brindisi Due Re Carpano* (1949) and *Punt E Mes* (1954) or as evinced in the décollage of artist Mimmo Rotella who would also derive the materials for his work from the world of advertising.[84] Accardi had spoken about the use of fluorescent colour as a way to achieve brightness in her painting but it also

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[80] Accardi and Fondazione, *op. cit.* (note 74), p.33.

[81] Accardi describes it in the following way as 'mezzi pittorici che corripondessero alla contemporaneità. Io ad esempio ho sempre tenuto molto conto del fatto che, oggi, non ci può essere paesaggio senza neon e luci fosforescenti, ed è per questo che sono poi arrivata a questi colori di oggi.' See Maurizio Calvesi, 'Intervista con i pittori', *Marcatré*, 8–10, June (1964), p.219–20.

[82] *Ibid*.

[83] Accardi acknowledged the practice of Frank Stella in two works dedicated to the artist made in 1964, *Stella I* and *Stella II*.

[84] From personal correspondence with Luisa Mensi, September 2012.

signalled a response to the contemporary environment. It was also precisely at this moment, Romy Golan reminds us, that lighting had become the iconic image of Italian design.[85] Accardi seems to play off, one against the other, the polarities of natural and artificial light, embracing the colours of her urban surroundings in ways that perhaps go against the grain of the statements the artist had made that point beyond the circuits of industrial production. Additionally, there is an on-going tension in the statements that she made between the search for an alternative way of life and her desire to be absolutely contemporary as if she were interrogating how far these two overlap or how far they might be a way of saying the same thing.

As much as the exploration of light signals a key aspect of Accardi's working practice, it also figures centrally in her autobiographical narrative, particularly because of its associations with Sicily (she speaks of the contrast of light in Trapani as 'dazzling').[86] There is a photograph (figure 1.22), taken in

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[85] Golan describes the catalogue of lamps that appear in Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* in the following way: 'from nineteenth century pastiches to the widely acclaimed midcentury modern lighting fixtures produced during the years of the postwar economic miracle. These were designed by Giò Ponti, the Castiglioni brothers, Marco Zanuso, Vittorio Vigano, Joe Colombo, and others for such firms as Arredoluce, O-Luce, Fontana Arte, Floss, Stilnovo, and Artemide. The fixation on lamps in Italy was such that it led the designer and theorist Andrea Branzi to infer that the numinous glow emanating from them, and the absorption they elicited in the figures perambulating around them, could be read as an unwitting philosophical meditation—in the midst of the frenzy produced by the economic boom—on the mysterious, dark side of technology.' See Romy Golan, 'Flashbacks and Eclipses in Italian Art in the 1960s', *Grey Room*, 49 (2012), p.111. On the subject of lighting design in this period see also Andrea Branzi, 'Le Luci che Cambiano,' in F. Ferrari and N. Ferrari, *Luce: Lampade 1968–73: Il Nuovo Design Italiano* (Turin: Allemandi, 2002), quoted in Alberto Bassi, *Italian Lighting Design 1945–2004* (Milan: Electa, 2004), p.129. See also the Introduction in Andrea Branzi, *Il Design Italiano negli Anni '50* (Milan: Centrokappa, 1985)

[86] Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente–Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *op. cit.* (note 20), p.50.

1940, that would seem to constitute the point of departure for the narrative

constructed by Accardi around the way light fell on the balcony in the family

home. It is as if the artist were trying to replicate, through such works as *Rotoli*

and *Coni*, the distorting effects of the shadows cast by wrought iron railings on

the surrounding surfaces (including across Accardi's body). Through these

works, light appears materialised as Accardi experiments with the ways in which

it can be transformed into a changing display of colour, projected images, and

cast shadows that are reflected, distorted, and extended beyond the Sicofoil

material and into the surrounding space. Accardi explores the fullest flexibility of

this plastic material—and the kinds of visual lighting-effects, metaphorical anti-

gravitational effects, as well as the range of colours that could be produced on its

surface. Certainly, the installation shots taken of *Rotoli* and *Coni* outdoors seem

to recall this effect, where dispersal and concentration of light deflected off the

curvilinear surface project an array of patterns and colours onto the surrounding

floor space, producing what seems like an animated surface (see for example

figure 1.23).[87] The same light effects that permeate through and deflect off the

shiny, pliable surfaces of *Rotoli* and *Coni* are also visible in *Tenda* and would be

replicated in the other environments that Accardi made between 1965 and 1972.

Such concerns with surface-as-skin align Accardi's work with the

rhetoric of suturing long associated with Alberto Burri. The practices of both

artists revolve around experiments with the material possibilities of surface. Both

worked with plastic and Burri, like Accardi, also turned to plastic in the 1960s.

From the outset, Burri's works have been interpreted in terms of metaphors of

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[87] See for example the photographs that appear in the catalogue to Accard's solo exhibition held
at the Galleria Notizie, Turin in May 1966. These are also reproduced in Accardi and
Fondazione, *op. cit.* (note 74), p.30.

skin—a skin that has been ravaged by the physical and psychological traumas of war.[88] Accardi also experiments with the effects of suturing in her own work. Her practice attests to a keen interest in the kinds of weaving effects made possible by repeated mark making on the surface of the Sicofoil (figure 1.24a–c). *Biancoarancio* (1967) (figure 1.25) belongs to a series of many works that the artist made in 1967 that play with these overlapping effects. This particular version comprises a square grid of nine panels arranged in alternating colour combinations—of white on orange or orange on white—that strikingly emphasise the way in which colour is foregrounded with this technique. What is sutured by Accardi is not the material surface, as Burri would do, but rather, the colours covering that surface. This is further emphasised by the collage effects that are incorporated into Accardi's early experiments with Sicofoil— particularly when plastic is laid over a canvas ground. It is of course a conception far removed from the dialectics of violence and repair that have characterised interpretations of Burri's own works in plastic. In these readings, material is

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[88] Recently this account of Burri's practice has been reappraised to acknowledge his own contradictory response to this interpretation of his work-as-wound. This recent scholarship extends the biographical connection with the artist to include aesthetic, historical and contemporary geopolitical meanings within a post-war Italian context. In this conception, Burri's artistic output is accommodated in a narrative of post-war artistic renewal following the demise of the historical avant-garde and what was seen as its failure to prevent fascism. In Italy, national cultural renewal was fraught by a conflicting rationale that sought alignment to international trends in order to carve out her own 'non-fascist modernism'. Jaimey Hamilton extends the metaphoric of violence and repair to a historical context and a reading of post-war painting understood to be in crisis. The outcome of Italy's somewhat ambivalent strategy of alignment to Informel resulted in the appropriation of a vocabulary, both by critics and artists alike, that was heavily influenced by existentialism. Additionally, comparisons were regularly made with French informel artists whose works were already couched in terms of metaphors of the existential body. Hamilton further explains that interpretations of Burri's works in these terms corresponded to debates about how to restore faith in avant-gardist ideals. See Jaimey Hamilton, 'Making Art Matter: Alberto Burri's Sacchi', *October*, 124 (2008), pp.31–52, particularly pp.34–36.

subjected to the deformations caused by exposure to heat, corrosion and lacerations—where colour and material register the intensity of those acts of violence. Accardi's own practice easily resists such associations with violence, or elsewhere with the performance of cutting, through which Fontana has been read, although her own statements intriguingly align with Fontana's rhetoric surrounding these transgressions against painting.[89] However, Burri's larger plastic works also read as environments in ways that do bear an affinity with Accardi's practice. Consider, for example, the photographs taken by Ugo Mulas in 1962 of Burri as he makes *Grande Plastica* (1963) (figure 1.26a–c)—a work which assumes the dimensions of a room.

Understood in this way, Accardi's practice might better be understood through metaphors of visibility and opacity. The artist takes advantage of the numerous possibilities these provide. She presses the transparent surface to its limits, in ways that bind her practice to a knot of concerns around optics and identity. Accardi emphasises the protective, decorative and interactive possibilities of surface in ways that redefine the relationship between the work and its surroundings, and additionally, the way that those surroundings come to be viewed through the work.[90] This distinctive aspect of her practice did not

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[89] I am thinking specifically here of the way in which Fontana described the wish to see 'paintings…come out of their frames and sculptures from under their glass' in 'The First Manifesto of Spatialism' (1948). This echoes with the way in which Accardi had spoken of the need to 'take [painting] down from the wall and look at the canvas.' See Renato Miracco and Lucio Fontana, *Lucio Fontana: At the Roots of Spatialism* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2006), p.31; Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art', *op. cit.* (note 55), p.50.

[90] On several occasions, Accardi had spoken about the diverse inspiration for her environments. She writes: 'Arab tents are the source of my inspiration…my first [tent], in 1965, had decorations that called to mind the arabesque that are found in Islamic art.' My translation of 'Le tende arabe sono state la fonte della mia ispirazione. La mia prima, nel 1965, aveva decorazioni che

escape the attention of critics at the time; for example in 1966 Lonzi described Accardi's brushstrokes as signs belonging to the unity of our visual experience.[91] The critic offers a structuralist reading of Accardi's environments in which she insists that the painted signs that characterised the artist's practice and that here appeared to float in space, had begun to assume a significance in relation to their surrroundings.[92]

With the introduction of Sicofoil, Accardi is able to experiment with surface-as-screen: Sicofoil functions here as a means of projecting images that play with changing degrees of opacity and translucency and interact with the surrounding floor space. The work-as-screen takes on an additional meaning, however, in Accardi's environments as it relates to privacy and shelter. Accardi plays with the idea of private and public but in ways that seem at times contradictory.[93] She had referred to her environments as 'transparent tents' and the drawing that dates to 1970 suggests a model of dwelling at odds with the

riportavano alla mente gli arabeschi che si trovano nell'arte islamica.' See Maurizio Vallarino, 'Luminous marks', in *Art and Artists*, June 1972, p.33

[91] 'Carla Accardi' in *Catalogo della mostra*, (Turin: Galleria Notizie), 1966. Reprinted in Lonzi, *Scritti sull'Arte*, *op. cit.* (note 11), p.450. Lonzi is the first to frame Accardi's practice in linguistic terms. Since then linguistic comparisons have continued to be foregrounded in the literature on the artist. See for example Udo Kultermann, *The New Painting*, (New York: Praeger, 1969), p.44. Levi, *op. cit.* (note 22), p.140–5; Accardi and Bramanti, *op. cit.* (note 42), p.20.

[92] Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 11); reprinted in Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 55), p.475.

[93] This has been connected to the politicisation of the private sphere by Leslie Cozzi in 'Spaces of Self-Consciousness: Carla Accardi's Environments and the Rise of Italian Feminism', *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 21, 1 (2011), p.68. Cozzi puts it in the following way: 'these modestly scaled, semi-transparent enclaves blurred clear distinctions between interior and exterior. They translated the personal realm into a semi-public spectacle just as autocoscienza would later convert individual reflection into an active political tool.'

notion of privacy.[94] But a work like *Triplice Tenda* also has the effect of closing

up the space, a space that Accardi had conceived as entirely pink despite its

diaphanous quality. It was described as 'labyrinthine'—to borrow the words of

Anne-Marie Sauzeau-Boetti from 1975, who had wanted to conjure a bodily,

specifically uterine, space—created by the three pink tents nestled together in

decreasing size, one inside the other (figure 1.27).[95] The inner and outer panels of

each tent interact in such a way so as to transform the painted wave-like pattern

on their surface into a lattice (figure 1.28). It suggests the different ways in

which transparency could be made to work—here as a form of enclosure, and to

disorientating effect.

There is another way in which Accardi plays with optics: her

environments behave like a kind of lens through which to experience the

surrounding space. It is as if the artist were asking how it is that we see an

object—what is revealed and what remains concealed in the process. The all-

over painting typical of the artist's practice in the 1950s comes, with the arrival

of Sicofoil, to resemble camouflage or animal markings, pressing these concerns

around vision further: the logic of camouflage, after all, traces a line between

identity and concealment.[96] Sicofoil dramatises these possibilities of interaction

with the surrounding space. It also blurs the boundary between material and skin

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[94] On this subject see Colin Rowe, *Transparency* (Basel; Boston: Birkhauser, 1997).

[95] Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *op. cit.* (note 20), p.51.

[96] There is a wide body of scholarship on the subject of camouflage. Among some of the more interesting examples are Chiara Casarin and Davide Fornari, *Estetiche del camouflage* (Milan: Et al, 2010); Beverliey Braune, *Camouflage* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1998); Neil Leach, *Camouflage* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2006); Roger Caillois and John Shepley, 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia', *October*, 31 (1984), pp.17–32; David Lomas, 'Artist–Sorcerers: Mimicry, Magic and Hysteria', *Oxford Art Journal*, 35, 3 (2012), pp.363–88.

that had long informed Accardi's practice.[97] The possibility of bodily interaction is also suggested by a photograph that appears in the catalogue accompanying the 1966 exhibition held at the Galleria Notizie, titled *Aspetti dell'Avanguardia in Italia* (figure 1.29). In this photograph, a single *Rotolo* is furled around the legs of the figure that features—from the waist down—and is literally surrounded by the work; anticipating the way in which the role of the body is foregrounded in her environments.

Furthermore, Accardi's environments, and particularly *Tenda*, speak to the aesthetic tropes of psychedelia of this moment—mind-altering experiences and fluid environments—which hailed the body as being one with the surroundings and liberated from the constraints of the physical world.[98] Accardi suggests this when she says: 'I'll say straightaway that I begin by putting the viewer in front of a work that is unstable and precarious […] they should abandon themselves entirely to a kind of hypnotic state, where they are suspended in time.'[99] Elsewhere Accardi spoke about the desire for a total

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[97] Accardi's practice had long evinced an interest in fashion and clothing design. A photograph taken in 1953 of Accardi's sister wearing a dress created by the artist is one such example of experimentation. In a project of a similar kind a painting by the artist titled *Integrazione n.19* (1958) was transformed into a dress on the occasion of the *II Premio di Pittura* organised by the fashion house Sorelle Fontana. See Celant and Accardi, *Carla Accardi*, p.294. It also anticipates the experimental Beat fashion parade that took place in Turin's piper pluriclub in May 1967 in which artists such as Alighiero Boetti, Enrico Colombotto, Piero Gilardi and Anne-marie Sauzeau all contributed with their own fashion designs. Referring to the show held at the Christian Stein gallery earlier that year (the invitation for which comprised a series of samples of industrial materials), Alighiero Boetti would have these same material displayed (and many more) in the pockets of clear plastic dresses for the catwalk at the Piper club.

[98] Timothy Leary (et.al), *The Psychedilc Experience* was published in Italy in 1964. See 'Acid Visions' in Scott, *Architecture or Techno-utopia*, pp.187–88.

[99] My translation of 'dirò subito che comincio con il porre lo spettatore di fronte a una lettura

environment, which she defines in terms of an integration of painting with architecture.[100] She had said in interview that a primary motivation for making *Tenda* was to 'eliminate the dichotomy, very pronounced at the time, between architecture and the visual arts.'[101] Expressing nostalgia for the integration of architecture and the visual arts and for reconciliation between man and his surroundings, Accardi intimates that a corrective might be found through the legacy of the Bauhaus concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[102] She describes the fallout from Le Corbusier's influence as 'terrible' and attributes this as the reason why painting was no longer used in architecture.[103]

Accardi's practice aligns with the general shift toward environments in

instabile e precaria […] dovrà abbandonarsi senza reticenze a una specie di stato ipnotico e sospeso nello stesso tempo, in cui esso potrà sentire lo scorrere della vita stessa, in quell gioco visivo e ambiguo ed indefinite.' Carla Accardi, *Carla Accardi*, *op. cit.* (note 42), pp.83–84.

[100] Accardi, *Carla Accardi*, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.33.

[101] *Ibid.*

[102] If the concept of totality continued to inform architectural practice in this period it tended to be conceived through tropes such as the 'primitive' and the 'organic' and mobilised in response to the perceived experience of uprootedness: the problem of whether this displacement is recognised as desirable *or* the outcome of social, political and environmental conditions appears repeatedly in the literature on the subject. Compare the way in which the organic was taken up by for example Walter Gropius who conceived of a total architecture—to which he gave the name 'living urban organism'—as a remedy for a fragmented world with Jacob Bakema's conception that turned to 'primitive' cultures for a model of organic unity. The example of 'primitive' culture assumes a central place as a remedial in the 1960s but it is the motif of the nomad that offers itself as an alternative to those sceptical of an integrated totality. I am following Scott's account here. See Scott, 'Bernard Rudofsky: Allegories of Nomadism and Dwelling', *op. cit.* (note 33), pp.217–18.

[103] Although Accardi couches it in slightly different terms, this thinking chimes with the influence of psychedelic culture on experimental architectural practice at this moment that refused the 'ego-trip' architecture, as it would be called of figures such as Le Corbusier and the implied separation 'between art, science, technology, architecture and everyday life'. See Jim Burns, *Anthropods: New Design Futures* (New York: Praeger, 1972), pp.7–8. Cited in 'Acid Visions', Scott, *Architecture or Techno-utopia*, p.192.

Italy. As noted in the introduction, this impulse was registered in a number of key shows throughout 1967, two years after Accardi began making *Tenda*. The first exhibition to experiment with this theme took place at Foligno with *Lo Spazio dell'immagine*. The show included a heterogeneous body of works that ranged from environmental sculpture to total environments right through to experiments with electric light or sound and the construction of virtual spaces. Perhaps rather unsurprisingly, in the numerous articles published to accompany the exhibition, much was made of the new relationship to space that characterised recent practice.[104] In these accounts space was articulated as a place of social engagement and as mediating relations. In practice this seemed to involve a series of works that played with perception of space through distortions of varying kinds as in Gruppo MID's *Progetto Tridimensionale dello Spazio* (1967), an environment which incorporated lights, motors, fans and timers in order to explore the effects of stroboscopic light on the perceived movement of bodies (figure 1.30). Lea Vergine articulated it best in her review of the exhibition for the 1968 issue of Almanacco Letterario Bompiani:

> We don't consider the word environment in a literal sense but are limited
> to an examination of those environments which, because they are not
> customary places or purely natural, have the capacity to communicate
> new things and to condition us in a new way.[105]

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[104] Palazzo Trinci (Foligno, Italy), *Lo Spazio Dell'immagine* (Venice: Alfieri edizioni d'arte, 1967), pp.22–41; these articles are reprinted in Italo Tomassoni, *Lo Spazio Dell'Immagine e Il Suo Tempo* (Milan: Skira, 2009), pp.22–41.

[105] Lea Vergine, 'Lo Spazio dell'Immagine' in *Almanacco Letterario Bompiani 1968: Dieci Anni Di Mode Culturali* (Milan: Bompiani, 1967), p.156.

None of the environments exhibited in *Lo Spazio dell'immagine* were strictly conceived as dwelling spaces in ways that map on to Accardi's own concerns with habitation. But as Vergine explains, this was partly the point; the works that were shown seemed to want to experiment with recent theories of perception in ways that impacted on the viewer's experience of that space in unfamiliar ways. Nevertheless, Accardi expresses something like disappointment at not having been invited to participate, particularly as her own *Ambiente Arancio* plays out some of the key concerns with perception explored by other artists in this exhibition.[106] Accardi would, however, include *Ambiente Arancio* in the Galleria Marlborough show in 1968—but only after some deliberation, as she confides in a letter to Lonzi:

> I created the environment for the last room: I was hesitant at first, but then not having anything else to do I slowly went ahead…You know I had these objects in Milan painted the same colour: the umbrella, the painting, the roll and the suggestion was always there but out of laziness I could never do anything. Add to this the annoyance of seeing environments, etc., in Foligno. So you know how I'm preparing the cot as well as the whole floor of the room covered with this bright colour: the floor is divided in the middle into a small corridor that turns right along

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[106] This narrative from painting to environment does not need restating (though its developments in Italy have, by comparison, been largely overlooked). *Lo Spazio dell'Immagine*, the exhibition held at Foligno between 2nd July and 1st October 1967 was a key moment in the history of environment art in Italy. See Palazzo Trinci (Foligno, Italy), *op. cit.* (note 104); Cozzi, *op. cit.* (note 93), p.67; Flavio Fergonzi, 'La Critica Militante', *La Pittura in Italia Il Novecento 2, 1945– 1990* (Milan: Electa, 1993), pp.569–90; G. Guercio and A. Mattirolo (eds), *Il Confine Evanescente. Arte Italiana 1960–2000* (Milan; Rome: Mondadori Electa, 2010), pp.263–309.

the wall so the visitor can get out. The floor is made of several panels and I could even have left it in transparent plastic, but I ended up painting the whole thing. [107]

Ambiente Arancio certainly appears to emit an orange glow (figure 1.31), but for an uncertain Accardi writing to Lonzi in 1968 it seemed too 'beach-like'.[108] A small parasol stands at the centre of this scene (the parasol had already been exhibited in 1966 at the artist's exhibition held at Galleria dell'Ariete in Milan) filtering any overhead light through solar-hued undulations painted on the surface of the canopy (a small sun visor is attached to the mattress on the floor and a single upright *Rotolo* completes the setting). The simplest of shelters, *Ambiente Arancio* both creates and transforms light, projecting it at different depths and at different angles whilst also ostensibly providing shelter from sunlight. Accardi had spoken intriguingly about the work as 'annul[ling] the boundaries between art and life', as 'almost the contents of a home, but from a rarefied world … possibly, unconsciously, connected with the Bauhaus experience.' This was underpinned, she writes, by 'a desire to induce people towards living in a different […] way.'[109] *Ambiente Arancio* is created by the most economical of means—a parasol, sun visor and mattress that evoke both the location and the kind of activity (or inactivity) that might structure this alternative existence. The sparseness of this work speaks to an alternative existence unconnected to ownership of property, which as mentioned above is described by Accardi in terms of a more natural existence, a life freed of

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[107] Accardi and Fondazione, *op. cit.* (note 74), p.55.

[108] *Ibid*.

[109] Eccher, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.145.

possessions and of work. If she wants to 'induce people towards living in a different way', then she does this by proposing a work that seems to reverse the logic of production—from accumulation to subtraction.

Ambiente Arancio offers its alternative in terms of a place of relaxation in line with the notion of leisure time, as it was foregrounded at this moment.[110] Intriguingly, this image of relaxation runs counter to the way that Accardi emphasises the labour involved in making these works. She describes her practice explicitly as 'an effort' and as 'painstaking work'.[111] Of the four environments that Accardi made, *Triplice Tenda* is the most ambitious, and she describes making it as a 'slow process', as 'two years of difficulty' both 'with the material and its [*Triplice Tenda*'s] production'.[112] Importantly in the artist's conception, the material lightening of the ground was never at the expense of technical difficulty. Accardi describes it here as meticulous work and elsewhere she has spoken about the 'huge problem' ('complicazione immensa') involved in making *Triplice Tenda*.[113]

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[110] On this subject see Gilbert, Chris, 'Herbie Goes Bananas: Fantasies of Leisure and Labor from the New Left to the New Economy', in Helen Anne Molesworth (author), Wexner Center for the Arts (ed.), *Work Ethic* (Baltimore, Md: Baltimore Museum of Art; University Park, 2003), pp.67–81.

[111] Celant and Accardi, *op. cit.* (note 10), p.350.

[112] Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *op. cit.* (note 20), p.51. The changing appearance of *Triplice Tenda* in recent years is a result of degradation. It is clear from photographs that the original state of *Triplice Tenda* has undergone some alteration, highlighting the fragility of the material, which degrades and becomes brittle, contracting with time. The existing version (now on display at the Centre Georges Pompidou) has lost the curvature of the original roof; sections have been removed and its angle is shallower and more rectangular, having been stiffened with Perspex.

[113] Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas,' p.50.

Additionally, Accardi made much of the effort involved in working on the floor. *Ambiente Arancio*, made with seven wooden stretchers that have been wrapped in Sicofoil sheets and arranged flat on the ground, makes a feature of the floor in a distinctive way just as Accardi's own approach to painting had by 1953 become floor-bound and distinguishable by its repeated all-over patterns. *Ambiente Arancio* seems to have been conceived, like so much work in this period, specifically for the floor. 'I'd like to place it all on the floor!' Accardi had exclaimed about the works for her forthcoming exhibition at the Galleria Marlborough, where *Ambiente Arancio* was showcased. On a separate occasion, she described making *Tenda* as a summer spent 'working on the floor, painting all these panels by hand with the overlapping pink and green'.[114] There are photographs of the artist taken in her studio in Rome (figure 1.32) whilst she was making *Tenda* (she literally builds from the floor upwards). She works directly on the floor but with none of the heroics associated with the Abstract Expressionists as they have come to be read. And while these photographs of Accardi by Ugo Mulas exhibit nothing of the theatrics enshrined in photographs by Hans Namuth of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings, she does share in the anti-heroic and anti-humanist tradition originally associated with their working practice—associated as it was with the ground, rather than with something that stands upright.[115]

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[114] My translation of 'con quel materiale sono stata un'estate a lavorara per terra e a dipingere a mano tutti questi pannelli con la sovrapposizione del rosso e del verde, una cosa allucinante […] Ora la tenda.' Accardi, *Carla Accardi*, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.34.

[115] For an important discussion of artist's studio in the postwar period as it was differently conceived by American artists from a solitary space of ritual to a space increasing defined by technological and antihumanist metaphors see Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), chap.1.

Another important aspect of the artist's practice was its repetitive nature. Accardi has elaborated on this subject specifically as it relates to the tradition of female labour in ways that chime with the concerns of this period. She explicitly describes her refusal to make anything that could be construed as artisanal—'otherwise the work could have been criticised', she explains.[116] Accardi seems to be implicitly acknowledging that others operated with the distinction between fine art and craft. It was at this moment that the position of women in the arts came to be re-evaluated and the unpaid crafts historically practiced by women came to be recognised as responsible for the marginalisation of women's work.[117] When Accardi speaks about her own practice she echoes the ambivalence and often troubled relationship with which female domestic work had come to be regarded in the 1970s as both 'trivialised and degraded categories of "women's work" outside of the fine arts', but also as an 'arena for self-expression in the face of oppression'.[118] Accardi writes: 'we know that women work with repetition. My paintings took a long time to make. I would make them on the floor like a rug. Repetition is an inherent fact of oppression […] but it needs to be revived, to be recovered and made into a liberatory gesture.'[119]

Importantly, Accardi seems to want to rethink her practice beyond any associations of repetition in post-war art as following the logic of industrial

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[116] For an important account of the role of craft within feminist discourse see the excerpts in Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), pp.491–524.

[117] On this subject see the special issue of *Heresies* (4: 1977) dedicated to traditional women's craft.

[118] Glenn Adamson, *op. cit.*, (note 116).

[119] 'On sait […] que les femmes travaillent dans la répétitivité…Mes tableaux, par example, ont été longs à faire […] Je les faisais par terre […] comme un tapis […] Le geste repetitive, c'est une donnée immanente de l'opprimée […] mais il faut le reviver, le reparcouris en quelque sorte comme geste libératoire, sorti de son immanence.' Causse and Lapouge, *op. cit.* (note 14), p.393.

production.[120] She takes a mode of working, long associated with the conditions of female oppression, and declares it a distinctive feature of her own practice. With her own practice based on repetition, Accardi claims to transform those repetitive operations into something 'liberatory'. And again in ways that speak to feminist thinking of the time, if, on the one hand, Accardi wants to draw attention to the labour and effort involved in her practice, she also emphatically refuses to take part in productive labour—rather, she speaks of taking pleasure in making a useless object, and rejecting means-end rationality.

In doing so, Accardi also seems to be exploring the possibilities of art-making in a climate of over-production and over-saturation of objects—and exploring whether it might still be possible for her to continue to make work without necessarily producing yet another commodity, another spectacle. Accardi directs her criticism against a specific kind of consumption (and the speed with which this happens), particularly its appearance in art, and with which the art critic is seen to collude when she writes: 'and straightaway, this neurotic fact […] surfaces […] the critics […] have […] invented this idea of consumption in art.'[121] The 'alternative' existence to which Accardi refers corresponds to a desire to escape these circuits, to avoid comparison with the art

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[120] See the Introduction to Helen Anne Molesworth and Wexner Center for the Arts, *Part Object Part Sculpture* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

[121] Accardi writes: 'e ne viene, subito, questo fatto così nevrotico del consumo. Che loro stessi, I critici, hanno inventato, perché chi è stato, che ha inventato questa idea del consumo nell'arte? Io capisco che siamo in una società consumistica, però non lo sento proprio attaccato alla mia pelle il consumo. Posso vivere […] va, mi sembra che tutti quanti possiamo vivere ancora degli anni con delle cose, poi facciamo le nostre esperienza, le abbiamo consummate e cominciamo altri consumi. Ma me, questo consumo velocissiomo ancora non m'ha toccato, o lo stesso europeo, forse, non se ne farà toccare.' Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 64), pp.21–22.

object. But the rationale that underpins this perspective barely conceals the contradictions with which it is entangled. Accardi asserts:

> The tent is not an object because if I wanted to make an object I would have had to have made one that was intriguing, invented, new, I would have had to try and astonish people; no, for me the tent was an obvious thing, I had thought of it as an extension of painting.[122]

Accardi had summed up *Tenda*'s appeal in the following way: 'I like the tent because I didn't invent it, I didn't intend to create an object.' But if this was the means by which to escape the logic of the object, it was by recourse to the logic of the readymade (itself implicated in those circuits). Furthermore, as noted above, Accardi has spoken about her environments as exemplifying 'a spiritual and rarefied kind of living' and as wanting 'to make art mythical'.[123] It suggests a contradictory response to the perceived encumbrances of modernism, at once she seemed to want to avoid any association of her work with the commodity status and yet she continues to couch her environments in terms of a 'symbolically resonant, aesthetically charged object' to borrow the words from Potts when she expresses the desire to 'make art mythical'.[124]

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[122] My translation of 'la tenda non è un oggetto perché se volevo fare un oggetto dovevo farne uno un po' curioso, un po' inventato, nuovo, dovvevo propormi di meravigliare la gente; no, per me la tenda è una cosa ovvia, l'ho pensata come un'estensione della pittura.' See Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 55), p.472.

[123] Obrist, *op. cit.* (note 8), p.98.

[124] See the way in which Potts discusses these contradictions in relation to Pino Pascali. Potts, *op. cit.* (note 69), p.181.

Living Differently Seeing Differently:

Accardi remakes home guided by the imperative to figuratively and materially 'lighten' her environments and, by extension, the dwelling space. This was literally achieved through the use of Sicofoil and, as the artist was at pains to point out, through a lot of hard work. But what were the implications of this move and more specifically how did this speak to the utopianism with which she framed these temporary shelters? Accardi's practice has from the outset elicited multiple interpretations.[125] By the mid-seventies, the politics of Accardi's tents would be recognised and claimed as a feminist critique by both Lonzi and Sauzeau-Boetti.[126] In an important though little-known contribution to the

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[125] Maurizio Fagiolo summarises these contradictory responses in the following way: '[her] painting has given rise to the most varied readings: [Michel] Tapiès views it within the context of *informale,* [Pierre] Restany within a symbolist perspective, [Gillo] Dorfles in optical terms, Lonzi claims it for feminism.' Fagiolo would rather have located Accardi's *Tenda* within a narrative shaped by the debates that had emerged in art criticism in Italy in the post war period (debates about the role of painting as well as the response to Marxist dictates). In a self-conscious acknowledgement of attempts to reconstruct an Italian modernist narrative in the wake of fascism, Fagiolo recuperates Accardi's *Tenda* for accounts whose roots were situated in futurism: he relies on a reading of the work as an extension of painting (Accardi had herself described *Tenda* in this way in interview with Lonzi). He further insists that 'the correct perspective is Futurism: the creation of signs that become signals because they demand interaction from the viewer…a return to Bergson's élan vital from which Futurism originates.' *Tenda*. Levi, *op. cit.* (note 22), p.156. Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Le Arti Oggi in Italia* (Rome: Mario Bulzoni, 1966) Reprinted in; Levi, *op. cit.* (note 22) See also; Accardi and Bramanti, *op. cit.* (note 42); for the art critical context see Hamilton, *op. cit.* (note 88). See also Fergonzi, *op. cit.* (note 106); Lara Conte, 'La Critica è Potere. Percorsi e Momenti della Critica Italiana negli Anni Sessanta', *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, n.d.), pp.87–109; See also Michele Dantini, 'Ytalya Subjecta. Narrazioni Identitarie e Critica d'Arte 1963–2009', in G. Guercio and A. Mattirolo (eds), *Il Confine Evanescente. Arte Italiana 1960–2000* (Milan; Rome: Mondadori Electa, 2010), pp.263–309.

[126] Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 55); Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art', *op. cit.* (note 55).

narrative of post-war women's art in Italy, Sauzeau-Boetti makes a case for a

productive space on the margins. She reads *Triplice Tenda* through the lens of

psychoanalysis, in pre-Oedipal terms, writing in 1976: 'at the time she had a

vision of primordial existence and feminine desire […] the mother, love before

castration and the involvement of the rival father.'[127] Framed by Accardi's own

participation in consciousness raising groups ('autocoscienza'), Sauzeau-Boetti

describes a turning point in the artist's practice in the following way: 'the end of

the 1960s represented a moment of intense introspection for Carla, the search for

her own historical condition, the immersion in the dream/sign' and 'Accardi's

feminine sign […] [is] a move through a certain appropriation of culture […] a

different way of being in the world.'[128] Sauzeau-Boetti evokes the spatial

organisation and formal logic of *Triplice Tenda* to read its pink, labyrinthine

space as a psychic metaphor and the temporary structure as symbolic resistance

to civilisation (referring specifically to the 'law of the father').[129] This association

of civilisation in masculine terms was not of course limited to feminist discourse,

though it was famously articulated explicitly in these terms by the Milan-based

radical feminist collective Demau (Demistificazione dell'autoritarismo) in

1966.[130] Their focus was turned towards the experience of women in patriarchal

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[127] Sauzeau Boetti writes: 'allora ebbe la visione dell'esperienza primordiale del desiderio femminile, il labirinto rosa e luminoso, la madre, l'amore anteriore alla castrazione e all'intervento rivale del padre.' Anne-marie Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Carla Accardi', *Data*, 20 (1976), p.73.

[128] 'La fine degli anni sessanta rappresentò per Carla l'introspezione feroce, il reperimento della propria condizione storica, l'immersione del sogno/segno' and 'Il segno femminile di Accardi…[è] un passaggio attraverso una certa appropriazione della cultura…un modo altro di essere al mondo'. *Ibid.*

[129] *Ibid.*

[130] Patrick Hanafin, *Conceiving Life: Reproductive Politics and the Law in Contemporary Italy* (Ashgate: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013), p.30, footnote 13; Monica Threlfall, *Mapping the*

society, and they called for a politics outside of its civilising and explicitly masculine norms. Accardi also spoke of this anti-civilising impulse in her works (and before Celant would famously articulate it in terms of acculturation), conflating an idea of alternative dwelling and an anti-masculinist impulse by explaining that she had wanted to make something 'destructible […] in opposition to a traditional masculine taste for the immutable, the imperishable.'[131]

Informed by these early feminist readings of Accardi's environments, Leslie Cozzi has recently analysed Accardi's 'quasi-domestic' structures as prototypes for the kind of anti-institutional spaces proposed by organised feminism and appropriate to the consciousness raising groups with which Accardi was involved as founding member of La Rivolta Femminile.[132] At stake in Cozzi's analysis is the desire to foreground the significance of Italian feminism amongst women artists in this period. She argues that *Tenda*, *Triplice Tenda* and *Ambiente Arancio* are the artist's response to the aims of that movement as they unfolded in Italy. Cozzi claims that Accardi's environments and the institutions of Italian feminism were predicated on the notion that 'a new consciousness could be facilitated if a separate institutional structure were provided to nurture it'.[133] This later became a central tenet of Italian feminist

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Women's Movement: Feminist Politics and Social Transformation in the North (London: Verso, 1996), p.106.

[131] Causse and Lapouge, *op. cit.* (note 14), p.393.

[132] This is, to my knowledge, the only English-language scholarly work that exclusively examines Accardi's environment—an aspect of Accardi practice that Cozzi describes as obscure. See Cozzi, *op. cit.* (note 93), p.68.

[133] *Ibid.*, p.76.

thought and Cozzi's argument is premised on this particular point.[134] Accardi's environments are understood as occupying a space somewhere between the private, as it was called for within feminist thought, and the public, as autocoscienza became an 'active political tool'.[135] To parse Cozzi's argument, Accardi's environments trace a shift within her own development of feminism from individual to group endeavour. *Triplice Tenda* marks the transformation of this development as a communal space and a prototype for those alternatives established by Rivolta Femminile.

An important performative quality is also read into these environments: their emptiness or 'blank space' to borrow from Cozzi, is ready to be 'symbolically' and literally reconfigured. In this conception emptiness invites inhabitation and with it a restaging and possible reconfiguration of the domestic space, freed from the encumbrances of every day existence.[136] Cozzi is right, I think, to connect *Tenda*, *Ambient Arancio* and *Triplice Tenda* to the aims of radical design, which was also committed to offering alternative ways of living in this period. In this way, Cozzi proposes a much-needed reading of Accardi's environments that binds these works to social and political concerns and sees them as visual instances of the call for an alternative existence—and after all these environments do overlap chronologically with Accardi's involvement in La Rivolta Femminile.

Accardi, however, has expressed ambivalence in recent years towards these kinds of interpretations that foreground her involvement in feminist

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[134] *Ibid.*, p.76.

[135] *Ibid.*, p.68.

[136] It is not however clear how these works might conjure the 'reminiscences of childhood and child-rearing' that Cozzi describes. *Ibid.*, p.75.

politics. In an interview with Obrist, Accardi has repeatedly stressed her departure from the politics of organised feminism. Two decades earlier, Accardi claimed that her transparent objects and environments preceded her interest in feminism and that her involvement with feminism only coincided with her grey works of 1970s.[137] This should suggest that any conflation of art and politics observed in the artist's practice should be approached with a degree of caution. Whilst Cozzi's is a welcome contribution to the dearth in English-language scholarship on Accardi, her analysis relies on a straight-forward rejection of what the author terms a 'formalist narrative' (one that has restricted these works to 'art world narratives'), maintaining a standard view that a formalist analysis is unable to speak to political concerns. As a result too little heed is paid to the materiality of the environments themselves, and to Accardi as an artist. The point perhaps is that to read her works strictly through the lens of her political involvement as Cozzi has powerfully attempted to do fails to acknowledge the importance of aesthetic concerns as their were foregrounded by the artist and the question of how those aesthetic concerns might themselves be able to speak to politics. I want to propose that her political involvement with La Rivolta Femminile should be seen through the lens of her artistic practice rather than the other way round.

Following the artist's statements, if *Tenda*, *Ambiente Arancio* and *Triplice Tenda* could offer another way of living, then I want to argue that this was principally played out through Accardi's way of working, and the concomitant experience of viewing her work. For Accardi this is predicated on a different way of seeing. It is this, above all else, that seems to take on a political significance in her practice of this period, anticipating rather than directly

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[137] *Ibid*., p.79.

mapping on to the way in which these concerns would subsequently be articulated through La Rivolta Femminile. For the artist a politics of vision went hand in hand with what it meant to be a woman artist, as when she writes: 'already in [19]64 I began a study … to lighten … especially to demystify the picture and for me this demystification had a feminine content.'[138] The use of Sicofoil here is key: Accardi explicitly described her environments made in this period as her 'transparent tents'. In an interview with Sauzeau Boetti in 1975, she had spoken about this aspect of her practice euphorically, declaring: 'oh how I liked transparency!'[139] For the artist this choice of material was explicitly connected to a new way of working, one defined in terms of a process of stripping back, anticipating the entirely transparent works that Accardi began making in the 1970s (figure 1.33). Accardi sums up this way of working when she explains that it had allowed her to 'take away, take away, take away'.[140] Sicofoil offers a distinctly new way of working—and transparency is literally and symbolically equated here with that new approach of peeling away or stripping back. Elsewhere, and perhaps in a way that seems at odds with the repeated brushwork technique, Accardi affirms 'to me it was more important to take away than to add'.[141]

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[138] Causse and Lapouge, *op. cit.* (note 14), p.393.

[139] Accardi characterises them as her 'transparent tents' in Causse and Lapouge, *Écrits, Voix d'Italie*, p.393; Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente-Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', p.50.

[140] Lonzi, Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.*, (note 55), p.473.

[141] Accardi affirms: 'per me era più importante togliere che aggiungere.' (My translation) See *Ibid.*

Accardi employs a rhetoric that is, by now at least, over-familiar in its alignment with dematerialisation.[142] It is an attitude that is echoed throughout this period by a number of artists. For example, in a recent interview Gilardi explains 'I started writing with the idea of dematerializing my work'[143] or elsewhere, when Boetti reflects on his experience of life in Afghanistan he puts it in similar terms of levelling out when he says:

> I was fascinated by the desert. Afghan homes, for example, are empty—no furniture and therefore no objects to place on furniture. I also like the fact that Afghans wear the same clothes at day and at night. I was most attracted to a sort of cancelling out, to desert civilisation […] it is a return to a degree zero—a 'desertification'—and a discovery of another world beyond the 'known' art world.[144]

For Accardi this attitude also carried with it a moral imperative.[145] She describes her new approach as underpinned by 'the right attitude' and as working with the

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[142] Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (London: Studio Vista, 1973).

[143] Piero Gilardi and Claudio Spadoni, *Piero Gilardi* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1999), p.35.

[144] Soldanini, A, 'Alighiero e Beotti' in *Alighiero Boetti*, Whitechapel Gallery, London 1999, p.16; quotation from Bourriaud, N., 'Afghanistan', *Documents*, 1 Paris, October, 1992 (pp.50–51).

[145] For example when she writes: 'when the tent was finished I realised that it did not have anything left of what I put around it, it was only what I made that had remained […] this could of course mean that the initial idea was a simple one; but the hope or desire that it should contain extra meaning didn't ruin it, you understand, perhaps because it came about from my attitude to making, that was straightforward, without pretence: I did not force it to express other things'. (My translation of 'Ma quando la tenda è stata lì mi sono accorta che non aveva niente di quello che ci avevo messo tutto attorno, era soltanto come io l'avevo fatto che era venuta fuori…Allora questo può voler dire che l'idea iniziale era stata un'idea semplice; lo sperare o il sognare che

right degree of 'care'.[146] Furthermore, it is underscored by the need to try 'to understand things properly', and crucially, 'to see in a new way, by emptying out'.[147] It perhaps admits an anxiety about what it meant to be an artist—to make art—at this moment but at the same time, Accardi seems to be saying that understanding things properly or seeing things in a new way becomes possible through an emptying out.[148] This thinking informs the way Accardi conceives of artistic production, which she couches in terms of authenticity, but also as redefining an everyday existence. This is how she put it in 1966:

Now the novelty of having experimented with what can be produced by taking even more of the emotions away that have otherwise appeared inherent to art […] but I didn't know what could have happened because taking everything away, might also have left nothing. But, perhaps, if a person has a certain attitude, takes a certain amount of care in trying to understand, yes, to see things in a new way, emptied out, in the end taking everything away will not result in nothing, something remains: for me it was an experience that I liked, that I enjoyed […] I have the right to do something in whichever way I choose, the simplest way, to

avesse un significato extra non l'ha rovinata, capisci perché forse è venuta fuori da come io mi mettevo in disposizione a farla, che mi mettevo in modo semplice, senza pretese: io non lo forzavo a esprimere altre cose). Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.*, (note 55), p.472.

[146] 'Però, forse, se una persona ha un certo modo di essere, una certa cura, cercando di capire, sì, di vedere in modo nuovo delle cose, svuotando.' *Ibid.*, p.473.

[147] *Ibid.*

[148] Accardi was not alone in her thinking. Piero Gilardi put it in similar terms in a recent interview when he explains: 'To dedicate oneself to a minimal output compared to that of consumer society was intended to be a metaphor for a new way of seeing things, a new way for the individual to create.' See Gilardi and Spadoni, *op. cit.* (note 143), p.35.

experiment, and if by making and trying to live each day in a way that was not vulgar, to remove everything, this thing remains […] I risk making empty things, I risk losing things, unable to make works because an element is missing. But I don't think so. I think that there is this fact of pure aesthetics, that is, this desire to make a useless product: it doesn't come from my activity, it isn't even useful to me because I release myself, it is not a substitution; it is only this gesture, finding the time to make it.[149]

This process of taking away extends to the viewing encounter. It is as if the artist wants to elicit a similar set of responses in the viewer when she writes: 'In front of the things I make the viewer could feel a kind of lack and emotional poverty'.[150] Accardi literally removes the obstacle posed by the canvas, making works whose constituent elements are all visible.[151] This is pointed to by the

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[149] 'Adesso la notività è di avere sperimentato cosa uno può produrre togliendo ancora delle emozioni che sembrano insite nell'arte…ma non sapevo cosa sarebbe capitato perché togliendo tutto, poteva anche non restare niente. Però, forse, se una persona ha un certo modo di essere, una certa cura, cercando di capire, sì, di vedere in modo nuovo delle cose, svuotando, alla fine non è vero che non c'è nulla togliendo tutto, resta poi questo qualche cosa: per me è stata un'esperienza che mi è piaciuta, mi ha fatto piacere. …Ho il diritto di fare la cosa più qualsiasi, più semplice, di sperimentare se, facendola io, ogni giorno, cercando di vivere in modo non volgare e levando tutto intorno, questa cosa poi resta…rischio di fare delle cose vuote, rischio pure di perdere la cosa, di non poter più fare un'opera perché manca quell'elemento. Però a me non sembra. Mi pare che abbiano questo fatto dell'estetica pura, che è questo piacere di fare un prodotto inutile: non viene fuori da una mia attività, non è neanche utile a me perché mi scarica, non è una sostituzione; è solo fare questo gesto, trovare il tempo di farlo, ecco.' Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 55), pp.473–4.

[150] 'Davanti alle cose che faccio lo spettatore può sentire una specie di povertà e carenza emotive.' See Lonzi, *Scritti sull'Arte*, *op. cit.* (note 55), p.473.

[151] In an interview with Marisa Volpi she explains: 'My works are almost entirely aesthetic, visual objects: the tents, the umbrella, the sunbed have a lightness for those that look at them, if

artist when she claims: 'I wanted to understand what lay behind it [art] and I wanted for people not to feel stuck in front of a work. I found that to be too automatic a position. I wanted the audience to be shaken.' Of course this impulse corresponds to what was a widespread attitude at the time to activate the viewer. These concerns are further connected to Accardi's origin story when she declares: 'I wanted to uncover the work of art, take it down from the wall and look at the canvas, it formed part of the arc of my lifespan.'[152]

Certainly the viewing encounter is transformed with transparent plastic, as Accardi explores what it means to view an object and to have the object negotiate the terms of the encounter for the viewer. Looking at something is of course different to looking through it and these environments transform that process. But if Accardi had ambitions to make everything transparent, then how did the use of plastic transform those relations?

Sicofoil animates the dynamics of vision; it implies alternative points of view with works that can literally be seen from all sides and it insists that art has to speak to that space around the work. It also interrogates the act of looking, and the different aspects that impinge on that experience. The effects of this move are far-reaching. Accardi not only physically situates her environments in relation to the surrounding space but also makes them a function of viewing that space.

the [viewer] looks at them in a straightforward way, and wants to liberate [themselves] from the heavy and conventional objects which surround us.' My translation of 'i miei oggetti sono quasi del tutto fatti estetici, visivi: le tende, l'ombrellone, il lettino stanno con leggerezza davanti a chi li guarda, se lui stesso guarda con semplicità e se gli piace liberarsi dagli oggetti pesanti e convenzionali che gli sono accumulate intorno.' See Marisa Volpi, 'Intervista a Carla Accardi', *Marcatrè* 42, May 1968, Milan.

[152] 'Io…volevo…vedermi il lavoro artistico, toglierlo dal muro e guardare il telaio, faceva parte dell'arco della mia storia.' See Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art', *op. cit.* (note 55), p.50.

Other artists in Italy were also exploring the possibilities of reciprocity in the viewing encounter and the way in which the viewer and work are implicated in the experience of space. Giuseppe Penone's *Rovesciare i propri occhi* ('To Reverse One's Own Eyes', 1970) (figure 1.34) is a series of six slides of the artist wearing mirrored contact lenses. The mirrored surface reflects the space in front of the artist, but at the expense of his sight. Perhaps more than any other artist, Michelangelo Pistoletto in his mirror works offers a sustained examination of the viewing encounter and the relations it produces (figure 1.35). The mirror surface collapses any distinctions between the space of the viewer and the space of the work, inviting the viewer to consider what constitutes the work and how that act of viewing is implicated in this conception. But Pistoletto's mirrored surfaces flirt with depth and illusion to disorientating effect (particularly so in reproductions of those works) and in a way that transparent plastic simply does not. A photograph taken of Accardi in the early 1980s (figure 1.36), holding up a large painted octagonal frame covered with a film of Sicofoil demonstrates this marked difference. Accardi's Sicofoils offer themselves as a means by which to see through a work and if they are striking (rather than disorientating in the way Pistoletto's might be) this is because they do not require the same theatrics of viewing.

Another way that Accardi negotiates the experience of a space is through recourse to memory, weaving these works into her own life-story (she speaks of having dreamt of *Tenda* as a child).[153] But she also does this by locating these works in the imaginary, insisting that *Tenda* 'is a thought', perhaps in the same

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[153] *Ibid*.

way that utopia is not a place.[154] With reference to *Ambiente Arancio* Accardi insists, 'before anything, it was a fabrication of my imagination.[155]

Accardi seems to be describing a different kind of interaction with the viewer, one that relies on a conception of the work as *mise-en-scène* rather than immersive environment. In her account of the different kinds of viewing encounter that emerged with installation art in the 1960s, Claire Bishop characterised the dream/fantasy divide as a way of distinguishing between installations that function more like tableaux—that is, where the viewing subject is indirectly solicited to imagine being part of the work, in contrast to installations where the viewer is immersed in an environment.[156] Accardi flirts with these distinctions: *Ambiente Arancio* seems to address itself directly to the viewer, in a way that appears to function like a dreamscape, but by describing *Ambiente Arancio* as 'rarefied' she relies on a conception of the work as tableau or *mise-en-scène* as well as a space or place in which to project those rêveries.

The artist complicates the narrative of environment art by asking how it might be possible to conceive of an environment if not as a place of interaction.[157] And in doing so, she also draws attention to the problem of how to

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[154] 'Poi, naturalmente, è una tenda che non ha niente di solido, utilità non ne ha nessuna, non è neanche un oggetto che un ricco se lo prende, se lo mette da qualche parte, perciò è veramente come un pensiero, ecco. Se levi tutti I castelli delle ideologie che cosa resta? Resta come uno si mette a fare certe cose e mettendosi a fare certe cose non si mette a farne tante altre. È un'osservazione banale, però non vai in giro a dar fastidio alla gente, non uccidi le persone, non inventi delle cose false per ingannare la gente.' See Lonzi, 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi', *op. cit.* (note 55), p.473.

[155] Obrist, *op. cit.* (note 8), p.98.

[156] Claire Bishop, *Installation Art a Critical History* (London: Tate, 2005), p.28; Briony Fer, 'The Somnambulist's Story: Installation and the Tableau', *Oxford Art Journal*, 24, 2 (2001), pp.77–92; see also the discussion in Perry, *op. cit.*, (note 21), p.15.

[157] I am referring to the way that Celant characterises environments in terms of a space of

render existence perceptible. She invites that question through the dislocation between the appearance of the works (as temporary inhabitable structures) and her own statements that locate these environments in the imaginary. This also emerges from the ambivalence with which these environments seem to both gesture towards and refuse occupation (they both demarcate any space or place as home while rejecting any specific material or territorial identification with home). In doing so Accardi suggests a nuanced response to the kinds of environmental-based work that were being produced at the time by insisting on a conceptual component to her work—suggesting not only that the locus of this alternative might be found in an attitude—a particular perspective taken in relation to things—but also that the ability to conceive of an alternative existence might be just as important as its realisation.

This chapter has sought to explore Accardi's contesting, and perhaps even her perpetuation, of certain contradictions regarding the available categories that determined what work was being made in her immediate milieu and elsewhere such as art object/readymade, natural/industrial, commodity/non-commodity. This chapter explored the material and political significance of the way that Accardi remakes home with Sicofoil and the extent to which this idea maps onto the need to rethink artistic practice at this moment. In Chapter Two I want to turn to the early practice of Marisa Merz to think about the politics of domesticity in a different way. Like Accardi's practice, Merz offers us a way of

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interaction when he explains: '[the] idea of establishing a series of physical and perceptive relationships between the space of the environment and artistic experiment, dates from when, over the course of the years, the artist, once having been given a space, thought of using it not just as a recipient that passively or indifferently receives a certain structure, but as an interactive part of his creation.' See German Celant 'Ambient/Art' in Biennale di Venezia, *Environment Participation Cultural Structures* (Venice: Alfieri edizioni d'arte, 1976), p.189.

rethinking the gendering of homemaking, the terms by which Merz's oeuvre has come to be defined. She emphatically aligns her way of working to the traditions of female labour and in turn these are the terms by which her practice has been framed in the literature. I want to offer a reading of *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) that goes against the grain of these accounts. I want to do this by tracing the different permutations of the work throughout 1967, from the installation in Merz's kitchen to the Piper-Pluri Club in Turin. One of its appearances, in Tonino De Bernardi's film *Il Mostro Verde* (1967), which transforms *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) into a monster, has previously been entirely neglected. I consider the artist's involvement in these contemporary experimental practices as a series of encounters that challenge the way in which Merz's 'primarily domestic practice' has come to be defined. At the same time, I want to think about the way in which each of these encounters is differently staged to ask how a work that has so often been collapsed onto a feminised identity limited by domestic roles might instead be understood as a challenge to the everyday lived experience of the home. With this chapter, I want to shift the focus from a utopian idea of alternative living to the everyday lived experience of the home as a form of bodily engagement that is necessarily psychic, sexual, political and technological.

CHAPTER TWO

Outgrowing the kitchen: Marisa Merz's *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) (1966)

A 'primarily domestic' practice:

In 1967 the filmmaker Tonino De Bernardi was in the Turin apartment of his then

close friend Marisa Merz to shoot scenes for his directorial début, *Il Mostro Verde*

(The Green Monster). When he began filming, he recounts, 'the house was

completely invaded by Marisa's metal sheets.'[1] De Bernardi imagined this metallic

tangle as the entrails of the monster to which the film owes its title and which

featured in a six-minute scene shot in Merz's home. And just as the monster of *Il*

Mostro Verde devours the inhabitants and contents of the strange subterranean

landscape of the film's setting, Merz had allowed these tubes to trail throughout the

apartment, emerging from behind household furniture, even spilling into the

bathroom, devouring its space and the contours of its architectural detail.[2]

I begin this chapter with De Bernardi's vivid account because it

encapsulates the impression conveyed by the existing photographs of the work as it

filled Merz's apartment at the time. In photographs taken in the artist's kitchen

(figure 2.1 and 2.2), Merz's aluminium sculpture hangs from the ceiling in a tangle

above the kitchen sink; as tin-can curtains around the television in this grainy

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[1] Tonino De Bernardi, personal communication, 30 October 2009. De Bernardi explained: '*Il*
Mostro Verde was my first film, made together with a friend of mine (he was a painter) Paolo
Menzio [...]. We also filmed in Marisa and Mario Merz's home, close friends of ours at the time, the
house was completely invaded by Marisa's metal sheets, even the bathroom, she cut the sheets of
metal with large scissors and left them to trail throughout the house, which she would then hang,
even from the ceiling.'

[2] Tonino De Bernardi, personal communication, 30 October 2009.

photograph from 1966 (figure 2.3) or strewn across the dining room table as in this photograph published in *Marcatrè (*figure 2.4).[3]

A process of folding and overlapping, evident in this detail of the work (figure 2.5), had transformed large aluminium sheets into articulated shapes.[4] This transformation into three dimensions had been achieved by cutting ribbons from these sheets (70mm wide x 0.5mm thickness) with large scissors, connecting the ends of these strips together to form rings of varying size, and fixing these together with industrial staples.[5] Each individual loop would then be grafted, one after the other, to form a kind of hollow, intestinal mass that slowly grew in size, volume and surface area, both outwards and lengthways in strangely contorting, strangely inflated shapes that belie the original flatness of their material beginnings.

It is a process described by Merz as being 'as humble and modest as embroidery.'[6] Elsewhere, she couches her practice in terms of the artisanal, as 'primarily domestic, the product of simple activities that are perfectly conceivable

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[3] Figure 3 appears upside down in the interview published in Anon., 'Intervista a Marisa Merz', *Marcatré*, 26–30 (December 1966), p.406. *Marcatré* was the first interdisciplinary journal in Italy founded by Eugenio Battisti in 1963. Contributors to the art sections included Gillo Dorfles, Edoardo Sanguineti, Umberto Eco and Germano Celant. In this interview, however, neither the name nor the initials of the interviewer appear. The dialogue is articulated using 'D,' for 'Domanda' (question), and 'R,' for 'Risposta' (answer). Strikingly, this interview, a significant contribution to the literature on the Merz, is rarely included in the various bibliographies on the artist that have been published. Reference to this interview is made in a book on the history of Sperone gallery: See Anna Minola, *Gian Enzo Sperone Torino-Roma-New York: 35 Anni di mostre tra Europa e America* (Turin: Hopefulmonster, 2000), p.25.

[4] Mariano Boggia, director of the Fondazione Merz, explains that at least since the mid-1980s, during the time that he knew Mario and Marisa Merz, both artists used to obtain semifinished metals such as lead, aluminium and copper from the company Zanoletti Metalli. Mariano Boggia, personal communication, 20 January 2014.

[5] These dimensions have been obtained from the Tate Installation technical report examined by Mette Carlsen in 2009. See Accession no.T12950, p.2.

[6] Anon., 'Intervista a Marisa Merz', *op*. *cit*. (note 3), p.406.

in the home, with no need for a proper atelier.'[7] Such references to domesticity as they relate to Merz abound in the accounts of the time, for example when Michelangelo Pistoletto, in an interview with Andrea Bellini, describes his visit to Mario Merz's studio in 1961. He explains, 'I also saw some interesting work by Marisa Merz: she was filling soup bowls from her kitchen with casts of plaster and other materials' as if her practice had emanated straight out of the kitchen.[8] Elsewhere, describing the meetings that regularly took place in Mario and Marisa Merz's Turin home, Piero Gilardi explains: 'we really have to say "at Marisa's" because it was really "her" house […] the house was a projection of Marisa.'[9]

Merz's description of her practice in terms of the 'primarily domestic' is consonant with the way Accardi had aligned the techniques underpinning her own practice with the traditions of female labour. But if Accardi had reclaimed the repetitive and arduous gesture this involved in order—so she claimed—to transform it into something liberatory, to take it outside the home, Merz's statements, by contrast, do not insist on such a distinction. Typically the literature on Merz has responded in different ways to this insistence by the artist on the apparently domestic character of her work. Many have continued to confine Merz's practice to the narrowly domestic, seeing it as quite simply an extension of homemaking.[10] In line with the way female home-based crafts were beginning to be

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[7] Dieter Schwarz, 'The Irony of Marisa Merz', *October*, 124 (2008), p.159. First published in German with Italian translation in Dieter Schwarz, *Marisa Merz* (Kunstmuseum Winterthur; Dusseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995).

[8] Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Facing Pistoletto* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2009), p.35.

[9] Piero Gilardi and Floriana Piqué, 'Pour Marisa Merz' in Catherine Grenier (ed.), *Marisa Merz: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1994), p.202.

[10] Achille Bonito Oliva describes how 'the objects produced by Marisa Merz are the result of a specifically feminine sensitivity, torn between two opposite extremes—the magical evocation of the

re-evaluated, a significantly distinct trend in the literature that emerged by the mid-seventies offered a feminist critique of Merz's practice, as it was understood in relation to female domestic labour.[11] In an article that appeared in *Data* in 1975, Tommaso Trini put it explicitly in these terms writing: 'her manual skill is aligned to a means of social production where, historically, woman has been the producer but has never owned the means of production.'[12] Those who have read the artist's practice within these terms have seen Merz's well-known withdrawal from the circuits of artistic production as a response to a culture imposing conditions of oppression.[13] These accounts also continue to situate Merz's art making in terms of

feminine role and the idea of a structure that puts order into sensitivity […] [to] convey the sense of a universe made by hand'. See Achille Bonita, 'Process, Concept and Behaviour in Italian Art', *Studio International*, 191, 979 (1976), p.5; Catherine Grenier describes how 'her entire oeuvre tends towards anonymity' and, how, 'in 1968, Marisa Merz withdrew voluntarily from the art circuit and became an outsider, shutting herself away in her studio at home in order to while away her time knitting'. See Catherine Grenier, 'The Thread of Time', in Grenier, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.263; Germano Celant describes this in similar terms: '[I]n 1968, she withdrew from the system of art, settling down in a chair to knit.' See Germano Celant, 'Marisa's Swing', *Artforum*, 30, 10 (1992), p.99. The article was reprinted with some minor differences in Grenier, op.cit. pp.239–52.

[11] For an overview of the gendering of homemaking see Gill Perry, *Playing at Home: House in Contemporary Art*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), pp.15–19.

[12] My translation of 'La sua manualità operativa è a misura dei mezzi sociali di produzione di cui la donna ha storicamente il processo e non la proprietà.' Robert Lumley makes a similar point when he writes: 'It was not until feminism and shows such as Lea Vergines's pioneering exhibition on "the other half of the avant-garde" that women such as Merz got the wider critical attention they deserved.' Robert Lumley, *Arte Povera* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), p.35; Anne-marie Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *Data*, 18 (1975), pp.50–55; Tommaso Trini, 'Arte e Storia Del Lavoro', *Data*, 16/17 (1975), pp.50–51; Anne-marie Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art', *Studio International*, 191, 979 (1976), pp.24–30; Lea Vergine, *L'Arte Ritrovata Alla Ricerca Dell'altra Metà Dell'avanguardia* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1982).

[13] Trini, 'Arte e Storia Del Lavoro', *op. cit.* (note 12); Marina La Palma, 'Paradoxes of Association and Object: Marisa Merz (Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California: Exhibition Review)', *ArtWeek (U.S.A.)*, 15, 10 (1984), p.5; Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art', *op. cit.* (note 12). For an overview of the way in which these kinds of practices have

an extension of homemaking so as to understand the relationship between her artistic activity and its only intermittent public exposure. Instead, I want to explore how the domestic aspect of her work overturns its own logic, outgrowing the space in which it originates.[14] In order to delineate this dialectical process, I want to examine the artist's involvement in experimental practices in Turin at the time, which Merz contributed to in innovative ways.

Already by 1966, when *Untitled* was first exhibited to the public in the artist's studio (figure 2.6), its spiralling tubes, which seemed to orbit the room, were threatening to overrun the space in which they were produced. Merz aligned the creative process to the 'humble' tradition of embroidery but this is embroidery that weaves a room, a habitat, a spectacular three-dimensional vision, a giant tin monster, and effects a complete transformation of the domestic space. The appearance of the sculpture stands in stark contrast to the process, couched as it is by Merz in terms of these domestic tropes.[15] I want to begin by taking *Untitled* out of the home, exploring the way in which the kinds of encounters that are staged through the work throughout 1967 might challenge the everyday lived experience of the domestic. By examining the effects of that artistic practice, I want to ask how

come to be read in gendered terms and situated within the home see also Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, new ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), pp.60–82.

[14] Rachele Ferrario also implies the need for an alternative reading when she writes that Merz 'rifiuterà ogni tipo di definizione e il cliché dell'arte al femminile.' Rachele Ferrario, *Le signore dell'arte: quattro artiste italiane che hanno cambiato il nostro modo di raffigurare il mondo*, 1. ed. (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), p.117.

[15] For the kinds of responses to Marisa Merz's work in this way see Bonita, *op. cit.* (note 10), p.5. More recently Rudi Fuchs has described Merz's work as private, metaphorical & mystifying. See Rudi Fuchs 'Marisa Merz' in Grenier, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.254; Grenier writes: 'In 1968, Marisa Merz withdrew voluntarily from the art circuit and became an outsider, shutting herself away in her studio at home in order to while away her time knitting.' See Grenier, 'The Thread of Time' in *ibid.*, p.263.

its products might work to transform the categories under which the works were viewed in their original space and the subsequent spaces in which they appeared throughout 1967. That is, I want to consider how a creative process that has so often been collapsed onto a feminised identity limited by domestic roles might instead offer a model of interaction that could work to challenge the established order. If Chapter One examined the idea of living space through the utopianism of living differently, then here I want to reframe that notion in terms of the everyday lived experience of home. And I want to explore how Merz's *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) might offer a way of rethinking that experience in ways that at times goes against the grain of the liberatory rhetoric as it had been expressed by Accardi.

As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, the themes of homemaking and habitation at this moment was not unusual. It emerged as the principal battleground upon which the issues of Americanisation, modernisation and Cold War politics were fought during this period in Italy.[16] In line with the way in which the domestic space would be subjected to interrogation throughout this period in diverse ways, Merz's practice seems to want to spectacularly undercut the activity of homemaking.[17] There is something unsettling about the way in which *Untitled*

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[16] For an account of the way in which Americanisation was negotiated in Italy, specifically as it related to the home, see Paolo Scrivano, 'Signs of Americanization in Italian Domestic Life: Italy's Postwar Conversion to Consumerism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40, 2 (2005), pp.317–340. As a theme homemaking also reverberated internationally, even dominating the 1967 world's fair held in Montreal under the rubric 'Man and his World'. See Expo 67. Montréal, Québec, Man and His World: International Fine Arts Exhibition, 28 April–27 October 1967 (Montreal: International Fine Arts Exhibition, 1967). For an Italian review of Expo 67 see Leonardo Ricci, 'Expo 67 esposizione universal di montreal' in *D'Ars Agency*, no.35 May–June, 1967, pp.48–59.

[17] On this subject see for example; Alex Coles and Catharine Rossi, *EP Vol. 1– The Italian Avant-Garde: 1968–1976* (Sternberg Press, 2013); Paola Navone, *Architettura Radicale* (Segrate: Milani, 1974); Scrivano, *op. cit.* (note 16).

comes to fill the room—a hybridisation of the domestic and the industrial in scale,

process and appearance. It evokes the vocabulary of Italian design only to strip it of

any functional value, anticipating the development of 'anti-design' from the late

1960s onwards (for example Cini Boeri's modular seating furniture *Serpentone* of

1970–71) (figure 2.7). The work stands as a complex challenge to any

preconceived notion of the modern lived experience of the domestic (a rejection of

the new models of the American suburban home widely disseminated at the time

through *Domus* as the epitome of comfort, convenience and modernity). Merz's

Untitled (*Living Sculpture*) functions as a subversion by means of its own logic,

whereby the artist appropriates a practice that she herself calls 'primarily domestic'

yet whose associations with the small-scale, the inconspicuous, and the

unobtrusive, by which it has subsequently been read, she here completely

overturns.[18]

In many ways Merz's *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*), a monstrous growth

within the home could seem like the opposite of dwelling as it had been envisaged

by Accardi. This was a sculpture that grew, and to which different parts were added

and put together in each of its various incarnations—which in 1967 alone

numbered four. In addition to featuring in Tonino De Bernardi's *Il Mostro Verde*

(1967), *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) was exhibited publicly for the first time in April

1967 at the *Museo Sperimentale d'arte Contemporanea*, held within the Galleria

Civica D'Arte Moderna (GAM) (figure 2.8).[19] A photograph of the work featured in

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[18] For a discussion of the kinds of images that were circulated in *Domus* throughout this period see; Scrivano, *op. cit.* (note 16), pp.324–25.

[19] Initially located in Genoa, the collection of *Museo Sperimentale d'Arte Contemporanea* was donated to the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna (GAM) by art historian Eugenio Battisti in 1965. At the time it was the only Italian institution exclusively dedicated to contemporary art. Following Battisti's move to the United States, curator Aldo Passoni and Germano Celant were actively

the 1985 publication *Museo Sperimentale d'Arte Contemporanea* shows it as it was installed in 1967, hanging as a single corkscrew from the ceiling. In June of that year, it expanded to fill the room at the Galleria Sperone (figure 2.9).[20] Six months later, still in 1967, Merz would be invited to install another version in Turin's Piper Pluri Club under the artistic direction of its architect Pietro Derossi (figure 2.10). A series of transitions, from a single spiral sculpture to entire-room installation, from protagonist-monster to environment, experiment playfully with the idea of what the work could be and how it could exist in each new space.

In part this way of thinking about *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) can be attributed to the effects of *photogénie*, that influential notion from cinematic impressionism first theorised in 1920 by Louis Delluc, which denoted that special capacity of the moving image 'to render an object or character in an expressive way […] a latent power […] based on the camera's ability to poeticise the ordinary and

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involved in augmenting the collection of works. Merz was amongst the artists persuaded to contribute, donating two aluminium sculptures to the expanding collection. When Battisti's donation was officially presented to the public in the exhibition *Museo Sperimentale d'Arte Contemporanea* 1967, the number of works in the collection had increased to over two hundred. These are documented in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Museo Sperimentale d'arte Moderna*. Merz's sculptures were exhibited in the seventh room (*Prime Proposte Di Arte Povera*) of the exhibition and featured alongside works by Alighiero Boetti, Luciano Fabro, Aldo Mondino, Mario Merz, Giulio Paolini, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Piero Gilardi, Francesco Lo Savio, Pino Pascali, Piero Manzoni, Lucio Fontana and Paolo Icaro. See *Museo Sperimentale D'arte Contemporanea* (Turin: Tip. Impronta, 1967), pp.10–30; see also Mirella Bandini and Rosanna Maggio Serra, *Il Museo Sperimentale Di Torino Arte Italiana Degli Anni Sessanta Nelle Collezioni Della Galleria Civica D'arte Moderna* (Milan: Fabbri, 1985), pp.11–21; Giorgina Bertolino, Mostre autres e musei-manifesto, Luca Massimo Barbero (ed.), *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2010), p.109.

[20] Maria Cristina Mundici explains that 'the exhibition space opened by the dealer in 1964 was called Gian Enzo Sperone—Arte moderna, a name shortened in April 1965 to Gian Enzo Sperone and in June 1967 this was changed again simply to Galleria Sperone.' See Minola, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.19.

prosaic through the use of framing, light and shade and directional movement'.[21] Certainly this is the case for the way in which de Bernardi brings *Untitled (Living Sculpture)* to life in *Il Mostro Verde*, but it is also an effect, I would argue, of photographic reproductions of the work which dramatises the way in which the sculpture might be defined in each new staging.

Just as the different staging of the work plays with how the sculpture could exist in every new space, much the same could be said of the encounter being staged each time. Examining the complex and contradictory modes of viewing that structure the sculptural encounter—proximity and distance, autonomy and situatedness, containment and dispersal—Alex Potts suggests that these conditions are as much a feature of traditional sculpture as they are of more recent work.[22] In order to offer a more nuanced interrogation of the kind of shifts (rather than radical break) that *did* take place in the three decades from 1960s onwards, Potts argues for continuity between the autonomous object-based and more recent context-dependent installation work. Merz seems to want to interrogate the new ways of viewing and thinking about sculpture that emerge at this moment (made possible by what Potts has described as the phenomenological turn). This brought with it new ways of thinking of everyday experiences of viewing and a broader situating of the body within the physical environment.[23] Understood in this context, I would add that Merz is also able to introduce an element of uncertainty about with whom or with what that encounter might be envisaged.

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[21] Ian Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2001), p.82; see also Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/anthology* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1988), p.xvi.

[22] Alex Potts, 'Installation and Sculpture', *Oxford Art Journal*, 24, 2 (2001), pp.7–23.

[23] *Ibid*., pp.7–8; Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), ch. 6.

The centrality of the everyday in Merz's work is brought out in the narrative she herself constructs around her artistic practice. In an interview published in *Data,* Merz associates the creation of the aluminium sculpture with the time spent caring for her daughter Beatrice Merz. As she explains it:

When Bea was small I stayed at home with her. At the time I was making the works with sheets of aluminium…there was a rhythm in all this, and time, lots of time. So there was Beatrice, small. She would ask me for things, I would get up and do them. Everything on the same level, Bea and the things I was sewing. I was equally open to all these things.[24]

Merz's reference to the aluminium sculptures as an index of the time spent caring for her daughter invokes a temporality associated with continuity and repetition, a time when artistic practice and family life are interwoven.[25] If this quotidian temporality is registered in the creative process, then Merz is also quick to draw attention to its limits, explaining that 'it became a bit mechanical, so I stopped'.[26]

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[24] 'Quando Bea era piccola, stavo in casa con lei. Allora facevo I lavori con I fogli d'alluminio. Tagliavo e cucivo queste cose (loro si piegano da soli, sai non c'e' sforzatura, hanno le loro possibilità e I loro limiti). C'era un ritmo in tutto questo, e il tempo, tanto tempo. Dunque c'era Beatrice, piccola. Mi chiedeva delle cose, mi alzavo le facevo. Tutto sullo stesso piano, Bea e le cose che cucivo, avevo la stessa disponibilita per tutto. Però diventava un pò meccanico. Allora mi sono fermata. Seduta su questa poltrona. Due anni seduta solo per Bea continuavo ad alzarmi. Non facevo più lavori d'arte'. See Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente–Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *op. cit.* (note 12), p.53.

[25] Ibid.

[26] anon., 'Intervista a Marisa Merz', *op. cit.* (note 3), p.406.

With this remark she at once points to a more ambivalent experience, an everyday existence that might also be inflected with drudgery and boredom.[27]

Merz frames her practice through these daily personal experiences and their maternal axes, insisting that there has 'never been any separation between my art and my life.'[28] This connection between 'art' and 'life' has often been read in a way that confines Merz to the anonymity of the private and domestic, emptying her work of political associations.[29] Drawing on the writings of artist and critic Piero Gilardi, whose own practice as it relates to the politics of domesticity will be examined in the following chapter, I would like to argue that a connection between art and life *can* take Merz's emphasis on daily existence into account without eliminating its political or critical potential. It was Germano Celant who famously connected the terms 'art' and 'life' in his article 'Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War' of 1967 as a way of politicising art.[30] Merz remains conspicuously absent from the list of artists featured in Celant's originary statements, in which he issues an urgent call to merge art and life by means of 'guerrilla strategies', lending a radicalised and overtly politicised flavour to his appeal to eliminate the opposition

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[27] This way of reading the artist's practice has also been recently recognised by Rachele Ferrario. She writes 'le opera degli anni Sessanta e Settanta si riferiscono a Bea, portano il suo nome e probabilmente sono ispirate a lei. Anche il giardino di chiocciole d'alluminio appeso al soffitto di casa—invadente e clasutrofobico, cangiante e leggero, persino ironico—sembra raccontare della difficoltà di quell compito, di madre e di moglie.' See Rachele Ferrario, *op. cit.* (note 14), p.128; for an in depth analysis of the term 'everyday day life' see Ben Highmore, *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday* (London: Routledge, 2011); Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[28] Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *op. cit.* (note 12), p.53.

[29] See for example: http://www.gladstonegallery.com/exhibition/5756/press

[30] Germano Celant, 'Arte Povera. Appunti per Una Guerriglia', *Flash Art*, 5 (1967), p.3; for an English translation see Germano Celant, 'Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War', trans. Paul Blanchard in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), p.194.

between art and life as 'the two levels of existence'.[31] Merz's emphasis on the everyday is couched in terms that are very different to those used by Celant, a critic who has described the 'aggressive and dispersive forms of *arte povera*' as anathema to her practice.[32]

Gilardi, however, offers a way of conceiving of Merz's practice that takes what was a distinctive position amongst her contemporaries at the time into account. Describing Merz's ability to 'put her work and her daily life' into close correspondence, Gilardi retroactively aligns Merz's practice with international artistic developments, founded upon what he describes as 'la récupération du facteur subjectif' ('a recovery of subjectivity'), and for which he coined the term *microemotiva* ('microemotive').[33] Elsewhere Gilardi explains that the rejection of a number of his works by the gallerist and collector Illeana Sonnabend, as he puts it:

> Made me reflect on the actual freedom an artist could have, once a part of the official cultural apparatus and the market […] I realised that it was necessary to affirm a new human subjectivity "within" the hyper-rational

[31] Celant, 'Arte Povera. Appunti per Una Guerriglia', *op. cit.* (note 30).

[32] Celant puts it in the following terms: 'A far cry from the clotted, entangled, aggressive and dispersive forms of Arte Povera'. See Celant, 'Marisa's Swing', in Grenier, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.294. This sentence appears in slightly altered forms in the original version of the article. Compare this for example with the way it is formulated in the article that appears in *Artforum*. There Celant writes: 'far from the landscape of…the disintegrative shapes of arte povera.' See Celant, 'Marisa's Swing', *op. cit.* (note 10), p.98.

[33] Piero Gilardi, 'Pour Marisa Merz' in Grenier, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.202. Gilardi explains it as follows: 'précisons tout d'abord que la démarche de Marisa mettait alors en étroite correspondance sa vie personnelle et son expression artistique, son travail et sa quotidienneté. C'était un des traits caractéristiques qui la démarquait fortement du reste du groupe [...]. Dans un de mes articles publié en septembre '68 …je parle de ce climat qui s'était crée dans un moment d'emphase, un foisonnement dont l'aspect germinal très intense tant a New York que sur la Côte Ouest ou en d'autres points de L'Europe était déjà vivant à partir de '66. C'était la récupération du facteur subjectif.'

logic of social life at the time. This tension was being expressed by the new artists with whom I was in contact.[34]

In a 1968 article titled 'Primary energy and the microemotive artists', Gilardi couched the work of a wide range of contemporary artists in terms borrowed from quantum physics.[35] The practice of a whole series of artists is connected through their engagement with what he describes as 'primary energy'.[36] Although Gilardi's argument takes a number of diverse forms (and logical leaps), what seems to underpin the work of microemotive artists is a common desire to liberate materials, individuals, emotions and consciousness from predetermined

[34] Cesare Biasini Selvaggi and Patrizia Poggi Galleria, *Piero Gilardi: Dalla Post-Pop Alla New Media Art, Il Percorso Di Ricerca Dal 1963 Al 2004* (Villanova di Ravenna: Essegi, 2004), p.26. Gilardi writes: 'mi aveva fatto riflettere sulla libertà effettiva che un artista aveva, una volta entrato nell'apparato culturale ufficiale e mercantile.…stavo capendo che era necessaria l'affermazione di una nuova soggettività umana "dentro" la logica iper-razionale della vita sociale di allora. Questa tensione veniva espressa dai nuovi artisti con I quali ero in contatto attraverso un'energia emotive sottile, tutta interna alle strutture, alle materie o alla natura'.

[35] Piero Gilardi, 'Primary Energy and the Microemotive Artists', *Arts Magazine*, 43, September, 1968, pp.48–52. First published as 'L'energia primaria e gli artisti microemotivi', in *Ombre Elettriche*, n. 3–4, September 1968, pp. 21–22. It also appeared as 'Micro-emotive art' in *Museum Journaal*, 13 April 1968, pp. 198–202. Beginning with a quote by Mario Merz who said of his practice: 'I search for energy that flows, freed from the shackles of rhythm', Gilardi writes of Merz, 'he goes on to give us an idea of this "primary energy" which is present both before and after "structure".' Finding parallels with the postulations of steady-state theory (that primary energy is present both before and after structure), Gilardi goes on to describe the different ways in which other artists (that Gilardi categorised as microemotive) have found ways of working that harness 'primary energy' and function independently from an overarching structure. However, it is not always clear how Gilardi's analogy is intended to function and his blanket application of the term primary energy is at times confusing. Similarly his reference to organizing structure is used to mean a variety of different things from its initial location in physical laws to its later situation within politics, economics, social organization and aesthetics, but what is so striking about this article is its attempt to find a counter model to the reading of process as entropic. Instead Gilardi offers a model of process as vital. I am grateful to Jo Applin for suggesting this link to me.

[36] *Ibid*., p.49.

and organising structures. Gilardi's statements chime with the widespread tendency

amongst artists at this time, including as mentioned above in the rhetoric adopted

by Accardi, in search for freedom from the weight of modernism, for artistic

disencumbrance as this has been articulated by Potts.[37] According to Gilardi's

view, microemotive artists are able to attain freedom within a society structured by

an overriding order.[38] His reading acknowledges the agency of these structuring

laws but also challenges the obstacle to freedom they present. Critical of

Minimalism, Gilardi's adoption of the term 'primary energy' is also directed

against 'Primary Structures'.[39]

Moreover, his application of physical laws (those postulated by steady-state

theory, as is indicated by his reference to entropic systems) is not unique.[40]

Elsewhere, they are articulated altogether differently. Gilardi explains this

difference in the following way:

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[37] Alex Potts, 'Disencumbered Objects', *October*, 124 (2008), p.169.

[38] Gilardi, *op. cit.* (note 35); see also 'Temporary Artistic Communities' Piero Gilardi in
conversation with Francesco Manacorda, 8 November 2008', in Christian Rattemeyer, *Exhibiting
the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form', 1969* (London: Afterall,
2010), p.232; Lara Conte, *Materia, Corpo, Azione: Ricerche Artistiche Processuali Tra Europa e
Stati Uniti 1966–1970* (Milan: Electa, 2010), pp.168–90. In a recent interview Gilardi explains the
idea of 'primary energy' in the following way: 'è stata una reazione: l'arte, soffocata dalla
produzione di massa di immagini industriali ha cercato di appropriarsi di tali immagini primarie ed
enegetiche'; Piero Gilardi et al., *Piero Gilardi: Acquavirtuale* (Livorno: Graphis arte, 2000), p.7.

[39] Gilardi is explicit about this when he compares the work of Larry Bell and Ger van Elk: 'we can
make a clear distinction between microemotive and minimal works: whereas Bell's subjects ran
through the void and came to life 'solely in the moment of impact with the plenum those of Van Elk
live in fluid form astride the plenum and the void.' Gilardi, *op. cit.* (note 35), p.51; 'Temporary
Artistic Communities' in Rattemeyer, *op. cit.* (note 38), p.252; Conte, *op. cit.* (note 38); for the way
in which Celant initially characterised Arte Povera and Minimalism with striking affinity, see
Jacopo Galimberti, 'A Third-Worldist Art? Germano Celant's Invention of Arte Povera', *Art
History*, 36, 2 (2013), p.4.

[40] Gilardi, *op. cit.* (note 35), p.48.

These were the years when a fundamental framework was emerging in the US. Robert Smithson and Robert Morris had expressed the sense of total entropy, or dead end, that had been reached by the industrial system. While Morris and Donald Judd insisted on this sense of emptiness, Smithson glimpsed an escape route.[41]

Also searching for an 'escape route', Gilardi offers a distinctive way of conceiving of process as vital rather than entropic, a view he identifies with microemotive artists. Within Gilardi's conception, Merz, like the other artists included in this group, is able to 'give the traditional art object the sense of a provisional presence'.[42] Importantly, it is in part on these grounds that Gilardi makes the claim that Merz's practice could be understood, with hindsight, as a precursor to post-modern subjectivity. Gilardi writes:

> Marisa perhaps suffered from a lack of real understanding on our part […] a broad consensus […] could appreciate her 'environment art' but […] didn't agree entirely with her theoretical approach. This was to do with a feminine specificity that we were unable to grasp, we did not know that this could be organised around a significant theoretical core. Reflecting on this now, you could say that Marisa was the protagonist of an artistic and cultural movement which brought to the fore a new concept of subjectivity,

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[41] 'Temporary Artistic Communities' in Rattemeyer, *op. cit.* (note 38), p.232.

[42] Gilardi, 'L'energia primaria e gli artisti microemotivi', *op. cit.* (note 35), p. 21.

anticipating that which following various stages of development became post-modern subjectivity.[43]

It is only these later comments by Gilardi that align Merz's practice around 1966 to a radical line of enquiry.[44] Here Gilardi proposes a way in which this recovery of subjectivity could have a political dimension at the level of experience. Following Gilardi's logic, Merz's 'primarily domestic practice' expands the kinds of politically charged responses Celant was calling for with its emphasis on subjectivity (Merz's ability to put her work and daily life in close correspondence) and the personal (Merz's reference to her daughter Bea).[45]

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[43] My translation of 'Marisa souffrait peut-être de ne pas rencontrer de notre part une véritable compréhension. C'était plutôt un consensus transversal qui pouvait apprécier son "arte ambientale" mais qui n'adhérait pas avec le fond de sa démarche théorique. Cette connotation liée à la spécificité féminine que nous n'avions pas su capter, nous ne saisissions pas qu'elle pouvait opérer autour d'un noyau théorique substantiel. En y réfléchissant aujourd'hui, on peut dire que Marisa était la protagoniste d'un mouvement artistique et culturel qui a hissé au premier plan un nouveau concept de subjectivité, anticipant ce qui, à la suite de divers stades de gestation est devenu la subjectivité post-moderne.' See Grenier, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.204.

[44] This echoes the general trend in recent decades that has seen Merz written into the histories of this period. Inevitably this raises some issues about the way in which Merz has been assimilated into a history from which she was originally kept apart. This question has already been raised elsewhere. Tommaso Trini had first posed the question in his article for *Data* when he asked how someone who had contributed in such a 'fundamental way' should have been excluded from the history of the period. Referring to Trini's article Robert Lumley asks whether it might have been that Merz had chosen to 'opt out of the competitiveness of the art scene and the pressures of the art market […] a deliberate strategy rather than enforced exclusion.' See also Richard Flood, Marisa Merz in Germano Celant, *Arte povera 2011* (Milan: Electa, 2011), p.356; Lumley, *op. cit.* (note 12), p.35; See also Rachele Ferrario, *op. cit.* (note 14), p.117; Trini, 'Arte E Storia Del Lavoro', *op. cit.* (note 12), p.50.

[45] Gilardi 'Pour Marisa Merz' in Grenier, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.202. It is only in this interview from 1994 that Gilardi describes Merz's practice as aligned with this tendency; see note 12 above. Conte, however, does note Marisa Merz's name amongst the original list of artists grouped together by Gilardi under the category of microemotive. See Conte, *op. cit.* (note 38), p.186.

Merz began making *Untitled* around the same time that Accardi was working on *Tenda*. Both works address the theme of dwelling but they do this by vastly different means. Certainly the waves that run up in a dorsal spine along the transparent panels of *Tenda* might suggest something of the lightness with which Merz's sculpture seems to float in space. However, Accardi's *Tenda* is underpinned by a logic of subtraction; she offers an image of uninhabited space and *Tenda*, along with the other environments that she made between 1965 and 1972, transforms any empty space or place into a home, shelter or dwelling. By contrast, Merz's conception of dwelling is underscored by a logic of surfeit and an image of overpopulation. Merz has described the work in terms of a spreading out of continuous rather than discrete forms, 'amassing', and 'connecting'.[46] And the photographs of the sculpture as it appears in the artist's home seem to offer a vision of untrammelled growth.

It is a conception of production that runs against the grain of sculptural practice at the time, particularly as it was redefined in the US. Much attention was directed in the Italian art press towards the *Primary Structures* (1966) exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York.[47] Considered in relation to this context, Merz's practice seems to be motivated by an impulse that was underpinned by a logic of seriality but whose apparently serial nature offered a vision of excess rather than

[46] Anon., 'Intervista a Marisa Merz', *op. cit.*, (note 3), p.406.

[47] See for example Lucy Lippard, 'Notizie da New York', *D'Ars Agency*, n.5, 20 December 1965–10 March 1966, p.88; Lippard, 'Gli Stati Uniti,', *D'Ars Agency*, nos.1–2, 10 March–10 June 1966, pp.8–9; Lippard, 'Notizie da New York', in *D'Ars Agency*, nos 3–4, 10 June–20 October 1966, p.144; Lippard, 'Notizie da New York', in *D'Ars Agency*, 20 October–10 January 1967, p.146; M Pistoi, 'Riviste,' in *Marcatrè,* 19–22, April 1966, pp.387–89; 'Due ultimissimi aspetti della pittura americana', *Marcatrè*, 23–25, June 1966, p.176; 'Strutturalismo made in USA' in *Arte Oggi*, n.30, October–November, 1967, p.2; Marisa Volpi, 'Arte Americana e arte Italiana, Nuove Tendenze, in 'Flash Art', n.7, 15 March–15 April, 1968.

containment as *Primary Structures* came to be negatively interpreted in Italy.[48]

Merz was not alone amongst her contemporaries in Italy to enact process as vital

(Richard Flood has recently described *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) as infinitely

adaptable and expandable).[49] When Mattiacci was invited to exhibit his *Tubo* at *Lo*

Spazio dell'Immagine in 1967 (figure 2.11), it also coincided with the showcasing

of works by Robert Morris, Dan Flavin, Tony DeLap and John McCracken in Italy

at the San Marino Biennale. Mattiacci's yellow enamel painted aluminium

sculpture was displayed on a floor that had been covered with polished aluminium

so that the tube was reflected in the mirrored floor to what must have been a

disorientating effect. In December of that year Mattiacci exhibited the work once

again at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome. Now one hundred and

fifty metres long, *Tubo* traced the spiralling steps that connected the gallery

entrance to the street level and continued in the building in a series of contortions.

In 1967 the writer and critic Mario Diacono offered the following description of the

sculpture: 'Mattiacci's big tube rises along the stairs that lead to the gallery,

invades and completes its development throughout the entire room, exiting from

the door at the back and losing itself in a smaller secondary room.'[50]

Similarly, Merz's sculpture seems to want to explore the parameters of the

space in which it was exhibited. Her work is continuously in the process of

transformation and as such continuously redefines the relationship between its form

and the space it occupies. But how exactly does Merz reckon these relationships

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[48] Conte, *op. cit.* (note 38), p.31.

[49] Richard Flood, 'Marisa Merz', in Celant, *Arte povera 2011*, *op. cit.* (note 44), p.356.

[50] My translation of 'Il grande tubo di Mattiacci sale lungo la scala che porta alla galleria, invade e compie le sue evoluzioni nell'intera sala, esce dalla porta in fondo e si perde in una stanzetta secondaria.' See Mario Diacono, 'Eliseo Mattiacci' in *Bit*, Milan, May 1967, quoted in Bruno Corà, *Eliseo Mattiacci* (Ravenna: Essegi, 1991), p.19.

through *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*)? Can Merz's 'domestic' practice be understood as politically engaged in the way that feminism politicised the private in the 1970s—and in Italy most famously through *La Rivolta Femminile* (Women's Revolt)?[51] And, further, how might this reach beyond the kitchen?[52] A statement made by Merz in 1966 suggests that the artist herself thought it could. Situating herself within this political context, Merz explains the process, which she compares to embroidery, as 'an effort; but it seems to me to be a positive struggle, in the sense that it conceals within it the allusion of struggle as social beings, and this is a way of identifying oneself with reality.'[53] Here Merz reveals a desire to recuperate a political dimension for her practice, a dimension where struggle is understood as a positive way of engaging with life, as an operative mode not simply paralleling but characterising daily existence.

If Merz considers the creative process as a way of engaging with life in terms of struggle, I want to pose the question: can the encounters that are staged through *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) be considered a further site of struggle? In the first published review of Merz's work, Tommaso Trini wrote of *Untitled* as

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[51] Second-wave feminism began in the mid-1960s in Italy, developing largely through women's collectives. *La Rivolta Femminile*, centered on the art critic and philosopher Carla Lonzi, was one such collective. For an overview of the development of the Italian feminist movement in Italy between 1960–1980, see Teresa Bertilotti and Anna Scattigno, *Il femminismo degli anni Settanta*, 1. ed. (Roma: Viella, 2005); Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Graziella Parati and Rebecca West, *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice: Equality and Sexual Difference* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002).

[52] On this subject see the selections of essays exploring the politics of space in Beatriz Colomina and Jennifer Bloomer, *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

[53] anon., 'Intervista a Marisa Merz', *op. cit.* (note 3); elsewhere Merz had spoken about refusing 'un ruolo stabilito, come la moglie, il figlio' (an established role, like wife or child) that she considered 'separatori' (split). See Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *op. cit.* (note 12), p.50.

occupying space 'passively'.[54] More recently, Alessandra Bonomo, gallerist and

close friend of Merz, has insisted that the artist wanted these tubes to function as an

obstacle or confrontation.[55] This description suggests the possibility of a form of

resistance that is played out in the work's inner logic. Such a reading corresponds

to the ways in which thinking about the sculptural encounter was actively

reanimated at the time with regard to its context of display and modes of address.[56]

Merz seems to want to take these conditions of viewing into account. And yet, if

the viewer is implicated in the staging of the work, its reception remains

ambivalent.

It is not clear from a photograph taken in 1967 to mark the opening of

Merz's installation at Piper Pluri Club (figure 2.12) precisely where in the Turin

studio Merz is standing. The surface patina of *Untitled*, dulled over time by dust

and grease does, however, testify to its placement in the artist's kitchen.[57] But

perhaps this ambiguity is partly the point. *Untitled* effaces the defining features of

the space. This is precisely how Mariano Boggia, director of the Fondazione Merz,

had wanted *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) installed at Tate Modern in 2009 with his

instruction that 'the artwork should fill out the room and the architecture should

disappear' (figure 2.13a–b).[58] At a time when other artists such as Pino Pascali,

Michelangelo Pistoletto and Alighiero Boetti were emptying out their studio

[54] Tommaso Trini, 'Marisa Merz: Una Mostra Alla Galleria Sperone', *Domus*, 424 (1967), p.52.

[55] Alessandra Bonomo, London, personal communication, June 2009.

[56] Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*, *op. cit.* (note 23), ch. 6.

[57] Richard Flood is, to my knowledge the first to note that this photograph was taken in 1967 on the occasion of the artist's exhibition at the Piper Pluri Club. See Richard Flood, 'Marisa Merz' in Celant, *Arte povera 2011*, *op. cit.* (note 44), p.356. For a report on the condition of *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) when it was first acquired for the Tate see Mette Carlsen, *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*), unpublished condition report, Tate, 2011.

[58] *Ibid*.

spaces, Merz was filling hers up. (Celant evokes this sense when he describes *Untitled* as 'having a taste for eating up space').[59] The photograph of the work in Merz's kitchen offers a rehearsal of the imminent possibility of encounter and entrapment both between the artist and her work and between the viewer and Merz's work. If this is an indication of a kind of interplay between work and world, as Gabriele Guercio has observed in relation to photographs of artists in their studios, then the balance here is precarious, the work threatening to take over the space in which it was created.[60] Merz had acknowledged the restrictions imposed by the studio/apartment's structure. In advance of the Galleria Sperone exhibition, the artist had described how she had wanted to take the work outside the confines of the studio, 'I think I'd like to rent a big space, a garage, a shop, for example.'[61] She goes on to admit that 'nevertheless, in a certain way, the fact of seeing them here in a domestic setting raises some doubts for me; I think that I would like to rent a big space […] to work on them outside of an inevitable and predetermined context.'[62] With each installation of *Untitled* a shift is implied that is temporal and

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[59] Celant, 'Marisa's Swing', *op. cit.* (note 10), p.98.

[60] As Gabriele Guercio has noted in relation to these kinds of studio photography: 'while sounding a theme of representation and self-representation…these images also offered a means of access…to the actual physical spaces where the most immaterial kind of human activity materialises…they also function as signifiers of a beginning, of a source or site where the creative emerges and the interplay between artist, work and world finds its origin.' See Gabriele Guercio, 'A Community of the Non-All' in Kathleen Krattenmaker (ed.), *Michelangelo Pistoletto, From One to Many, 1956–1974* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2010), p.109.

[61] Anon., 'Intervista a Marisa Merz', *op. cit.* (note 3). Merz writes: 'penso che mi piacerebbe affittare un grosso locale, un garage, un magazzino, per esempio.'

[62] Merz writes: 'tuttavia, in certo qual modo, il fatto di vederle qui nel contesto abituale della mia casa mi fa sorgere dei dubbi; penso che mi piacerebbe affittare un grosso locale…per lavorarvi al di fuori di un ambientazione obbligata e preesistente.' *Ibid.* p.406. Her attitude accords with a widespread desire to take art out of 'the designated circuit' to borrow the vocabulary from Robert Lumley in his account of the new artist-run space, *Deposito D'Arte Presente,* created by Marcello Levi and Gian Enzo Sperone that had once served as a warehouse for a car showroom. See Robert

narrative as well as physical. Consistent with experiments in Turin at the time, the various stagings of the work throughout 1967, which I will now explore in turn, offer particularly innovative forms of viewing: if it quickly acquired the title of living sculpture, it is also because it is constantly changing and contingent.

Outgrowing the Kitchen:

Piper Pluri Club

'Imagine the belly of a science fiction spaceship' begins the review of Turin's Piper Pluri Club that appears in the Italian Communist Party newspaper *L'Unità* and which goes on to describe the atmosphere created as a combination of Mario Bava's science-fiction adventures and Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (figure 2.14a–c).[63] It was there that, in December 1967, Merz staged a version of her aluminium sculptures. Constructed in 1966, the club was conceived as a multi-site for cinema, theatre, exhibitions and music events, designed by STRUM group architects Pietro Derossi, Riccardo Rosso and Giorgio Ceretti.[64] It was designed to be an assault on the senses of its visitors, mediated through technological and industrial innovations, with features such as the composer Sergio Liberovici's construction of a sound wall in which forty recorded tracks mixed fragments of news reports,

Lumley, '"This strange and metaphysical city": Arte Povera and the Turin of Alighiero Boetti', Germano Celant and the Deposito D'Arte Presente' in Luca Massimo Barbero, *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2010), p.66. See also Francesco Manacorda et al., *Marcello Levi* (Turin: Hopefulmonster, 2005), p.102–3.

[63] Anon., 'A Torino Un Piper Fantascientifico', *L'Unità*, 29 November 1966, n.p.

[64] The group's other Pluri Club built in Rimini shared the same name as Italian title of the 1951 American SF film *The Thing from Another World*. The article published to mark the opening of the club in November 1966 explains that even this new 'beat paradise' was not enough to forget the recent events, the flooding of 1966, that had destroyed the area; see anon., 'Melanconie Yè-Yè Nel Nuovo Piper', *La Stampa*, 274th edn, 30 November 1966, p.5.

electronic music and the words of Kerouac, Ginsberg and other Beat poets played at random through a laminated polyvinyl tubing tunnel at the entrance to the club.[65]

Through a series of changing events and installations, the Piper Pluri Club was committed to a new and constantly shifting sense of space, mimicking the effects of synesthetic experience. It was a response to widespread calls within architectural practice in Italy seeking to transform social relations through the transformation of social and interactive space in a period when, in particular, music and its associated dance forms had been responsible for creating new public spheres.[66] With similar venues built in Florence, Rimini, Milan and Rome, the nightclub, premised on a utopian ideal of community, came to be regarded as the exemplary site amongst radical architects in Italy: the architect Leonardo Savioli had even designed a course at the Florence School of Design on the subject.

Pietro Derossi explains the radical aims underpinning his practice at the time when the Piper Pluri Clubs were realised. He recounts: 'architecture, in its functional and technical elements, could find its legitimacy (and its beauty) to the extent that it was capable of being an instrument, with specific roles, in organising against the capitalistic exploitation of the city.'[67] He goes on to explain that 'the

[65] See Pietro Derossi, *Per Un'Architettura Narrativa Architetture e Progetti 1959–2000* (Milan: Skira, 2000), p.38; Pietro, *Derossi Associato, Racconto Di Architettura* (Milan: Skira, 2006), 30–33; anon., 'A Torino Un Piper Fantascientifico', *op. cit.* (note 63); anon., 'Melanconie Yè-Yè Nel Nuovo Piper', *op. cit.* (note 64); anon., 'Il Piper E l'Altro Mondo Club', *BOUW* (1970), pp.268–75; Pietro De Rossi et al., 'Progettare per Il Mondo Beat: Il Piper Di Torino', *L'Architettura, Cronoca e Storia*, 143 (1967), p.294; Tommaso Trini, 'Divertimentifici', *Domus*, 458 (1968), pp.13–14.

[66] Paola Navone, *op. cit.* (note 17), p.25; Pietro Derossi, 'Ricordi Radicali', *Ottogono*, 99 (1999), pp.87–117; Associati Archizoom, 'Lo Spazio Di Coinvolgmento', *Casabella*, 326 (1968), pp.32–45; Coles and Rossi, *op. cit.* (note 17); Sohnya Sayres, *The Sixties, without Apology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[67] Derossi, *Per Un'Architettura Narrativa Architetture e Progetti 1959–2000*, *op. cit.* (note 65), p.38. Derossi writes: 'L'architettura, nelle sue componenti funzionali e techniche, poteva trovare la

physical organisation of space was identified as an instrument of domination of the capitalist bourgeoisie, and the role of the architect as the foolish servant of this dominion. Change, through social mobilisation of urban planning, became the real objective.'[68] For Derossi, this conception presupposed an expanded notion of the battleground for action, he goes on to explain that it was 'no longer confined to the factory, but spread throughout society, and socially reproduced in wide-ranging spaces.'[69]

The programme of events held throughout 1967 included shows by Gilardi, Boetti and Pistoletto and is testament to Pietro and Graziella Derossi's close connections with artistic practice in Turin at this time. Merz's environment for the club was the last in the line-up for 1967. This is how Piero Gilardi describes the opening night:

Last night, having just arrived from Paris I passed by the Piper where Marisa Merz's happening was taking place; it was full of fabulously dressed people, there were lots of flowers, Marisa's works were hanging and there was a strong smell of incense. In short, it was a much better evening then any other similar event that I have seen around until now.[70]

sua legittimazione (e anche la sua bellezza) nella misura in cui era capace di essere strumento, con ruoli specifici, nell'organizzare l'antagonismo allo sfruttamento capitalistico della citta'.

[68] *Ibid.*, p.37. Again, Derossi explains: 'L'organizzazione fisica dello spazio fu individuata come strumento di dominio della borghesia capitalista, e il ruolo dell'architetto come quello del servitore sciocco di questo dominio. La mutazione, attraverso la mobilitazione sociale dell'assetto territoriale, divenne il vero obiettivo, e a questo fine l'intelletuale dovette rivedere a fondo il proprio bagaglio disciplinare sottoponendolo a una critica radicale'.

[69] *Ibid.*, p.41. 'E chiaro che questa concezione supponeva una visione allargata del campo delle lotte, non solo più racchiuse nella fabbrica, ma dilaganti nella società, negli ampi spazi della riproduzione sociale.'

[70] Letter from Piero Gilardi to Paolo Icaro quoted in Conte, *op. cit.* (note 38), p.104.

Forming a nightscape with industrial materials in which light, sound, gravity and volume are at play, Merz's installation echoed the visual vocabulary of the building: a temporary structure created within a nightclub container that extends the artist's practice well beyond the confines of the studio/apartment. But how exactly was participation conceived here? Photographs of the work at the time suggest a range of possible stagings, either sparsely dispersed throughout the club in individual groupings of spirals and vertical tubes hanging from the ceiling, or clustered together in a suffocating mass (figure 2.15). The invitation card to Merz's *environnement*, as it was titled, suggests a much more densely populated arrangement of elements towering over the figures sitting underneath (see figure 2.10).

In addition to this, the close-up photograph picturing Merz's sculpture (next to Bruno Munari's light display) as if hovering in space appears distinctly futuristic (figure 2.16), and accords with the description featured in *L'Unità*. But if the allusions to science fiction have been duly noted, they have been interpreted with ambivalence. One account explicitly underscores this connection, and claims that the environment created by Merz recalls Mario Garbuglia's film sets, in particular the space-fantasy pop-satire *Barbarella* (1967).[71] According to Reyner Banham, it is precisely this film that brings into view the architecture of the future. He writes, 'Barbarella is the first post-hardware SF movie of any consequence […] about responsive environments, of one sort or another, and so has been the architectural

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[71] Dorian Ker explains that 'the film's popularity in Italy was based on a long running and popular Italian comic strip of the same name, created and drawn by Mario Garbuglia.' Dorian Ker, *Twelve Perspectives on Arte Povera* (PhD Thesis, University of Essex, 1998), p.383, p. 409, note. 19.

underground for the last three years or so.'[72] This is far removed from the description offered by Trini in a review for *Domus,* in which Merz's aluminium tubes are conceived as 'the-show-rained-from-above.'[73] The latter is a characterisation that resonates with the otherworldly, but rather than pop satire this is apocalyptic, an image of disaster. If this is the kind of environmental sculpture that is intended to mediate relations in the world, then the stakes for change (particularly as they were conceived in political, ecological and technological terms through radical architecture) were as precarious as they were high.[74]

Galleria Sperone:

In interview Merz had explained how she had wanted to bring the sculpture to life from the painted forms that she had been creating, commenting: 'I felt the need to let them live in space [...] the sheets of aluminium are light but resistant to rust and so could, for example, even stay outdoors in a garden'.[75] Already in 1966 the artist was experimenting with just such an out-of-doors display made possible by the rust-resistant aluminium material in a series of photographs taken to accompany the

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[72] 'The aluminium viscera she hung from its ceiling [...],' writes Ker, 'recall some scenographic details in Roger Vadim's film of that same year, the space fantasy/pop satire, 'Barbarella' (1967).' Dorian Ker, *Twelve Perspectives on Arte Povera* (PhD thesis, Essex University, 1998), p.383. Ker explains in the footnote that 'the film's popularity in Italy is not too surprising as the film was based on a long running and popular Italian comic strip of the same name, created and drawn by Mario Garbuglia. He, with the artistic direction of Jean-Claude Forest, also designed the film set.' R. Banham, Megastructure, Urban Futures of the Recent Past, 1976. *ibid*., p.383.

[73] Trini, 'Divertimentifici', *op. cit.* (note 65), p.13.

[74] Paola Navone, *op. cit.* (note 17), ch. 1.

[75] My translation of 'ho sentito l'esigenza di farle vivere nello spazio…[i] fogli di alluminio, che sono leggeri ma resistenti e inattaccabili alla ruggine, per cui, ad esempio, potrebbero anche stare all'aperto in un giardino.' anon., 'Intervista a Marisa Merz', *op. cit.* (note 3), p.406.

Marcatré interview (figure 2.17). When the artist marked her public début with an exhibition at the Galleria Sperone on 30 June 1967, the invitation card showed *Untitled* outdoors.[76] The photograph is an earlier version of the work that was not exhibited but was used solely for the invitation card; *Untitled* is positioned in the foreground, hanging from a tree and hovering just above the ground in ways that anticipate the anti-gravitational shift in sculptural practice in subsequent years (figure 2.18). It was taken in Merz's garden, and recalls those photographs of *Untitled* that were printed in the *Marcatré* interview in which the sculpture is similarly installed outside, trailing from different branches of a tree and heaped in a pile in the foreground.[77] These stagings set up a particular encounter between *Untitled* and the environment that presses the idea of the 'living sculpture' further. In addition to challenging any predetermined notions of where a sculptural work could be installed, it also implies a conception of the work as a complex interaction with the surrounding natural environment and additionally, it also chimes with the idea of mobility, as it was foregrounded by Accardi.

Writing in 1968 about the way in which artists at the time were engaging with their urban surroundings through their practice, Filiberto Menna observes a renewed interest in the theme of nature. But he also recognises that this engagement with the natural is of a complexity that exceeds traditional binary

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[76] A photograph of the Merz's *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) as it was installed in the gallery would accompany the review reprinted in *Flash Art* later that year. M, Cristina Mundici, 'Torino 1963—1968,' in Minola, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.24. Prior to this solo exhibition, Merz had participated in a group show at the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna of Turin in the exhibition Museo Sperimentale d'Arte Contemporanea held between April and September 1967. There, Merz had exhibited a version of the sculpture suspended from the ceiling in the gallery. See Barbero, *op. cit.* (note 19), p.257.

[77] Trini describes how Merz's garden skirted the River Po that ran through the centre of Turin. From personal correspondence with Tommaso Trini, May 2011.

oppositions such as 'internal' and 'external'.[78] As Menna explains, 'without rejecting the city, the technical and the artificial, they are turning elsewhere, towards nature, the artisanal and organic'.[79] For these artists, this renewed interest indicates both a broader conception, and affirmation, of the everyday existence from which they draw. Crucially, Menna emphasises the artificiality implicit in the concept of nature when he writes: 'the nature which they restore to us is no longer presented as an illusory image and representation, but as a thing which can be manipulated and constructed'.[80] This is evident according to Menna through the divergent forms this engagement takes amongst different artists.[81] More recently, Alex Potts makes a similar observation when he points out that 'the deployment of modern artificial materials… negated the nature-like "impoverished" look often misleadingly seen as characteristic of Arte Povera.'[82] Potts goes on to explain that 'the imaginative world [such works] explore is one in which images of nature, and there are many of them, take the form of objects and fantasies whose natural qualities are decidedly artificial and urban in substance.'[83]

As I will go on to examine in the next chapter, Piero Gilardi is among those artists interested in exploring the polarities between nature and artifice. His series of illusionistic 'rugs,' (*Tappeti-Natura*) recreate the natural habitats of riverbeds, forests, and vegetable gardens with polyurethane foam. Gilardi explained that he

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[78] Filiberto Menna, 'Una Mise en Scène per la Natura', *Cartabianca*, March (1968), pp.2–5.

[79] *Ibid*.

[80] *Ibid*.

[81] On this subject see Nicholas Cullinan, 'La Ricostruzione della Natura: gli Imperativi Artigianali e Rurali dell'Arte Povera', in Germano Celant (ed.), *Arte povera 2011* (Milan: Electa, 2011), pp.62–75.

[82] Potts, 'Disencumbered Objects', *op. cit*. (note 37), p.171.

[83] *Ibid*.

'had the idea for these carpets one afternoon when chatting with a friend about the landscape that [would] surround man in the future.' He goes on to say:

> I thought that this landscape would be different to the image we are
> presented with today in science-fiction […] I imagined a naturalistic
> environment which was artificially made from synthetic materials for
> reasons of comfort and hygiene […] I achieved an extraordinarily realistic
> result which continued to surprise me even after walking for a long time
> over the material.[84]

In addition to the appropriation of artificial materials, what is interesting about Gilardi's comment is the concern with the kinds of habitat/environment of the future rather than an unindustrialised past; but is this a future in which the artificial has completely replaced the natural—leaving a simulated environment as its only remaining sign? Comparison can also be made with a series of photographs taken in 1968, which show Pascali arranging a large pink *Baco da Setola* in the Roman countryside (figure 2.19). This work from Pascali's final sculptural series, *Ricostruzione della Natura,* characteristically takes decidedly synthetic materials more usually found in a domestic setting, transforming them into strange fantastical creatures and positioning them outdoors as if this were their natural habitat.

At this point I want to return to Merz's own innovative engagement with this theme of nature and artifice for the invitation card to her solo show at the Galleria Sperone (see figure 2.18). *Untitled* hangs from the branches of a tree, which is all but eclipsed, in such a way that industrial material and organism appear artificially

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[84] Piero Gilardi, Exhibition catalogue, reprinted in Minola, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.100.

combined. Trini was the first critic to connect Merz's practice to the organic.[85] But rather than straightforwardly connecting these elements, hers is a vision seemingly rooted in biological hybridity—bringing to mind the method of asexual plant propagation, stem-grafting—in which fusion is encouraged to create a hybrid sculpture, part organic, part inorganic. The notional connection to inorganic growth and colonisation that had emerged from the work installed in the Turin home/studio could be extended here—stem-grafting is after all a means of creating new forms of life. The sculpture suspended from the branches of a tree might also be seen as mimicking the way in which its host organism responds to its own environment—in terms of movement and sonorous effect.[86] This particular staging explores the possibilities of synthetic biology—a more provocative engagement with the polarities of nature and artifice—suggesting a merging of the two rather than an application of one to the other. The effect of this staging seemingly transforms Merz's sculpture into a soft, malleable, 'living' tissue.[87] In a rare example of autobiographical reflection, Merz attributes, in terms characteristic of an origin story, a lasting interest in changing forms to an early and formative experience of seeing a chrysalis and its subsequent metamorphosis into a moth.[88] The sculpture as

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[85] Trini, 'Marisa Merz: Una Mostra Alla Galleria Sperone', *op. cit.* (note 54).

[86] This aspect of the work is first noted by Tommaso Trini when he describes the 'potential sonority' of the sculpture. See also the following observation by the interviewer in *Marcatrè* who notes the way in which the aluminium sculpture reflects the environment: 'essere realizzato con sottili fogli di alluminio è argenteo e lascia che la sua monocromia si anomi in quanto riflette l'ambinete.' *Ibid.*; anon., 'Intervista a Marisa Merz', *op. cit.* (note 3).

[87] The only reference to the work as 'soft' sculpture appears in Pier Giovanni Castagnoli's article 'Marisa Merz' in Marisa Merz et al., *Marisa Merz* (Turin: Hopefulmonster, 1998), p.85. On the subject of soft sculpture see Max Kozloff, 'The Poetics of Softness' in *Renderings: Critical Essays on a Century of Modern Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), pp.223–35.

[88] Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente–Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *op. cit.* (note 12), p.53.

it appears on the invitation card recalls this image of a pupa while at the same time also interrogating expectations of sculptural weight against an appearance of weightlessness. And additionally, the chrysalis could also be read as a kind of home.

As early as 1967, Trini connects Merz's practice to the organic in an article that appeared in *Domus*, a month after Merz's exhibition opened at the Galleria Sperone (and later reprinted in that fifth issue of *Flash Art*, that historic battleground for Celant's *Notes for a Guerilla War*). Describing his encounter with Merz's *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) Trini asks himself what these works could be. Focusing instead on an examination of process and gesture, and writing suggestively about the idea of autopoeisis, he explains that 'the organic life to which these things point is a world still in formation'.[89] The work eschews permanence and stands opposed to any attempts at classification. If these forms are anything at all, it seems that they need to be understood in terms of continuous flux. After all, this was also the way the artist spoke about her work in the interview published in *Marcatré*. There Merz explained that 'these forms are not definitive' and so can 'be moved without changing their value'.[90] The idea of mutability applies not only to indefinite forms but also to space, the possibility of repositioning those forms in different configurations. What I want to stress is the dynamism at the heart of Merz's work. *Untitled* is continually in the process of making and remaking. According to Trini, it is the work's capacity for reinvention that remakes the viewing encounter. In a sense, the work's encounter is always potentially unpredictable.

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[89] Trini, 'Marisa Merz: Una Mostra Alla Galleria Sperone', *op. cit.* (note 54).

[90] Anon., 'Intervista a Marisa Merz', *op. cit.* (note 3), p.406.

Il Mostro Verde

It is in De Bernardi's 1967 experimental film *Il Mostro Verde*, where *Untitled* is transformed into a monster, that the force and unpredictability of the encounter is most impressively heightened (figure 2.20).[91] There, the sculpture is transformed through filmic space into a sentient/sensing subject, reconfiguring the ways in which sculpture can be thought.[92] If, following Gilardi, the notions of 'art' and 'life' are indeed brought together by Merz, here they are also turned on their head. The artwork becomes animated and is capable of ensnaring the subjects of this particular filmic encounter, literalising the struggle conceived by Merz.

Celant, writing some twenty-five years after De Bernardi's film (a work, which, however, he does not discuss) described Merz's aluminium sculpture as 'nocturnal, visceral … almost a universe, moving, throbbing, with any puff of air to

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[91] Filming took place before the sculpture was given its definitive title *Untitled (Living Sculpture)*. For this reason I call the sculpture that appears in *Il Mostro Verde* simply *Untitled*.

[92] In an account of the monstrous in relation to the body and understanding of the 'self' Margrit Shildrick writes: 'invasion, either corporeal or psychic, is one of our greatest fears. Indeed the whole genre of horror stories, to which the monstrous is clearly related, might be said to be fundamentally about invasion. As Barbara Creed puts it: 'The possessed or invaded being is a figure of abjection in that the boundary between self and other has been transgressed.' See Margrit Shildrick, 'The Self's Clean and Proper Body' in *Embodying the Monster Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: SAGE, 2002), p.137 note 2. Elsewhere, Jeffrey Cohen, author of *Monster Theory* describes the category of the monster as 'a kind of limit case, an extreme version of marginalization, an abjecting epistemological device basic to the mechanics of deviance construction and identity formation.' See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.ix.

form a tin monster, something inhuman, suspended in silence.'[93] This is a

particularly apt description that captures the way in which De Bernardi had

conceived of *Untitled* as a moving, devouring monster.[94] However, nowhere is

explicit reference to the film made beyond this casual reference. The lack of

documentation around *Il Mostro Verde* is surprising not least because this filmic

space radically alters the sculpture, transforming it into a moving, devouring

monster and, in doing so, exploring its limits and its transformation into a living

sculpture—and *Living Sculpture* is precisely the English title by which *Untitled*

would come to be known (from 1967 onwards).[95]

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[93] Celant, 'Marisa's Swing', *op. cit.* (note 10), p.98; A couple of errors appear in the transcription of this essay in the Centre Georges Pompidou catalogue. The 1966 date to which Celant refers has been changed to 1965 and the original quotation has been changed to the following: 'It is like a moving, throbbing visceral nocturnal universe, which comes together to form an inhuman tin monster, suspended in silence.' See G. Celant 'Marisa's Swing' in Grenier, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.241. On p.250 it indicates that the text has been 'translated from the Italian by Julia Waley.' To date, I have only been able to find the English version first published in *Art Forum*.

[94] Stefano Francia di Celle and Sergio Toffetti (eds), *Dalle Lontane Provincie, Il Cinema Di Tonino De Bernardi* (Turin: Museo Nazionale del Cinema, 1995), p.13; *ibid*. As Bruno di Marino explains 'the Italian Film Cooperative was based on Mekas's model of the New York Filmakers's Coop. Its main objective was to distribute underground film. Officially founded in Naples in May 1967, the first meeting of the group members only took place in January of the following year. In the first issue of the CCI catalogue, films by the following directors were included: Angeli, Bacigalupo, Baruchello, Bignardi, Capanna, De Bernardi, de Rinaldo, Dogliani, Elia, Epremian, Ferrero, Grifi, Leonardi, Silvio e Vittorio Loffredo, Mantelli, Menzio, Oriani, Patella, Serna, Siniscalchi, Turi, and the three Vergine brother (Adamo, Aldo e Antonio). For the most part these were Roman or Turinese filmmakers. In the second issue the films of Bargellini and the American Abbott Meader were included (whose films were also distributed by the Filmmaker's Coop. The first festival of Italian Independent Film was held at Filmstudio (founded by Annabella Miscuglio and Amerigo Sbardella) between 2–7 March 1968. There, *Il Bestiario* by De Bernardi and *Il Mostro Verde* by Menzio/De Bernardi were shown along with most of the films distributed by CCI.' See Bruno Di Marino, *Sguardo inconscio azione: cinema sperimentale e underground a Roma: 1965–1975* (Rome: Lithos, 1999), pp.20, 24.

[95] Originally left untitled, this work was published for the first time accompanied by the English title, *Living Sculpture*, in Bandini and Maggio Serra, *op. cit.* (note 19), p.17. Elisabetta Salzotti,

The film was one of two Italian entries first shown to an international audience at the 4th Knokke-Le-Zoute film festival organised by Jacques Ledoux in December 1967—a pivotal event in the spread of new wave and underground film in Europe.[96] At the time, De Bernardi belonged to the Italian Independent Cinema Cooperative (Cooperativa del Cinema Indipendente Italiano, CCI) based on the model of the Filmmaker's Coop in New York, and whose objectives included the widespread distribution of underground film. Officially founded in Naples in May 1967, the group first met in January of the following year. De Bernardi's directorial debut would appear in the first edition of the CCI multimedia catalogue and was screened at the first review of Italian Independent Cinema held at Filmstudio in March 1968. Before the appearance of clubs and film festivals such as the Filmstudio, underground cinema in Italy would be shown in the same locations as those exhibiting contemporary art. For instance, *Il Mostro Verde* was screened at an event titled *Ombre Elettriche* organised by filmmaker Ugo Nespolo, a central figure in underground cinema and experimental film in Turin. The event ran on 25 and 26 January 1968 in Pistoletto's studio.[97]

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formerly assistant at the Merz Archives, has explained that Merz does not like to assign titles to and reveal dates of her works. In fact, most of them are untitled, and some of these have acquired a title later on. On the origins of these secondary titles, Salzotti has explained that usually curators have interpreted the pieces and suggested titles that, if approved by Merz, are then published in the exhibition catalogue within parentheses after Untitled (Salzotti, personal communication between Mecugni and Salzotti [telephone call], April 18, 2003)

[96] di Celle and Toffetti, *op. cit.* (note 94), p.13; Barbero, *op. cit.* (note 19), p.55; later that year, *Il Mostro Verde* was screened at the Italian Independent film cooperative's (CCI) first film screening in March, 1968. For an overview of underground Italian cinema see Di Marino, *op. cit.* (note 94).

[97] This absence in the literature is also surprising since De Bernardi was closely involved with other artists associated with the Turin arte povera group during this period. In interview, De Bernardi has described the cultural climate as follows: 'I primi anni '60 sono stati un periodo bellissimo, scoprivamo l'avanguardia: a Torino nasceva l'arte povera, cui ero molto legato, ma frequentavamo anche un poeta–scrittore come Edoardo Sanguineti […] Il cinema, per come lo facevamo noi, era

The twenty-five-minute filmic experiment of *Il Mostro Verde* is structured around three episodes: a primal scene of Adam and Eve in Arcadia with Taylor Mead (the star of several underground films shot in Warhol's Factory) as the green serpent; a subterranean landscape whose inhabitants are consumed by a hybrid monster pairing of Dracula and Frankenstein; and a final episode of rebirth in which the characters emerge above ground, running and screaming in a barren wasteland to a soundtrack of Afghan folk music and Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*.[98] These episodes are played over a split screen, a technique well adapted to the second of these three episodes, where Merz's *Untitled* is transformed into a monster. It is this second scene that I will focus on.

De Bernardi employs the split-screen technique to play on the contrast and movement between the inside and outside of the monster's body (see figure 2.21a–b). In the six-minute sequence, *Untitled* is staged in such a way as to comprise the dark and disorientating cavernous interior of the monster, a *mise-en-scène* that encompasses both setting and protagonist. De Bernardi explains that the film stemmed from an idea of another way of living; as he put it in 1995, 'it was the second half of the sixties and we lived in a state of fever [...] without knowing how

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strettamente collegato alla pittura e alla scrittura, eravamo un gruppo e ci scambiavamo le esperienze […]. C'erano anche altri amici della pittura, Gigliola Carretti e Mauro Chessa, Francesco Casorati e Paola Zanetti, e Marzia Calleri. Eravamo pure molto amici di Mario e Marisa Merz. Un altro artista con cui ho collaborato in quel periodo è Michelangelo Pistoletto.' See di Celle and Toffetti, *op. cit.* (note 94), pp.10–11.

[98] De Bernardi writes: 'i Beatnik americani, Kerouac e sopratutto Ginsberg, che per noi era un vero e proprio vessillo. Quando è venuto a Torino, gli abbiamo fatto vedere *Il Mostro Verde* che l'ha capito molto, anche perche nel finale utilizzavamo un brano del suo *Grido* che si troncava e poi riprendeva. Lui ce ne chiese il motivo, e fu molto contento quando gli rispondemmo che le ripetizioni dello stesso frammento erano dovute al disco rotto che permetteva di ascoltare solo una parte del brano. Un altro incontro importante per noi è stato quello con Taylor Mead, il folle filmmaker americano, attore di Warhol, venuto all'Unione Culturale a presentare I suoi film.' See *Ibid.*

things would turn out.'[99] An initial camera pan around this space reveals it to be a

barren and claustrophobic metallic landscape of aluminium tubes. Filmed in high

contrast, the work is visually striking against the naked bodies of the interned

figures that populate it. There is a striking visual resonance here with an

installation by Lucio Fontana held at the International Centre for Aesthetic

Research, ICAR, in Turin in 1962, in which the artist recreated a cavernous interior

with the copper panel series titled *Metalli*, an exploration of the potential of metal

to create colour and texture within an environment (figure 2.22). Throughout this

scene, *Untitled* plays a central role in creating a stark post-apocalyptic setting, a

hostile environment against the recoiling bodies. Under this metal canopy and

against the backdrop of aluminium tubes the oppressive, horizontally framed

enclosure is the stage against which the struggling bodies writhe. Here,

environment is all encompassing: an encounter from which there is no escape. This

is bodily terrain as topology, a single, continuously shifting surface that also

functions as an organism, an animated, living body, albeit that of a monster. This is

what it would be like to be inside the body of this monster, a tangled mass of

metallic viscera. It is an evocation of interiority in all its amorphous knots and

overlapping intestinal villi, except that materially it points to something distinctly

other—industrial, machinic, menacing. Furthermore, this environment functions as

an organism, an animated, living body, albeit that of a monster. The encounter

between the actor-subjects and the monster-environment is staged so the surfaces

of these aluminium tubes act as a boundary wall.

A striking contrast between flesh and metal is achieved through lighting

effects that capture the way in which light is reflected from the aluminium tubes

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[99] *Ibid*., p.99.

onto the surface of the actors' skin (figure 2.23a–c). Darting light creates the sense

of movement necessary for that heightened evocation of entrapment. The

perspectival shifts of the camera also allows for a certain playing out of depth and

depthlessness, of reflection, absorption and movement, as if the sculpture were

moving in, on, and around the bodies in frenzied motion. Moreover, shine plays a

central role but in such a way that emphasises the menacing or perhaps sexually

charged encounter between metal and flesh. In interview, Gilardi explained that the

material quality of the aluminium 'disgusted' the group of Turin-based artists,

explaining: 'we didn't like the material she used, the thin sheets of plastic-coated

aluminium. The "cheap" quality of this shiny material disturbed us. In contrast, we

were looking for the purity of materials that had their own intrinsic quality.'[100] It

would seem that Gilardi is describing a particular distaste for a type of material that

might too easily be connected to the circuits of industrial production. (The 1964

exhibition held at the Galleria Civica D'Arte Moderna titled *Sculture in Metallo* in

which Fontana had participated had been sponsored by the Italian Metallurgy

Association).[101] De Bernardi would conceive of the material differently, describing

how, during filming, the actors would roll naked against the aluminium, precisely

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[100] Translated from: 'Ce que nous n'aimons pas, c'était ce matériau qu'elle utilisait, la fine feuille d'aluminum plastifiée. L'aspect "cheap" de ce matériau, brillant, nous dérangait. Nous cherchions au contraire la pureté de certaines matières portant en elles une vérité intrinsèque.' See Piero Gilardi, 'Pour Marisa Merz,' in Grenier, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.203; for an examination of the way in which the role of shine has functioned in sculptural production in the twentieth century see Jon Wood et al., 'Shine: Sculpture and Surface in the 1920s and 1930s' (Henry Moore Institute, 2002). See also Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), esp. pp.53–54.

[101] *Sculture in Metallo: Mostra Organizzata in Occasione Del 1o Salone Europeo Della Metallurgia Sotto Il Patronato Della Citta Di Torino E dell'Associazione Italiana Di Metallurgia* (Turin: Galleria d'Arte Moderna, 1964).

to emphasise the contrast with their bodies.[102] De Bernardi has described how *Untitled* was conceived as another actor in the film, the monster transformed into an animated sentient-subject, reacting to its environment through various evocative technical operations and stagings.[103] What is played out then is a destabilising encounter between the monster, traditionally viewed as 'other', and that inescapable belonging to the same environment, which the monster also comprises.

If the aluminium material seems to offer itself as a means of establishing discrete or separate entities between the protagonists and the monster, a more fluid understanding of interaction with the other is suggested by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's introduction of the notion of flesh as the sentient-sensible in his unfinished text *The Visible and the Invisible* offers a way in which access to the 'other' might be attained while maintaining separation. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, 'the body interposed […] without superposition, that difference without contradiction, that divergence between the within and the without that constitutes its natal secret.'[104] Merleau-Ponty's analysis is marked by a sense of familiarity that the world-as-flesh makes possible. It allows for a kind of access to the 'other' that is characteristically generative as for example when he writes: 'it is the body and it alone that can bring us to the things themselves […] beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world.'[105]

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[102] Tonino De Bernardi, personal communication, 9 November 2009. My translation of 'i personaggi del film strisciavano nudi tra il metallo che luccicava in contrasto...le sculture diventavano come i personaggi umani del film [...]'

[103] Tonino De Bernardi, personal communication 9 November 2009

[104] Maurice Merleau-Ponty et al., *The Visible and the Invisible Followed by Working Notes* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern U.P, 1968), pp.135–36.

[105] *Ibid*., p.136.

In a move that extends beyond perception and into a theory of being, Merleau-Ponty addressed the traditional dualities of self and other as necessarily involving the possibility of encroachment and overlapping. Importantly, this is conceived in terms of reversibility, so that alterity is conceived relationally as well as already intertwined with the subject. Here the subject does not deny the existence of the other, and furthermore, has its ground in reciprocal influence and communication.[106] Those who have criticised Merleau-Ponty on feminist grounds have tended to point to his apparent privileging of sight over touch, and suggested that this is not the result one should expect from an epistemology in tune with feminine subjectivity.[107] The encounter staged in De Bernardi's film, however, does not subordinate touch to vision but allows touch to become a primal force that shapes vision itself.

But this initial encounter which functions as a kind of coming together in difference is disrupted in the film by a series of close-up shots of truncated bodies, marking the beginning of a sequence culminating in a kind of polymorphously perverse performance between the multiplying actors and *Untitled* in which the protagonist-monster consumes the imprisoned bodies. In this expanded sense, Merleau-Ponty's conception of alterity could allow the traditional dualism of subject/other to be recast, offering a relationship in which the participants are endlessly variable and changing. This sense of overlap and encroachment is further reinforced in *Il Mostro Verde* through the effects of narrative displacement, the coiling over and recoiling which occurs in the encounter between the sculpture and

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[106] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans., Alphonso Lingis (Evanston IL: Northwestern U.P 1992), pp. 130–55.

[107] For a range of discussions appraising Merleau-Ponty through the lens of feminism, see Dorothea Olkowski and Gail Weiss., eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (University Park, Pa: Penn State University Press, 2006).

the bodies with which it interacts. Crucially, De Bernardi has described how *Untitled* was conceived as another actor in the film. The monster was transformed into an animated, sentient subject that reacted to its environment through a series of evocative technical operations and stagings.[108]

The sequence concludes as the split-screen display converges temporally (figure 2.24a–b). The camera pans across the lifeless bodies that lie in the metallic landscape with close-up shots of the sculpture swaying from side to side. As noted above, the nature of this encounter alters when the aluminium tubes engulf the bodies. This is conveyed through a staging of the actors literally inside the sculpture so that parts of their bodies (an arm or a head) are featured wearing the aluminium sheets and tubing as armour (in ways that recall experiments in fashion design with metal and vinyl in this period, most famously by Paco Rabanne).[109] It offers a model for the kind of interaction and identification with that internal surface of the work: a proximity which incorporates the animate and inanimate together into a hybrid sculptor/sculpture. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, Piero Manzoni had already proposed multiple versions of a *Living Sculpture* (for the first time in January 1961).[110] What I want to argue for, however, is a reversal of this kind of operation in *Il Mostro Verde* in which the inanimate-aluminium material is conceived as 'living' instead of those signed living bodies of Manzoni's

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[108] Tonino De Bernardi, personal communication 9 November 2009. De Bernardi explains that 'i personaggi del film strisciavano nudi tra il metallo che luccicava in contrasto […] le sculture diventavano come i personaggi umani del film.'

[109] This is evocative of a particular mode of interaction with sculpture suggested in photographs of Lygia Clark and Eva Hesse between 1967 and 1969.

[110] G. Thomas Couser and Joseph Fichtelberg (eds), 'All by Myself: Piero Manzoni's Autobiographical Use of His Body, Its Parts, and Its Products', *True Relations Essays on Autobiography and the Postmodern* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), pp.137–59; see also Elio Grazioli and Piero Manzoni, *Piero Manzoni*, 1. ed. (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007).

creation conceived as sculpture. *Untitled* offers a reversal of a way of conceiving of the sculptural encounter, from the inside out. It also constitutes a repositioning of the subjects of that encounter so that it is not so much that the viewer might be understood as completing that encounter but rather that the sculpture might function as an experiencing subject in a multiple staging that features *Untitled* both as subject as well as constituting a field of vision.

Untitled is not included in the list of works specifically connected by the artist to the measurements of her body when she explains: 'the ring of salt, the height of the copper wire which runs around the room in one of my exhibitions. They correspond to the dimensions of my body, my possibilities'.[111] *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) could also be understood in this way, as an extension of the body, a prosthetic-feeler. Considered in these terms, it involves an expanded conception of the limits of what sculpture can be, do and feel. The implication is not only that the sculpture is intricately bound to the body but also that it contributes to the artist's own interrogation of the world. This would make *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) simultaneously sentient and an extension of the senses. The long tentacles of Merz's sculpture seem to feel their way through the space: hugging the walls, touching the ceiling, skimming the floor. Here vision is reunited with the other senses, contributing, as in Juhani Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin*, to a haptic experience of the world. Pallasmaa's proposal of a sensory architecture offers a way of understanding *Untitled* as the locus of experience but furthermore as partaking and extending that experience. The sculpture in this way functions as an

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[111] 'Si, il mio corpo [...]. Altri lavori *a misura del mio corpo* [...] l'annello di sale, e l'altezza del filo di rame che corre attorno a una stanza nella mia mostra.' See Sauzeau-Boetti, 'Lo Specchio Ardente—Intervista a Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Iole Freitas', *op. cit.* (note 12).

experiencing body—comprehending, revealing and concealing space through its occupation.

Merz's *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) generates a series of changes as it is experienced through various encounters and incarnations. The work itself may have started out looking like a serial progression but it very soon exceeds it, overwhelmed by its own organicity. Its own series of permutations, through the various encounters that are staged, are brought about through and as a result of this process. The work's environments reflect back on its potential for self-regeneration, self-expansion and self-permutation. De Bernardi's film is only one way in which *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) could be shown as living. This is a long way from the tenderness of Merz's description of the work invoked as a maternal axis in reference to Beatrice. It implies instead the possibility of a kind of maternal ambivalence that is aggressive as much as it is tender. Or, in the case of the monster-sculpture, it suggests the mechanical as much as does the libidinal. *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) not only lives, but further defines and expands the notion of the living—the living as biological organism but also as a form of bodily engagement that is necessarily sexual, political and technological. Merz's 'domestic practice' continually undercuts itself and demonstrates provocatively different kinds of relations that never resolve themselves but continually anticipate further sculptural iterations and encounters.

This chapter has sought to examine the idea of home explicitly in terms of the activities associated with this site. I have explored the way that Merz's *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*) (1966) challenged the gendering of homemaking, in contrast to the way in which her practice has traditionally been read. Merz's practice vividly suggests that to inhabit space is to move through it and between it underscoring the

porosity of the domestic onto the spaces of leisure such as the Piper Pluri Club and lived experience. The next chapter will continue to explore the everyday experience of the home through a body of very different work. Taking up the relationship between nature and artifice as it was staged by Merz in the photographs of *Untitled* (Living Sculpture) outdoors, I begin Chapter Three by looking at Piero Gilardi's *Nature Carpets*, squares of illusionistic rugs that recreate the natural habitats of riverbeds, forests, and vegetable gardens with polyurethane foam, in order to consider what it might mean to think about the home in ecological terms.

CHAPTER THREE

Home as habitat: Piero Gilardi's Tappeti Natura (Nature Carpets)

Home-comforts:

'It is so-o-o comfortable', Piero Gilardi exclaims, sitting on one of his polyurethane

carpets on show at the Fischbach Gallery.[1] So begins the review published in the

New York Times to mark the opening of his exhibition in September 1967. Gilardi

appears in the accompanying photograph (figure 3.1) surfing on a great swathe of

one of his *Riverbeds* (1967), or *Nature Carpets* as they came to be known—soft

polyurethane foam blocks cut, shaped and painted to look like a slice of stony

landscape.[2] At around the same time, photographs of the artist included in

catalogues for his exhibitions at the Galleria Sperone and at the Palazzo Grassi

show him immersed in his synthetic world (figure 3.2–3.4), painstakingly putting

the finishing touches to his *Nature Carpets*.[3] These were meant to be walked on,

Gilardi insists, citing his liking for 'the feel of the soft carpet under his feet.'[4] The

sensation recalls his own experience of 'walking barefoot in a dried-out river bed in

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[1] Rita Reif, 'Sticks and Stones That Won't Break Bones', *New York Times*, 13 September 1967, n/p.

[2] For a description of the techniques used to by Piero Gilardi to make his *Nature Carpets* see;
Andrea Bellini, *Piero Gilardi: A Little Manual of Expression with Foam Rubber* (Geneva: Centre
d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2013), pp.2, 6–7; see also Thea van Oosten, *PUR Facts: Conservation
of Polyurethane Foam in Art and Design* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), p.92.

[3] Figures 2 and 3 are published in the exhibition catalogue for Gilardi's solo show at the Galleria
Gian Enzo Sperone and Sperone Milan in May 1966 and March 1967 respectively. Figure 4 is
reproduced in Paolo Marinotti, *Campo Vitale: Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Contemporanea*
(Palazzo Grassi, Venice: Centro Internazionale delle Arti e del Costume, 1967), n/p; see also Anna
Minola, *Gian Enzo Sperone Torino-Roma-New York: 35 Anni Di Mostre Tra Europa E America*
(Turin: Hopefulmonster, 2000), pp.100–1; Benoît Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier,
2012), pp.113–17.

[4] Reif, *op. cit.* (note 1), n/p.

Turin', as Gilardi once put it and as if he had wanted to replicate this into a work.[5]

One year earlier, at his show at the Galleria Sperone in 1966, he had been a little

less prescriptive with his comic invitation to 'cut them into squares, put them onto

stands of polished marble and display them under glass! Have your tailor turn them

into cocktail frocks! Take them into the country for ant-free picnics!'[6]

There is a sense in which Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* often insist on their own

horizontality—segments seemingly cut from the surface of the earth—such as *Dry*

Riverbed (1967) or *Wheat Field* (1967) (figure 3.5 and 3.6). Further, the slightly

flattened forms of *Fallen Fruit* (1967) (figure 3.7) appear to want to register the

impact of their fall to the ground. If painting had come down from the wall, it has

done so here with a thud. Gilardi specifically called these works carpets, engaging

with the rhetoric of sculpture's vanishing base that already had a currency within

Minimalism which he was clearly also engaging.[7] These Nature Carpets speak to

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[5] Rita Reif, 'Sticks and Stones that won't break bones', New York, New York Times, September 1967, n/p. In a more recent interview Gilardi gives a slightly different account of this experience when he explains: 'I was walking along the bed of one of the five rivers of Turin, my home town. It was polluted by a revolting amount of urban and industrial refuse and it was there that I felt the desire to recreate a pristine natural setting, using a material that is soft and inviting for our bodies in the form of a normal household carpet.' See Andrea Bellini, *Piero Gilardi: a little manual of expression with foam rubber*, 2013, n/p.

[6] Henry Martin, 'Technological Arcadia', *Art and Artists*, 2, 8 (1967), pp.22–5; the article is partially reproduced, but incorrectly referenced, in Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.58–9; Nicholas Cullinan notes an obvious irony in Gilardi's invitation to use his Nature Carpets for what he describes as the most bourgeois of activities. He regards it as Gilardi's critique of consumerism at the time. See 'La Ricostruzione della Natura: gli Imperativi Artigianali e Rurali dell'Arte Povera', in Germano Celant (ed.), *Arte povera 2011* (Milan: Electa, 2011), p.71.

[7] The issue of categorisation has been discussed in numerous places. For example Ettore Sottsass writes: 'Gilardi's carpets are called carpets and are not called paintings [whereas] for example, it is not clear whether works by Smithson are paintings, sculptures, architecture, furniture or something else.' See Ettore Sottsass jr., 'Memoires Di Panna Montata', *Domus*, 445 (1966), p.51; Trini also makes the point that these works reference a world outside of the domain of art when he says: 'these plastic carpets of flora and fauna could easily belong anywhere outside of art, as craft, for example,

Carl Andre's steel rugs, though they stand in stark contrast to his modular systems

and metaphorics of the railroad. In line with the sculptural tendencies of the mid-

sixties, Gilardi emphatically rejects the conditions of display imposed by the base,

with its tendency to set the work apart as a sculptural object.[8] He insists instead that

sculpture become indistinguishable from its surroundings, and here that means that

they become continuous with the kinds of soft furnishings that belonged in the

home. Michael Sonnabend encapsulated this sense when he wrote in 1967: 'for

Gilardi the earth is a carpet into whose pleasurable warmth we sink…he offers

us…plush carpets able to lull furniture.'[9]

Gilardi began making what have been described as his 'trademark' carpets

as early as 1965, and, as with the practice of Accardi and Merz explored in earlier

chapters, he couches these works in terms of the domestic landscape.[10] As

Tommaso Trini recognised in 1967 when he spoke of Gilardi creating a 'habitat'

out of synthetic material, the artist playfully negotiates the boundaries between

inside and outside to offer a provocative engagement with the materiality of the

home.[11] Gilardi's Nature Carpets offer themselves as synthetic environments,

scaled to human dimensions; they anticipate environmental and Land Art in the

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as the products of a talented and sophisticated inlay-worker; or else as set-design or interior design.'
See Tommaso Trini, 'Natura Inventata Da Gilardi in Poliuretano Espanso', *Materie plastiche ed
elastomeri*, 12 (1973), p.959; Henry Martin also discusses the issue of categorisation when he writes
'they are not paintings since they are perfectly at home when lying on the floor; they are not
sculptures since they are equally at home when hanging flat against a wall. And then again, they are
made of synthetic foam rubber, a material that had hardly any associations with fine art at all.'
Martin, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.23.

[8] Instead Gilardi embraces the conditions of display dictated by the department store as I will
explain below.

[9] Quoted in Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.57.

[10] Gilardi in conversation with Andrea Bellini in *ibid.*, p.12.

[11] Tommaso Trini, 'Piero Gilardi', *Collage*, 7 (1967), p.47.

same breath as speaking to the design of environments for which Italy had become

famous. At the same time, by bringing his individual squares of nature into the

home, Gilardi seems to ask us to consider that space in ecological terms that is to

say in terms of our relationship to the environment. He has recently described these

works as his attempt to 'reinvent the habitat' of the domestic space.[12] It is the

significance of this aspect of the artist's practice that I want to interrogate in this

third chapter, to explore the knot of contradictions that surrounds this body of

works as they relate to the everyday lived experience of the domestic 'habitat'.

Certainly, Gilardi's Nature Carpets could easily translate into a whole host

of soft furnishings with all their connotations of comfort, ease and accessibility.[13]

In figure 3.8 one of Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* is propped by a raised platform, and

supported by a frame, turning it into *Nature Bed* (1967) in which we see a quizzical

Gilberto Zorio recumbent with a stone doubling up as a pillow. Given his

involvement with the furniture manufacturers Gufram during this period, Gilardi's

practice is intertwined more closely with the circuits of design than that of any

other artist under consideration here.[14] Ostensibly a work such as *Nature Bed* seems

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[12] In an interview published as an appendix to *The Little Manual of Expression with Foam Rubber*, Gilardi explains the changing significance of his continued use of polyurethane foam, explaining: 'the 1970s brought a conceptual leap in the use of foam rubber, which was transformed from a technique used to reinvent the habitat to an instrument used to recreate the habitus'. See Bellini, *op. cit*. (note 2), n/p.

[13] This was recognised straight away by critics at the time. See for example, Trini, 'Piero Gilardi', *op. cit*. (note 11), p.47.

[14] In a series of collaborations with artists and designers, the Turin based furniture manufacturer Gufram produced their 'Multipli' series of limited editions between 1968 and 1974. Gufram's first collaboration was with Gilardi, who designed the polyurethane seating *Sedilsasso* (1968) and later, the coffee table *Massolo* (1974) in the same material. Gilardi also designed *Pavé Piuma* for Gufram in 1967. On the artist's involvement with design see Catharine Rossi, 'Playing with the Povera: Connections between Art, Architecture and Design in 1970s Italy' (paper presented at 'Collaborative Effects', Nottingham Contemporary, 23 March 2013); Robert Lumley, 'Habitable

to belong to that world of design, but to quote Trini, recounting his experience of writing for *Domus*, and with reference to the Milanese milieu of the 1960s, had Gilardi really 'sold [his] soul to upholstery'?[15] At a moment seemingly 'dominated by design', as Trini puts it, what might it have meant for the artist to be making another object purportedly destined for use in the home?[16] Gilardi's statements need to be understood in part as rhetorical; despite the artist's comments, these works continued to be exhibited in the kinds of places associated with contemporary art, and in this way they inevitably raised the question of what kind of critical strategies were available to artists at the time. Focusing on Gilardi's *Nature Carpets*, my aim here is to look at a brief moment when the artist's complex interaction with this world of design and the design of environments suggests that how to negotiate that new landscape of things had by no means been resolved.

The artist remained in thrall to this synthetic world for much of the 1960s, continuing to make and exhibit his *Nature Carpets* throughout the decade (and

Art: In and Around Piero Gilardi' (paper presented at 'Collaborative Effects', Nottingham Contemporary, 23 March 2013). Lumley observes that Gilardi's involvement with Gufram offered him a means to finance his artistic practice; this is reiterated by the artist in an interview with Andrea Bellini in Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.11–12; for more information on Gufram see also Paola Antonelli and Harriet Schoenholz Bee, *Objects of Design from The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003), p.258.

[15] Referring to Milan as he experienced it at the time, Trini explains: 'the city stood for the opposite of what we thought art ought to be. It was dominated by design, by the consumerist production of housewares that have always been at the core of the Milanese aesthetic sensibility. For us, art in Milan had sold its soul to upholstery. No one cared about art . . . even though none of the designers' lights would ever reach the spiritual intensity of a single neon by Flavin.' See Tommaso Trini, interviewed by Marco di Capua, in *Roma anni '60: Al di là della pittura*, exh. cat. (Rome: Carte Segrete, 1991), p.378; quoted in Romy Golan, 'Flashbacks and Eclipses in Italian Art in the 1960s', *Grey Room*, 49 (2012), p.121.

[16] Quoted in *ibid*.

resuming this practice once he returned to art making in the 1980s).[17] Whilst the

Nature Carpets have by now become well known and are regularly cited in

narratives of the artist's practice, they have rarely received the kind of sustained

scholarly attention they deserve. Those accounts have instead tended to leap frog

straight to his career as political and environmental activist, with any contradictions

between that and his early practice subsequently smoothed out.[18] Certainly, much

has been made of Gilardi's political commitment after 1968. It is perhaps

unsurprising that the maxim 'art into life' continues to be the axis along which

Gilardi's practice has been plotted.[19] Lea Vergine was amongst the first writers to

describe the artist in these terms in her analysis of the impact of the political unrest

of 1968 on cultural production.[20] She characterises Gilardi as having 'the

conviction that art is a political activity', and that it is 'nothing unless it aims at

everything.'[21] More recently, the artist's long-standing contribution to the

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[17] Piero Gilardi in an interview with Andrea Bellini in Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.11–12.

[18] Gilardi's exit from the circuits of artistic production in 1968 to pursue a life of political activism aligns him to a number of key figures at this moment which also includes Lucy Lippard, and as I will go on to discuss in the next chapter, Carla Lonzi.

[19] The continuities between Gilardi's early work and his subsequent interest in the interactive possibilities of virtual reality have been acknowledged, most notably in accounts of this latest collaborative project, Parco Arte Vivente (PAV), which combines his political, social and environmental activity with his interests in artistic practice. See Frank Popper, 'Expression & Signe', *Psychologie médicale*, Paris 1993 reprinted in Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.64.

[20] Lea Vergine, *Attraverso L'arte Pratica politica/pagare il '68* (Rome: Arcana Editrice, 1976).

[21] My translation of 'la convinzione che l'arte è un'attività politica, che l'arte non è niente se non vuole essere tutto'. Lea Vergine explains her interest in 'those [artists] that had reached the peak of international recognition in 1968 and had found themselves in a situation where they were finally able to fully enjoy the benefits of such recognition…rejected those benefits through their work, which stood as a challenge to that system. The most clamorous examples were those of Le Parc, Mari, Castellani and Massironi; quickly followed by Gilardi and then Simonetti.' See *Ibid*., p.vi; on this subject see also Lea Vergine, 'Le Malaise, l'alternative et l'opposition', *Opus International*, 53

international art scene of the period, particularly his involvement in the ground-breaking group exhibitions *Op Losse Schroeven* and *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) has been acknowledged.[22] In these accounts, Gilardi's practice has been characterised as a form of relational aesthetics *avant-la-lettre* and credited with connecting a wide range of artists working in the US and across Europe.[23]

It is worth remembering that Gilardi had of course begun to make these works before mounting political tensions had started to colour Germano Celant's writings on Arte Povera. Writing in 1967, Celant epitomises the widespread view that the *Nature Carpets* anticipate Gilardi's involvement in that historic movement.[24] Celant put it decisively when he wrote that 'an urgency of existence

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(1974), pp.19–23; Lea Vergine, 'Italy's Avant-Garde?', *Art and Artists*, 7 no.3, 75 (1972), pp.18–23.

[22] See also Lara Conte, *Materia, Corpo, Azione: Ricerche Artistiche Processuali Tra Europa e Stati Uniti 1966–1970* (Milan: Electa, 2010), pp.168–187; see Christian Rattemeyer, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form', 1969* (London: Afterall, 2010), pp.46–49, 230–238.

[23] Andrea Bellini describes it as 'one of the first examples of thinking about an idea of relational art.' See Porcher, Bovier, and Dirié, *Piero Gilardi*, p.4. Gilardi explicitly connected his Nature Carpets to the idea of relational aesthetics in a recent interview referring to the term 'utopia of proximity' for 'the implicit relational nature given by a convivial object such as a household carpet.' See Bellini, *op. cit.* (note 2), n/p; see also Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002).

[24] This interpretation continues to be reiterated in more recent accounts where it is connected with the artist's departure from the circuits of artistic production in 1968 following a disagreement with Illeana Sonnabend. Gilardi recounts his decision to abandon art making in the following way: 'One of the things that put me on this road was the 'rejection' by Ileana Sonnabend, my gallerist at the time, of the new objects that I had tried to make as a development of my Nature Carpets. I was really frustrated by this and it made me reflect on the effective freedom that an artist could have, once they had become part of official cultural and commercial apparatus.' See Gilardi, *Dall'Arte Alla Vita Dalla Vita All'Arte*, p.11; *Ibid*. Gilardi has since returned to making these works, although he speaks about the *Nature Carpets* that he has made since the 1980s rather differently to the way in which he had spoken about those made in the 1960s.

led Gilardi, who felt suffocated by his nature-rugs and by polyurethane, to make the pack saddle, wheelbarrow, saw and ladder.'[25] For Celant, it was these new works, rather than the *Nature Carpets*, that were able to bring art and life into close proximity, no longer 'mediated or mimetic manifestations' as he puts it.[26] In the art critic's 1967 formulation, 'Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War', 'art and life' is collapsed onto that other slogan of avant-gardist rhetoric, 'art and revolution', rooted in that archetypal vehicle of the avant-garde: the manifesto.[27] Heavily loaded with a metaphorics of warfare, heroics and aggression, this formulation can be understood as belonging to a history of vanguardist rhetoric conceived as a military force in a war against established lines of culture.[28] Celant's 'terrorist aesthetics' addresses an audience receptive to a vocabulary of protest.[29] His attack is directed against a US-dominated system of production and all it had come to embody in the form of a lifestyle of consumerism.

As noted in Chapter One, recent scholarship has done much to reclaim a politics for Arte Povera in response to its subsequent whitewashing in the 1980s.[30] But it also inevitably draws attention to Celant's strategic appropriation of what had by then become a widely disseminated rhetoric of guerrilla warfare—which he

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[25] See See Germano Celant, 'Arte Povera. Appunti per Una Guerriglia', *Flash Art*, 5 (1967), p.3; this view is also taken up by Lea Vergine in her account of Gilardi's political activity in subsequent decades. See Vergine, *Attraverso L'arte Pratica politica/pagare il '68*, *op. cit.* (note 20), p.xix.

[26] See Celant, *op. cit.* (note 25), p.3; for an English translation see Tate Modern (Gallery) and Walker Art Center, *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 2001).

[27] Celant, *op. cit.* (note 25), p.3.

[28] Andrew Webber, *The European Avant-Garde 1900–1940* (Cambridge; Malden, Mass: Polity Press, 2004), p.4.

[29] The phrase 'terrorist aesthetics' was coined by Giulio Carlo Argan. See Piero Gilardi and Claudio Spadoni, *Piero Gilardi* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1999), p.20.

[30] For a broader discussion of this phenomenon see Nicholas Cullinan, 'Past Imperfect Arte Povera in Italy, 1963–1972' (PhD Thesis: Courtauld Institute of Art, 2010), chap. 1, 3.

subsequently, and again, strategically relinquished when it risked too close an association with extremist political action in Italy in the 1970s.[31] It suggests that the connection between the avant-gardes and political vanguardism as both historical and contingent.[32] Celant's formulation of art into life, if seductive at the time, proved short-lived. But what remained so appealing, as Gilardi has recently explained in interview, was that Celant's writing, stripped of its formulaic rhetoric, was underpinned by the perceived need to radically alter the relationship between artist and public.[33]

When Gilardi began making his *Nature Carpets* in 1965, he already seemed to be articulating a set of concerns around transforming the spaces of social relations and interaction.[34] From the outset and despite Celant's claims to the contrary, Gilardi had couched his *Nature Carpets* in terms of an everyday lived experience, in ways that suggest an interest in bringing art and life together. He explains that his *Nature Carpets* were a proposal for 'an everyday existence to be thought of as carpets, put in the home and … stepped on.'[35] Seen in contrast to

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[31] *Ibid*., chap. 1; on this subject see Jacopo Galimberti, 'A Third-Worldist Art? Germano Celant's Invention of Arte Povera', *Art History*, 36, 2 (2013), p.423.

[32] On this subject see Evan Mauro, 'The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde: Or, Modernism and Biopolitics', *Mediations: Journal of Marxist Literary Group*, 26, 1–2 (2012), p.120.

[33] Galimberti, *op. cit*. (note 31), p.422; see Gilardi's letter to Celant published in Piero Gilardi, 'Infinity to Zero', *Juliet*, 20, 103 (2001), p.65; see also Gilardi's recent criticisms of Celant cited in Benoît Porcher et al. (eds), 'The Collaborative Effect', *Piero Gilardi* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2012), p.49. Franssen writes: 'In Gilardi's view the Arte Povera period was not about linking new aesthetic metaphors to each other, but the need to combine art and life into a subjective energy with social revolution as objective.'

[34] According to one account Gilardi made approximately one hundred and fifty nature carpets between 1965 and 1968. See Martina Corgnati, *Opere Storiche (1964–1969)* (Turin: Galleria Biasutti & Biasutti, 2008); reprinted in Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit*. (note 3), p.65.

[35] Gilardi writes that his carpets belong in the home and can be 'used and enjoyed in the routine of daily life'. In an interview with Roberto Vidali he writes: 'my carpets did not originate as paintings, as objects for a gallery, but were proposal for an everyday life; they really were thought of as

Celant's rhetoric about tearing down the existing order, Gilardi's *Nature Carpets*

offer a different way of being political. Gilardi takes his art into the home, a space

that might seem to cut itself off from the processes of politics—and which might

appear to enshrine a certain form of orthodoxy.[36] The artist makes the home the

meeting place of art and life. But at a time when this became a battleground for

cold war politics, there is a kind of urgency to Gilardi's innovative move to

interrogate that space in its material, psychic and social terms.[37] The artist distances

himself from the traditional metaphors of warfare, in striking contrast to Celant's

attempt to incite violence in the radical art magazine *BIT* in 1967. There, Celant

poses the following question: 'why do we talk of weapons at home? It is better to

use them'.[38] Gilardi's proposals are pacifist but no less innovative as a result. I

want to go back to examine these works not only because they pre-empted Celant's

writings but because they offer a more problematic and less well defined response

to some of the concerns relating to artistic production in this period, particularly

carpets to put in the home and to be stepped on.' My translation, see Piero Gilardi, 'I Tappeti-Natura', *Collage*, 7 (1967), p.46; for a description of *Sassi* (1972) one of a number of Nature Carpets, specially commissioned for the architect Alessandro Monteforte and intended for the living-room see Oosten, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.108; Roberto Vidali, 'Piero Gilardi', *Juliet*, 40 (1986), p.18.

[36] See for example the section on the traditional environment as a 'faithful image of familial and social structures' in Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London: Verso, 2005), pp.13–15; see also Johann Lamoureux, 'Avant-Garde: A Historiography of a Critical Concept' in Amelia Jones (ed.), *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), p.193.

[37] For a discussion of the home in these terms see Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007).

[38] Germano Celant, 'una rivoluzione in serie', *Bit*, 1: 6, December, 1967, p.11. *Bit: 'Art: What is Happening in Italy today'* ran between 1967 and 1968 describing itself as the 'most aggressive art magazine'. See Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines an Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), p.245; Giorgio Maffei, *Arte Povera, 1966–1980 Libri e Documenti* (Mantua: Corraini, 2007), p.275.

regarding how best to negotiate and where to situate a practice that sought to bring art and life together.

Gilardi's rhetoric of an everyday existence is conceived in terms of comfort, making it a far cry from the conception of an everyday lived experience as evoked in the claustrophobic images of Merz's *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*).[39] As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, within sculptural practice these concerns were registered in the exhibition *Arte Abitabile* (*Habitable Art*) at the Galleria Sperone in 1966, which included one of Gilardi's *Nature Carpets*. In his analysis of *Arte Abitabile*, Robert Lumley explains that the term was able to register both the sense of an everyday lived experience and the way in which art occupied space; at once it evoked 'the familiar, the domestic, and the world of home'.[40] The point is that if art referenced the home it was precisely to 'produce disquiet' or activate that space to be 'more meditative' as Lumley phrases it.[41] What, then, did it mean for Gilardi to speak of his *Nature Carpets* in terms of comfort, particularly as the idea of comfort would serve as target for both radical design and artistic practice at this moment?[42]

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[39] With reference to the use polyurethane material Gilardi writes: 'the softness of this material suggested the idea of comfort to me.' See Gilardi, 'I Tappeti-Natura', *op. cit.* (note 35), p.46.

[40] Elsewhere with reference to the exhibition Gilardi explains, 'La nostra *Arte Abitabile* stava appunto a indicare che occoreva uscire da quanto nucleo neo-dadaista del Nouveau Réalisme e della Pop-art portando l'arte fuori della sua cornice, nello spazio visuto.' Piero Gilardi et al., *Piero Gilardi: Acquavirtuale* (Livorno: Graphis arte, 2000), p.7; Lumley, 'Habitable Art: In and Around Piero Gilardi', *op. cit.*, (note 14); see also Minola, *op. cit.*, (note 3), pp.22–3; In a recent interview with Andrea Bellini, Gilardi explains that 'Arte Abitabile was presented in 1966 at the Sperone Gallery in Turin…with that title we wanted to explain that our artistic experiments had left the context of aesthetic representation to enter the lived-in space, and hence that of relations.' See Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.*, (note 3), p.4.

[41] Lumley, 'Habitable Art: In and Around Piero Gilardi', *op. cit.* (note 14).

[42] On this subject see Alex Coles and Catharine Rossi, *EP Vol. 1–The Italian Avant-Garde: 1968–1976* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013); Penny Sparke, *Italian Design: 1870 to the Present* (Berlin: Thames and Hudson, 1988); Penny Sparke, 'Nature, Craft, Domesticity, and the Culture of

If the final destination of these works was still likely to be the collectors' home, they refused to be simply looked at even though they are coloured like paintings, asking instead to be walked on, lain on, and rolled on.[43] Gilardi is not yet ready to abandon painting. He relies on colour for its lurid and over-saturated effect. The *Nature Carpets* are literally over-saturated with colour—embedded with layers and layers of resin encrusting their surfaces as seen in these photographs (figure 3.9a–b).[44] They have an obvious visual appeal but the stress placed on function and bodily interactivity by the artist suggests an interest in the changing dynamics of that space and the kinds of objects that might be found there, both gesturing towards design whilst rejecting its implied good taste.

If Gilardi had already begun to couch his *Nature Carpets* in terms of art and life then unlike Celant, who had proposed a clear-cut solution to the same problem (by invoking a model in the US system against which to oppose himself), Gilardi offers a more ambivalent response, particularly with regard to the art object, lifestyle, and systems of production that were emerging from the US. Gilardi had himself insisted that these *Nature Carpets* should become part of an everyday lived experience—elements of a daily routine—but what kind of daily routine was he endorsing? Invariably, where these works have been glossed in the literature, there has been a tendency to interpret them pessimistically as a sign of consumer society's influence, and in terms of their relation to the role of technology in industrial society. Michael Sonnabend encapsulates this when, in 1967, he

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Consumption: The Feminine Face of Design in Italy, 1945–70', *Modern Italy*, 4, 1 (1999), pp.59–78.

[43] In this way they chime with the redefinition of sculpture in this period and anticipate the way that Robert Morris had provided instructions for the visitors to the Tate Gallery exhibition of 1971 for how they should interact with his works. See Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p.249.

[44] Oosten, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.92.

remarked that 'the demons in our IBM computers have thrown Gilardi out of the garden of yesteryear as perceived by Courbet.'[45] If Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* continue to be framed in terms of a dichotomy between nature and culture then I want to think about the implications of this framing as it relates to the domestic space, and the issues around lived experience that these works propose.[46]

Gilardi already evinces an interest in these questions in his earlier engagement with living space for his little-known exhibition entitled *Macchine per il Futuro* (*Machines for the Future*) at the Galleria L'Immagine in 1963. There he exhibited a series of design projects realised through drawings, maps, models, paintings and films that envisaged a future humanity, or as the artist put it, 'a complete solution to the fundamental needs of man in the near future' providing the infrastructure to eradicate economic, racial and social problems.[47] Gilardi recasts the problem of living on a global scale, a form of mass 'territorial planning', as he puts it.[48] As mentioned in Chapter One this form of redistribution or organisation of

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[45] Michael Sonnabend, 'Gilardi', in Benoît Porcher et al. (eds), *Piero Gilardi* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2012), p.57.

[46] See Pierre Restany, *Le Principe d'anarchie*, exhibition cat. (Ferrara: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, 1985), reprinted in Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.60. Only Trini has wanted to reconfigure the terms of the debate from nature/culture to the garden/wall as if he had specifically wanted to reframe the discussion to centre it on the home and its surrounding spaces.

[47] My translation of 'una soluzione sommaria delle fondamentali esigenze dell'uomo nel prossimo futuro.' The exhibition included fourteen works on paper, five models, two films and what are described as five 'psychological paintings'. In a recent interview, Claudio Spadoni has recognised a connection to Futurism in this exhibition. Gilardi also acknowledged this connection, explaining: 'I was trying to do something but for some years I could not find a way out of what had been my training, which took me through expressionism and a return to Futurism, a sort of stalemate.' Gilardi and Spadoni, *op. cit.* (note 29), pp.15, 31; 'Piero Gilardi: Esposizione Di Macchine per Il Futuro' (Turin: Galleria L'immagine, 1963), n/p.

[48] Gilardi describes it as 'an architectural show, where there were models of machines, models of hospitals, schedules, tables with territorial planning, where a sort of hypercybernetic society was already taking form.' See Gilardi and Spadoni, *op. cit.* (note 29), p.31.

the world's resources had by the end of the sixties become a popular techno-utopian argument.[49] However, if in a recent interview he explains that he 'saw here the opportunity to make peace in the world,'[50] then it is not clear from his catalogue statement for the exhibition *Macchine per il Futuro* that Gilardi imagined this future particularly optimistically when he writes:

> The underlying structures of the planned globe are epitomised in the single habitation cell, the medical centre and the centre of automatic prefabrication; their unique achievement is to eliminate social relations, human responsibility and manual labour. The discourse machine (M.D) and the machine that satisfies impulses represent a solution to internal problems, they cure individual desires and irrationality.[51]

When describing the implications of his projects, Gilardi's stance is ambivalent. He conceives of home as a single cell that 'isolates man in functional surroundings without contact with the outside world'[52], whereas elsewhere he declares: 'I have

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[49] On this subject see Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, London, 1974. In Italy these ideas were explored at the 13th Milan Triennale in the Italian section of the triennial titled 'Tempo Libero nella Natura: Mare; Fiumi; Laghi.' See *Tempo libero tempo di vita: note, studi, disegni sulla preparazione della 13 Triennale a cura della Giunta executiva* (Milan: Milan Triennale, 1964), n/p. *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* perhaps best evinces the popular techno-utopian argument of this period that technological advances would allow all goods to be readily available and free.

[50] See Gilardi and Spadoni, *op. cit.* (note 29), p.31.

[51] My translation of 'le sottostrutture del planisfero pianificato sono esemplificate nella cellula d'abitazione individuale, nel centro ospedaliero e nel centro di prefabbricazione automatica; il loro effetto particolare è di eliminare il rapporto sociale, la responsabilità umana e il lavoro fisico. La macchina per discorrere (M.D.) e la macchina per appagare gli istinti rappresentano la soluzione dei problemi interni; esse guariscono gli stimoli individualistici ed irrazionali.' See 'Piero Gilardi: Esposizione Di Macchine per Il Futuro', *op. cit.* (note 47), n/p.

[52] See *Ibid*.

faith in our technological civilization, because it can produce natural events, while defeating death.'[53]

So unappealing did Gilardi's conception of the future seem to the art critic Renzo Guasco that he initially refused to review the show because (as he put it in his catalogue statement) the works on display 'produced a sense of disquiet, a sadness from which I struggled to liberate myself.'[54] Guasco goes on to recognise that 'the questions that Gilardi posed…are issues that are too serious to ignore. They are in effect the problems of the life of man in a technical world, that is problems of daily existence.'[55] The critic reads the works as a response to, and an extension of, the kinds of surroundings that had increasingly come to structure everyday lived existence, which he bleakly evokes when he writes: 'if some hours of the day have to be spent in an office or in some other artificial environment, it makes sense that even resting hours … nights, and Sundays, are spent [there too].'[56] Guasco brings to light the immediacy of this reality when he recounts that:

> Some time ago a weekly magazine reproduced a photograph of a building
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> for offices built in the United States, without windows. First it began with
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> windows that could not be opened because of air conditioning then it was
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> considered more logical to do away with [them] altogether and to use

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[53] Michael Sonnabend, 'Gilardi' cited from Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.57.

[54] My translation of 'mi hanno provocato un senso di disagio, una tristezza di cui stentai a liberarmi.' See 'Piero Gilardi: Esposizione Di Macchine per Il Futuro', *op. cit.* (note 47), n/p.

[55] My translation of 'i problemi che Gilardi ci pone davanti…sono problemi troppo importanti per tacere. Sono in sostanza I problemi della vita dell'uomo nel mondo della tecnica, cioè della nostra vita di ogni giorno.' *Ibid*.

[56] My translation of 'Se alcune ore della giornata devono essere vissute in una officina o in un altro ambiente totalmente artificiale, è bene che tutta la giornata, anche le ore del riposo, anche la notte e le domeniche siano trascorse in un ambiente artificiale. Così almeno l'unità dell'uomo non sarà rotto. In qualche modo l'armonia sarà ricostituita.' *Ibid*.

electric lighting … and if we make use of [electric lighting] for a few hours

of the day why then not always.[57]

If Guasco paints a dystopian picture, what is notable in his account is that he

recognises an ecological impulse in these works when he writes: 'in some way

harmony will be restored.'[58]

The whole world can be plasticised:

Gilardi's most striking move is to introduce nature into the home, doing so with

polyurethane. Easily cut into different shapes (he describes the process as *intaglio*,

a word usually used to describe techniques of cutting, carving or engraving in art),

he made use of its unlimited scope for reinvention. These are literally and

metaphorically elastic surfaces.[59] He experimented with different expectations of

weight, density, and volume in applying the polyvinyl acetate emulsion (PVAc)

used to paint the mineral striations and vegetal markings of his synthetic

landscapes (figure 3.10), as if to realise the characterisation offered by Roland

Barthes when he wrote of plastic's transformation into ever more 'startling

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[57] My translation (slightly modified) of 'un giorno un settimanale riproduse la fotografia di un edificio per uffici costruito negli Stati Uniti, totalmente privo di finestre. Si cominiciò con le finestre che non si potevano aprire per via dell'aria condizionata poi si pensò che era più logico abolire anche le finestre e servirsi della luce artificiale. Infatti, se ce ne serviamo per alcune ore della giornata, perchè non servircene sempre.' See 'Piero Gilardi: Esposizione Di Macchine per Il Futuro', *op. cit.* (note 47), n/p.

[58] My translation of 'in qualche mode l'armonia sarà ricostruita.' See *Ibid*.

[59] Gilardi explains that 'the most salient characteristics of foam rubber are its elasticity, softness and lightness.' See Gilardi Bellini, *Piero Gilardi*, p.2. For a technical description of the different varieties of polyurethane and their uses as well as the processes used to work and colour the material, see Bellini, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp.6–7.

objects'.[60] Gilardi was not alone at this moment in his attempts to manipulate the environment. The artist recalls of his meeting with Michelangelo Antonioni in New York in the sixties that their conversation had revolved around the way in which the filmmaker had painted the trees on set blue.[61] Gilardi approved: 'I liked it, I was in agreement', he recounts.[62]

Responding to the observation made by Filiberto Menna in 1968 that artists were 'looking elsewhere towards nature, the artisanal and organic',[63] Nicholas Cullinan has recently explored the dialectical relation between nature and artifice as he sees it played out in the work of artists associated with Arte Povera such as Pino Pascali, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Jannis Kounellis, Giuseppe Penone and Gilardi and in key exhibitions such as *Lo Spazio degli Elementi. Fuoco Immagine Acqua* Terra held at the Galleria L'Attico in Rome in 1967.[64] In spite of the clear

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[60] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Vintage, 2009), p.97.

[61] Gilardi explains that he regularly visited New York with Michelangelo Pistoletto throughout the sixties in Luca Massimo Barbero (ed.), 'Intervista a Piero Gilardi', *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2010), p.278; Cullinan observes comparable strategies in the filmmaking of Federico Fellini who used large sheets of black plastic to evoke the Venice Laguna in his film *Casanova* (1976). See 'La Ricostruzione della Natura: gli Imperativi Artigianali e Rurali dell'Arte Povera', *op. cit.* (note 6), p.63; on the use of colour in Antonioni's films see Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line Re-Making Art after Modernism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), p.170–72; for the now famous account of the way that Antonioni painted the woods outside of Ravenna for his film Red Desert see Michelangelo Antonioni, 'The White Forest' in *The Architecture of Vision: Writings and Interviews on Cinema*, american edition by marga cottino-jones (New York: Marsilio, 1996), p.87.

[62] Barbero, 'Intervista a Piero Gilardi', *op. cit.*, (note 65), p.278.

[63] Filiberto Menna, 'Una Mise en Scène per la Natura', in *Cartabianca,* March 1968, pp.2–5, reprinted in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera,* (London, New York: Phaidon, 1999), p.22.

[64] Cullinan, 'La Ricostruzione della Natura: gli Imperativi Artigianali e Rurali dell'Arte Povera', *op. cit.* (note 6), pp.62–3; for an important discussion of the role of craft in the construction of postwar design see Catharine Rossi, 'Crafting Modern Design in Italy: From Post-War to Postmodernism'(PhD Thesis: Royal College of Art, 2012). Rossi interrogates the traditional binaries of craft-based versus industrial production, foregrounding the importance of craft in industry in this period.

artificiality of the materials used in Pascali's *Attrezzi Agricoli* (Farm Tools) (1968) or *Campi Arati* (Ploughed Fields) (1967), Cullinan argues that they register a nostalgia for the rural past in the face of increasing industrialisation and urbanisation in the post-war years in Italy. Crucially, it was the idea or concept of nature rather than nature per se that artists were interested in evoking.[65] In Cullinan's conception, this was connected with specific moments in Italian history and the political implications of such associations. For example, Cullinan makes the point that the medieval and noble origins of the term povertà (poverty) put Arte Povera in stark contrast to what he describes as 'the amnesia of Minimalism and the American colonisation of Italy through the proliferation of images of advanced capitalism'.[66] Cullinan rightly notes that, like Pascali, Gilardi also reconstructed nature out of artificial materials. What is perhaps worth mentioning, then, is Gilardi's insistence on couching his *Nature Carpets* in terms of a future tense or, as he puts it, as a 'landscape that will surround man in the future' rather than explicitly referencing a lost arcadia.[67]

On a one-to-one scale with nature, Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* appear illusionistic, but he rebuffs any associations of his work with trompe l'œil. While

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[65] Cullinan, 'La Ricostruzione della Natura: gli Imperativi Artigianali e Rurali dell'Arte Povera', *op. cit.* (note 6), p.63; Alex Potts puts it slightly differently when he describes that the 'fabricated, image-based work in which the deployment of modern artificial materials negated the nature-like "impoverished" look [was] often misleadingly seen as characteristic of Arte Povera...the images of nature, and there are many of them, take the form of objects and fantasies whose natural qualities are decidedly artificial and urban in substance.' See 'Disencumbered Objects', *October*, 124 (2008), p.171.

[66] Cullinan, 'La Ricostruzione della Natura: gli Imperativi Artigianali e Rurali dell'Arte Povera', *op. cit.* (note 6), p.63; For a further discussion of the roots and cultural associations of the term poverty as it relates to Arte Povera see Rosalind Krauss, 'Giovanni Anselmo: Matter and Monochrome', *October*, 124 (2008), pp.126, 129.

[67] Gilardi cited in Minola, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.100.

Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* do not share the characteristic features of trompe l'œil, perhaps there *is* a sense in which these works are not so far from that logic, in their invitation to metaphysical reflection and in their visual trickery, that 'realist hallucination that gave [trompe l'œil] its name', as Jean Baudrillard puts it.[68] Michael Sonnabend thought so, writing that '[Gilardi's] goal [was] to…supply the world with a mysterious replica'.[69] A design for an unrealised work in polyurethane from 1967, *La Surface du Soleil* (The Surface of the Sun) (figure 3.11) for the exhibition *Science-Fiction* curated by Harald Szeemann in 1967, suggests that the artist had even greater ambitions that extended beyond the surface of the earth.[70] Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* seem to flirt with the same potential for misrecognition inherent to trompe l'œil, which in Baudrillard's conception derives from its special capacity to undercut perspectival space, and which he argues does so by way of an unexpected move.[71] Baudrillard describes the special kind of failure inherent to the technique of trompe l'œil as an 'excess of appearance' or a 'failure of reality', the unsettling effect that results when reality is revealed as a semblance.[72]

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[68] The characteristics that Baudrillard refers to are 'the vertical field, the absence of a horizon and of any kind of horizontality (utterly different from the still life), a certain oblique light that is unreal, the absence of depth, a certain type of object, a certain type of material, and of course the 'realist' hallucination that gave it its name.' Jean Baudrillard, 'The Trompe L'Oeil', in Norman Bryson (ed.), *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.53.

[69] Michael Sonnabend 'Gilardi' quoted in Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.57.

[70] Harald Szeemann, *Science Fiction* (Bern: Kunsthalle, 1967). The design is reproduced in *Exhibition: Science-Fiction* (Paris: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, Pavillon de Marsan, 1967), p.42.

[71] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Trompe L'Oeil', *op. cit.* (note 72), p.56.

[72] Baudrillard explains that 'if there is a miracle of *trompe l'œil*, it does not lie in the realism of its execution, like the grapes of Zeuxis which appeared so real that birds came to peck at them. This is absurd. Miracles never result from a surplus of reality but, on the contrary, from a sudden break in reality and the giddiness of feeling oneself fall.' See Jean Baudrillard, 'Trompe L'Oeil or Enchanted

This is the radical power behind trompe l'œil which could be thought not so much in terms of a convincing execution, but about where this convincing execution ends, that is where reality begins to unravel and becomes almost vertiginous, as Baudrillard explains; it 'tak[es] appearances by surprise … undo[ing] the evidence of the world.'[73] Baudrillard describes trompe l'œil as functioning like a spectre that haunts a particular construction of reality and in doing so shows it up as a mere semblance. It reveals to us, Baudrillard explains, 'that "reality" is never more than a world […] staged (*mise-en-scène*) […] that reality is a principle […] but it is a principle and a simulacrum and nothing more, put to an end by the experimental hypersimulation of trompe l'œil.'[74] The implications of the latter are interpreted by Baudrillard in unremittingly bleak terms as the source of power behind politics.[75] However there is a way in which Baudrillard's logic can be marshalled differently by emphasising its ability to interrogate reality and in doing so allowing for the possibility of imagining that reality differently. We glimpse this when Baudrillard describes the way that:

> Trompe-l'œil indiscriminately mixes all the disciplines and then plays false with them all. Trompe-l'œil at once ridicules architecture, is wedded to it, betrays it, emphasises its role and puts it out of circulation by making unbridled use of its techniques. It makes play of weight, solidity, resistance […] it can do anything, mime anything, parody anything.[76]

Simulation', *Seduction; Translated by Brian Singer*, english ed. (Montreéal: New World Perspectives, 1990), p.62; Jean Baudrillard, 'The Trompe L'Oeil', *op. cit.* (note 72), p.58.

[73] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Trompe L'Oeil', *op. cit.* (note 72), p.59.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] *Ibid.*, pp.61–62.

[76] *Ibid.*, p.59.

Gilardi seems to perform this possibility in playful terms, for example in a photograph (figure 3.12) taken during the 1960s where Gilardi, facing forward, appears driving a motorbike whilst balancing an impossibly heavy load. Gilardi transforms polyurethane into porphyry or so he would have us believe. The artist recounts that his partner in crime at the time had been Pino Pascali, that other master of sculptural trickery and author of *Finte Sculture* (Feigned Sculptures) (1966–67). When Pascali visited Turin, he would swap his motorbike with Gilardi and the two artists would go around the city:

> [P]laying tricks […] [transforming] […] the fantasies that we put into our work into an everyday lived reality, a world in which nature was explosive, where […] I don't know, a fruit found on a table, gave rise to a whole series of fantastical projections.[77]

Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* do not fool us (trompent l'œil). Instead they transform nature's imperfections so as to arrive at a dazzling perfection of the artificial. When he brings his *Nature Carpets* into the home, he explains their presence there in almost ecological terms. He even relies on the synthetic appearance of these works in order to deliver a comic effect:[78] 'in my opinion' he writes, 'artificial nature

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[77] 'Piero Gilardi: Conversazione a Milano', *Domus*, 662 (1985), pp.80–81.

[78] For a history of synthetic polymers, particularly the way in which the synthetic became a synonym of artificial see Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and William Newman, eds, *The Artificial and the Natural: An Evolving Polarity* (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 2007), p.295.

responded to nature's needs. Nature was dirty and polluted and so we recreated it to be clean, washable and out of plastic.'[79]

Anticipating the ecology movement that developed in the latter half of the 1960s as well as experiments in radical design in this period, Gilardi's synthetic ecology speaks on behalf of nature and claims to redress a balance. Only a few years later, and recalling Gilardi's *Nature Carpets*, the architecture collective Gruppo 9999 realised a project to literally bring nature into the home with their design for *Vegetable Garden House* (1971–72).[80] Motivated by the desire to put 'man and his environment […] at the center of [their] research', and to find a balance 'between scientific progress and nature', as Carlo Caldini, member of Gruppo 9999, put it recently, the *Vegetable Garden House* was 'conceived to be industrially produced', allowing 'families to grow their own vegetables' and as Caldini put it in distinctly utopian terms, to 'live in closer relationship with nature.'[81] A prototype for the living room of the project was shown at the Space Electronic, the nightclub established by Gruppo 9999 in Florence (figure 3.13) in 1971. A photograph of the *Vegetable Garden House* shows a full-scale model of the living room comprising a real vegetable garden installed there.[82] A year later, *Vegetable Garden House* was awarded joint first prize for the young designers

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[79] My translation of 'secondo me la natura artificiale rispondeva al bisogna di natura. La natura era sporca e inquinata e allora la rifacevamo nuova, pulita, lavabile e di plastica.' See the interview with the artist in Luca Massimo Barbero (ed.), *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2010), p.278. On a separate occasion Gilardi puts it slightly differently when he explained: 'I think the work contains a genuine human truth: a feeling of nostalgia for nature humiliated and disrupted by industrial society.' Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.12.

[80] I am indebted to Catharine Rossi for bringing this to my attention. Rossi, 'Playing with the Povera: Connections between Art, Architecture and Design in 1970s Italy', *op. cit.* (note 14).

[81] Coles and Rossi, *op. cit.* (note 42), p.105.

[82] Rossi, 'Playing with the Povera: Connections between Art, Architecture and Design in 1970s Italy', *op. cit.* (note 14).

competition at the landmark MoMA exhibition *Italy: the New Domestic Landscape* (1972). There, a design for the bedroom was displayed as a series of collaged plans and cross-sections of the room on coloured graph paper that show that space transformed into a vegetable patch supplied by an irrigation system and airbed (figure 3.14).[83]

Seen in contrast to the *Vegetable Garden House*, Gilardi's own logic of green-washing nature with plastic now seems counterintuitive. It does, however, correspond to shifting attitudes towards artificially produced materials in this period. Chemical substitutes could alleviate some of the demands being made on natural resources, or so it was argued by manufacturers.[84] And to return to Barthes, who highlights plastic's universalising potential: 'until now imitation materials have always indicated pretension … plastic has climbed down, it is a household material. It is the first magical substance which consents to be prosaic.'[85] Plastic had become the token of modernity. It had, according to Barthes, become a feature of everyday lived experience: 'the whole world can be plasticised,' he insists.[86] Trini put it similarly when he described Gilardi as inaugurating a 'plastic season.'[87] And as if Gilardi had wanted to prove that polyurethane really could bring with it its own climate, he suggestively gives his *Riverbeds* the appearance of wetness or dryness (figure 3.15). In the absence of atmospheric or meteorological conditions,

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[83] Coles and Rossi, *op. cit.* (note 42), p.102; Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.) *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape Achievements and Problems of Italian Design* (New York: Distributed by New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Conn., 1972), pp.276–81.

[84] On this subject see Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and William Newman, *op. cit.* (note 82), p.295.

[85] Barthes, *op. cit.* (note 64), p.98.

[86] *Ibid.*, p.99.

[87] 'Il suo paesaggio futuro ha come scenario l'attuale stagione della plastica. Ci sono state passate stagioni, ce ne saranno altre. Le sue previsioni, se vogliamo, non sono rivolte soltanto al futuro, ma anche al passato.' See Tommaso Trini, 'Gilardi', *Collage*, 7 (1967), p.47.

Gilardi adds flecks of silver to glistening effect in *Wet Riverbed* (1967) (figure

3.16). Robert Smithson talked about giving art a climate in his short essay entitled

'The Climate of Sight' in 1968. There he collapses psychic states onto

meteorological ones, offering an ecology of vision '[which] changes from wet to

dry and from dry to wet according to one's mental weather'.[88] For Smithson our

psyche affects not only how we feel but also how we see.[89]

Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* had already explored this interplay between

psychic states and physical surroundings, between an ecology of inside and outside,

perhaps as a way of foregrounding the total environment over the singular object.

The artist couches his *Nature Carpets* within a language of systems theory that had

gained a currency in the preceding decade.[90] Central to this discourse of cybernetics

were the neurological and physiological capabilities of living systems. Gilardi had

been interested in such problems with his *Individual Living Cell* (a project for

Macchine per il futuro), whose appearance recalls the latest innovation in

contemporary dwelling design at the time (Ionel Schein's *All Plastic House* of

1956) (figures 3.17 and 3.18). Gilardi explains that he 'created the Nature Carpets

in 1965, thinking of them as examples of the interior décor of the cybernetic

"individual living cell",'[91] inside of which, as he recounts, 'were the Nature Carpets

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[88] Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson, the Collected Writings* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1996), pp.108–9.

[89] Smithson explains that 'the prevailing conditions of one's psyche affect how he views art. We have already heard much about 'cool' or 'hot' art, but not much about 'wet' or 'dry' art.' See *Ibid*., p.108.

[90] Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp.255–77.

[91] Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.4.

[…] gestalt panels that had a function on the sensorimotor system of the inhabitant, a relaxing effect.'[92]

Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* are situated within the realm of relaxation in line with the period's revival of utopian thinking around work and leisure (which had also been the theme for the 13th Milan Trienniale in 1964).[93] Informed by a rhetoric of feedback mechanisms, Gilardi seems to offer his *Nature Carpets* as a response to enervation, as having a restorative effect, in this case on the nervous system. This very subject featured in a strange tale written by the artist in 1967 titled 'The Mystery of Energy', an adventure set in the New York subway where underground system and nervous system are collapsed onto each other in a dizzying experience of infinitesimal scale and time that renders any difference between the body and the surrounding environment indistinguishable. In an ongoing chain of displacement between inside and outside, Gilardi writes: 'I had been travelling "inside" Manhattan, "inside" my train, "inside" my wagon, "inside" my nervous system and my nervous system was travelling "inside"—itself, and my

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[92] My translation of 'perché dentro la cellula abitativa c'erano i *Tappeti Natura*', he writes, 'le loro matrici erano dipinti, erano dei pannelli gestaltici che avevano una funzione sulla psiologia senso-motoria della persona, una funzione rilassante.' Barbero, *1959–1969*, *op. cit.* (note 83), p.277.

[93] Andrea Branzi, *Il Design Italiano, 1964–1990: un museo del design italiano* (Milan: Electa, 1996), pp.104–11; Fabbri, *op. cit.* (note 49). For a broader discussion as it relates to the US. see Gilbert, Chris, 'Herbie Goes Bananas: Fantasies of Leisure and Labor from the New Left to the New Economy', in Helen Anne Molesworth et al., *Work Ethic* (Baltimore, Md: Baltimore Museum of Art; University Park, 2003), pp.67–81; Helen Anne Molesworth et al., *Work Ethic* (Baltimore, Md: Baltimore Museum of Art; University Park, 2003); for an account of the shifting attitudes of 'tempo libero' within the Communist part in Italy (PVCI) see also Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943–1991* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), esp. pp.101–2.

Neurons [had] begun to make communications between themselves—which is something that has never happened before and moreover extremely dangerous.'[94]

Gilardi describes his *Nature Carpets* in terms of 'comfort', suggesting perhaps that this restorative effect could be achieved by way of tactile forms of interaction.[95] Certainly this is evoked in the black and white photographs that accompany the artist's technical manual (figures 3.19 and 3.20). Elsewhere, Gilardi was more explicit about this when he explains that foam rubber 'had the function of welcoming and interacting with the body.'[96] Critics frequently refer to the association between the artist's choice of polyurethane material and its use as padding in soft furnishings.[97] But such associations were of course readily available within sculpture too.[98] Gilardi cites as an important reference, Claes Oldenburg, who famously introduced softness into the sculptural idiom—both materially and metaphorically through his signature soft vinyl pieces as well as the associations that are conjured by his choice of subject matter—ketchup, toothpaste, and ice-cream.[99] The photograph of Pat Oldenburg taken in 1963 shown squeezing *French*

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[94] Piero Gilardi, 'Il Mistero dell'Energia/The Mystery of Energy', *Piero Gilardi* (New York: Mazzotta, 1967); reprinted in Gilardi and Spadoni, *op. cit.* (note 29), pp.25–8, p.26.

[95] It is also a word that appears in reviews of the artist's works in period. See for example Tommaso Trini, 'Gli Archittipi della Natura Sono di Poliuretano', *Materie plastiche ed elastomeri*, 12 (1974), p.954.

[96] Gilardi and Spadoni, *op. cit.* (note 29), p.36; Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.4.

[97] See for example Trini, 'Piero Gilardi', *op. cit.* (note 11), p.47.

[98] Oldenburg is usually cited as the point of reference for Gilardi. Henry Martin also points to John Chamberlain, the other obvious reference of this period. See Martin, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.23.

[99] Gilardi expresses his gratitude to Oldenburg for, as he writes, 'having inspired me in the 1960s with his "soft" poetic vision, with the aesthetic adoption of foam rubber as a raw material of expression.' See Andrea Bellini, *Piero Gilardi: A Little Manual of Expression with Foam Rubber*, (Geneva: Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2013), n/p; Luca Massimo Barbero, ed, 'Intervista a Piero Gilardi', Turin, *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2010), pp.267–289, p.284. Gilardi refers specifically only to Oldenburg's *Bedroom Ensemble* (1963) but then goes on to characterise Oldenburg more generally as a father-figure.

Fries and Ketchup seems to want to play on both these aspects (figure 3.21).[100] This is the one thing that sculpture should not be, wrote Max Kozloff, characterising an attitude which would relegate Oldenburg to the category of non-serious sculptor.[101] Defiant of gravity, Oldenburg, and others working with soft materials had, according to this logic, turned the traditional associations of sculpture on their head, opting instead for a poetics of deflation and varying states of collapse: so in the case of Gilardi, what, then, would Kozloff have made of comfort?[102]

If Gilardi introduces comfort into the sculptural vocabulary, then he also invites association with the language of advertising.[103] The artist made much of the design use of polyurethane whose water resistant and shock absorbent qualities made it an attractive material for use in packaging and the soft padding of furniture.[104] Critics were also quick to comment on the unusual and relatively new material, which had become commercially available only in the 1950s, heralding a new world of consumer products destined for use in the home.[105] As if to extend this logic, Gilardi's exhibition at the Fischbach Gallery in New York—the white-cube gallery par excellence—seemed to be structured around a showroom display.

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[100] For an important discussion of this photo and Oldenburg's practice see Jo Applin, *Eccentric Objects: Rethinking Sculpture in 1960s America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp.43–61.

[101] See 'The Poetics of Softness' in Max Kozloff, *Renderings: Critical Essays on a Century of Modern Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p.223. Kozloff explains that Oldenburg is characterised in this way if sculpture is approached in relation to the 'form history of that art'. But he is critical of that approach: 'this may be a characteristic perspective', he writes 'but it is not necessarily or always the most relevant one.' Implicit in this perspective is the assumption that 'serious' sculptors 'use a common vocabulary of forms ... yet one thing sculpture is quite simply not allowed to be, if it has any pretensions to the mainstream, or any claim to historical necessity, is soft.'

[102] *Ibid.*, p.223.

[103] See the section on advertising in Baudrillard, *op. cit.* (note 36), pp.179–215.

[104] Oosten, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.22.

[105] *Ibid.*, pp.14–15.

A maquette for the installation there shows several of his *Nature Carpets* produced

on rolls and for sale by the metre (figure 3.22). Gilardi created giant cotton-reels

made of plexiglass and aluminium tubing, devised to mount his carpets (figure

3.23). The artist's insistence on their artificial quality seems precisely to draw

attention to the conditions of display.[106] There are installation shots taken in 1967

from Gilardi's exhibition at Illeana Sonnabend's Gallery of these 'carpet samples'

encased in aluminium and fanned out on vertical mounts (figure 3.24a–b). And

when Gilardi exhibited his *Nature Carpets* later that year at *Lo Spazio*

dell'Immagine in Foligno (figure 3.25) he continued to deploy this shop front

aesthetic, presenting his blankets folded up as they might have been displayed in a

department store.[107]

The historical associations with Pinot Gallizio's industrial painting have

already been widely noted.[108] Gilardi has always been cautious to shake off such

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[106] Gilardi explains the logic of this form of presentation in the following way: 'I made samples of the Nature Carpets to look like carpet samples. That type of arrangement certainly highlighted its artificiality. And if the carpet is artificial it suggests that it is industrially produced and from there you get the rolls.' (My translation of 'ad esempio ho fatto un campionario di Tappeti Natura simile a un campionario di moquette. Quel tipo di montaggio metteva l'accento proprio sull'artificialità. Se il tappeto è artificiale allora significa che è prodotto industrialmente ed ecco i rotoli'). See Barbero, 'Intervista a Piero Gilardi', *op. cit.* (note 65), p.278.

[107] Corgnati, *op. cit.* (note 34); reprinted in Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.65.

[108] See for example Martina Corgnati who writes: 'His insistence on the object-based value of the fake piece of ground, with all that lay upon it, might this have been suggested to him by Pinot Gallizio's "painting by the meter" (1958)'. Gilardi is more reticent. He writes: 'Quell'idea l'avevo solo captata. Non ho mai visto la "Pittura Industriale" di Gallizio perché bisognava andare ad Alba. Non l'ho mai vista all'ICAR. L'ho captata anche attraverso tante altre fonti, per esempio dal Nouveau Réalisme francese, da Ettore Sottsass.' See Barbero, *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969*, *op. cit.* (note 83), p.278. In an interview with Claudio Spadoni he accounts for this connection slightly differently, explaining: 'At the same time, I was interested in what was going on in Michel Tapié's Centro Internazionale di Ricerche Artistiche in Turin, where you could see the works of Asger Jorn, Pinot Gallizio, and the Bauhaus Immaginista. This current of Situationism nourished me, even though not as deeply as the direct relationship with Mondino.' See Gilardi and Spadoni, *op. cit.*

straightforward connections, explaining that he had come to Gallizio by a more circuitous route, via Ettore Sottsass (who had been involved with architectural design at the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (IMBI) and Nouveau Réalisme). But there is a sense in which Gilardi's practice speaks to a similar set of concerns that marry a positive embrace of new technology with experiments in behaviour as they had been conceived by Gallizio and underpinned by a logic of surplus in the form of industrial painting.[109] Gallizio's industrial painting had made possible a production of art by the metre, and with it, a rejection of the 'small glories of the easel painting'.[110] Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* are even legible as a logical extension of Gallizio's industrial painting, reproducing on rolls the cobbled ground on which Gallizio had performed his experiments (figure 3.26–27). Gallizio's inflationist model of art by the metre parodically took as its target a Taylorist model of production, along with its management of waste, at the same time as signalling an end to the specialist artist. It brought into question the art market's value system with its notion that art was a separate sphere into which surplus value could be added.

Furthermore, Gallizio had envisaged his rolls of paintings as 'fantastic coverings for whole cities, motorways etc.'[111] Echoes of this can be heard in Gilardi's own musings about the possibility of bringing all his *Nature Carpets* together as a kind of expansive surface. In figure 3.28, a more modest gesture toward such a goal can be seen at his exhibition held over a decade later in 1981 in

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(note 29), p.29; Porcher et al., *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.65; for a fine account of Industrial Painting see Frances Stracey, *Pursuit of the Situationist Subject* (PhD Thesis, University College London, 2002).

[109] Stracey, *op. cit.* (note 112), p.33.

[110] *Ibid.*, p.45.

[111] *Ibid.*, p.46.

Volta Mantovana (near Mantua), where Gilardi seemingly consents to the global ambitions of industrial production.[112] At least that is how Henry Martin explained it in 1967: 'when the Nature Carpets are wound upon the stands', he wrote:

> [t]hey […] become as large as the imagination will allow. We cannot see where they finish, and if we like we can assume that they do not finish at all […] cold and efficient looking […] they seem to be the last link in a chain of endless factory production […] that advertises its desire and its capability to cover the world.[113]

The artist takes the logic of commercial projection to almost absurd lengths by declaring the possibility of an industrially produced nature. The point is to emphasise that the rhetorical framework within which they both couched their work can be seen as linked to broader concerns around technologies of production, their socio-political implications and how to negotiate this terrain. As already noted in an earlier chapter, writing about artistic practice in Italy at this time, Alex Potts characterises the strategies of Pistoletto, Pascali and Boetti as ambivalent in their relation to the mechanisms of the market.[114] There are echoes here with the way that Gallizio's own practice has been characterised in terms of parody.[115] According to Potts, the key to guarding against reification (both of the artist and artwork alike) involved adopting strategies that mimicked the same mechanisms of capitalism.[116]

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[112] From personal correspondence with Giorgio Colombo, January 2014.

[113] Martin, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.25.

[114] Potts, 'Disencumbered Objects', *op. cit.* (note 69), p.181.

[115] Stracey, *op. cit.* (note 112).

[116] Potts, 'Disencumbered Objects', *op. cit.* (note 69), p.181.

Gilardi's own stance remains intentionally unclear. At the Fischbach

Gallery he adopts the persona of showroom salesman, in line with what Helen

Molesworth has characterised as an increasing preoccupation with the definition of

'work' and 'production' in postwar artistic practice, which saw artists assuming

roles that might more readily be identified with managerial and service sector

industries.[117] In relation to this changing dynamic, Gilardi's choice of mineral and

vegetal subject matter is intriguing. It both points to an altogether different and

slower cycle of production (the time it would take for stones to erode, or corn to

grow, for example) whilst the references to biological growth also belie the

complex set of processes involved in making these works (as if they could grow by

themselves), rather than a painstaking process involved in building up colour

through paint baths, airbrushing and applications by hand.[118] These works seem to

wilfully operate in an ongoing tension with the conditions of production and

display. There are parallels here with the way that Yves Klein makes wondrous and

highly prised objects out of his *Sponge Sculptures* (figure 3.29), hovering

somewhere between a catalogue of the sprouting forms of a new life species and

the trophy-display of precious stones. They both resist and embrace the logic of a

vitrine aesthetic as identified by Benjamin Buchloh, who writes that sculpture of

this moment 'would have to be exclusively situated within the presentational

devices of the commodity […] and the display conventions of the department

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[117] Helen Anne Molesworth et al., *op. cit.* (note 97), pp.34, 39, 43.

[118] This publication is written by conservators in Rotterdam with a specific focus on the Nature Carpets held within the collection of the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum. This includes *Nature Carpets* made in the 1960s as well as more recently made versions. See Oosten, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.92.

store.'[119] Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* both speak to this world whilst highlighting how quickly assimilation into it could be. This latter is emphasised by Henry Martin when he describes the interest from department stores ready to place bulk orders for Gilardi's Nature Carpets.[120] The artist flirted with such ambiguities and invited the friction resulting from his seemingly ambivalent visual and rhetorical strategies. He seems to want to operate within the circuits linking consumer goods to home, store and gallery. And if these works were destined for use in the home, Gilardi wants both to transform that space (visually and psychically) whilst simultaneously interrogating the processes (technical and industrial) that underpin those transformations. Such ambiguities perplexed gallery visitors as much as the department stores.[121]

[119] See B. H. D. Buchloh, 'Plenty or Nothing: From Yves Klein's "Le Vide" to Arman's "Le Plein"', *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2000), p.276. See also Butterfiend-Rosen, Emmelyn, 'La Vitrine/L'éponge: The École de Nice and the "Hygiene of Vision"', *New Realisms, 1957–1962: Object Strategies between Readymade and Spectacle* (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 2010), pp.67–68.

[120] Martin writes: 'photographs of Piero Gilardi's work have appeared on several occasion in magazines dedicated to architecture and interior decoration, and on every one of these occasions he has subsequently received letters from department stores and wholesalers wanting information—not having realised that these are works of art—about manufacturer's specifications, norms for gross purchases, sizes of possible shipments, the range of subject matters, and the dimensions in which each be made available.' See Martin, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.23.

[121] Martin, 'Technological Arcadia', p.23; Trini also notes this when he writes: 'we could just as well have come across them in the supermarket, in the department dedicated to leisure time, as domestic surrogates of far-away places or missed weekends. And indeed requests of this kind have been made to the artist.' (My translation (slightly modified) 'Avremmo potuto incontrarli addirittura nei supermercato, reparto tempo libero, come surrogati casalinghi di paesaggi lontani o week-end mancati. E in effetti all'artista non mancano richieste in questo senso'). Diana Franssen makes a similar point when she writes, with reference to the Nature Carpets: 'they became widely known in the art world, but their status as autonomous art object was not a goal in itself, even though the obvious detailed copying of nature makes one suspect otherwise.' *Piero Gilardi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.50.; Trini, 'Natura Inventata Da Gilardi in Poliuretano Espanso', *op. cit.* (note 7), p.959.

Knocking off the front lawn:

'My God, he knocked off my front lawn', was the response of one

American viewer to the Fischbach show.[122] Gilardi's manicured *Nature Carpets*

seemed to speak to that strange suburban space which so powerfully registered the

technological, biological and psychic as argued by Beatriz Colomina.[123] The lawn

loomed large in the American imagination. References to comfort and hygiene

abound in advertising in this period, which metaphorically transformed the lawn

into a body to be sanitised and protected (figure 3.30a–b). This was a strategy that

was replicated in the Italian architectural journal *Domus* with advertising by the

carpet manufacturer Sissalette that offered the possibility to 'Live with Nature'

('Vivere con la Natura') (figure 3.31–3.32). Gilardi adopts this same vocabulary,

explaining that he had 'imagined a naturalistic environment which was artificially

made from synthetic materials for reasons of comfort and hygiene'.[124] One feature

of such advertising campaigns, argues Colomina, was that the lawn was effectively

treated like another room within the domestic interior, whose surface was taken as

almost interchangeable with the carpet and vice-versa. This is the moment when

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[122] Reif, *op. cit.*, (note 1), n/p.

[123] As Colomina explains, it becames one of the principal sites on which World War II and subsequently Cold War politics were being played out on the home front. During this time the lawn became a symbolic space into which moral obligations and anxieties around the threat of warfare were projected. It became a patch of turf to be literally and metaphorically defended. See Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), pp.114–140; On this subject see also Georges Teyssot, *The American Lawn* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press with Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1999). In particular see 'The American Lawn: Surface of Everyday Life', *The American Lawn* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press with Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1999), pp.1–39.

[124] Minola, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.100.

Astroturf, or ChemGrass, appeared in the US, sold as rolls and when Gruppo

Strum, the radical Italian architecture trio designed their lurid green *Pratone* (Large

Lawn) for Gufram (figure 3.33) transforming the traditional chair into an oversized

rubber foam lawn.[125] It reverberates with Colomina's emphatic claim, in *Cold War*

Hothouses, that 'everything in the postwar age was domestic […] an extension of

domestic space.'[126] And conversely, as Colomina puts it, 'much of America's

postwar consumable durables seemed to have metaphorically grown out of the

lawn'. It is in the nature of things, apparently, not to stay in their place. Here the

natural is collapsed into the artificial and vice versa. The artist plays on the strange

conflation of garden and interior space, rendering any distinction between the two

absurd, when for the works on show at the Fischbach gallery he affirms that 'water

does not hurt polyurethane […] for ordinary soil, a vacuuming once a month is all

that is necessary'.[127]

Gilardi obliquely referred to the language of advertising when he said, in

relation to Pop art: 'we immediately understood that this was the new route, that

the impersonality of that language, which retraced the images of mass

communication, just as they were, had a deeply innovative meaning […] a

linguistic exploration that also corresponded to the need to abandon the poetics still

linked to painting as a direct existential projection.'[128] The language of mass

communication seemed to offer far-reaching possibilities for a new way of

speaking and interacting. It is a view that Gilardi reiterates in 'Politics and the

[125] *Pratone* was designed by Gruppo Strum in 1966 and was put into production by Gufram in 1971.

[126] Beatriz Colomina et al., *Cold War Hothouses: Inventing Postwar Culture from Cockpit to Playboy* (New York: Princeton Architectural; London, 2004), p.12.

[127] Reif, *op. cit.* (note 1), n/p.

[128] Gilardi and Spadoni, *op. cit.* (note 29), pp.29, 31.

Avant-Garde', the catalogue essay written for the group show *Op Losse Schroeven* in 1969:

> At the beginning of the 60s pop and nouveaux realists looked at 'mass-media' as a clarifying force in human relationships; intuition of the objectivity of the relationship induced by the technological system seemed to open up new avenues of freedom for the individual in a myth of a classless society; encouraged by the planning of consumption, lifted the artist out of the anguish of an ideological debate, embroiled in abstractions and frustrations without end.[129]

It is against this backdrop of consumerism that Sottsass wants to portray Gilardi as a particularly prescient social commentator but for altogether different reasons. His carpets are not a vision of the future, Sottsass warns us. This is not science fiction. How can it be when the world that Sottsass sees around him is 'largely man-made and synthetic.'[130] He continues:

> And the beauty is that it doesn't require going far into the future to find this substitute for nature because the substitute is already around us: nature like pepper, Worcester sauce, savora-mustard and ketchup for foods without any flavour, nature for restaurants and bars, entrance halls and waiting rooms, wild and luxurious nature for motels and balconies, for toilets and shop window displays, for garages and airports, stations and department stores,

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[129] The essay is reprinted in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (MIT Press, 1999), pp.128–134, p.128.

[130] Sottsass Jr., *op. cit.* (note 7), p.52.

for openings and the launchings of ships, for the arrival of ambassadors and exits of actors, for illegal casinos and divorce courts, for suburban banks and for chemists open at night, a free nature, lush and happy, made of plastic already abounds, like grated cheese in packets, fragrant, scented and flavoured like sawdust, all over America, everywhere American tin-goods appear […] wasp-free, fly-less […] life-less, death-less […] 'for reasons of hygiene and comfort.'[131]

The artificial reigns supreme, heralding a sterile and insipid world which it was designed to somehow remedy. Sottsass draws on the ambiguous way in which Gilardi had spoken about his own work. (He cites Gilardi when he writes: 'for reasons of hygiene and comfort', as if this were the logic driving the construction of this artificial world).[132] But despite this, Sottsass reads the artist's carpets as a swan song to nature. 'Gilardi's nature is neither hygienic nor comfortable', he writes, 'it's not a substitute for nature but a last rite […] and this is a mourning for its loss.' Deeply critical of the objects and lifestyle spun out by the US, Sottsass regards Gilardi as a champion of the same view. Gilardi has described how the language of advertising had come to be perverted in the 'glossy but passive mirroring of industrialist society':

While Wesselmann, Rosenquist and the others made a style of it that was easily turned into a celebration of American visual culture and therefore

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[131] My translation of (slightly modified). *Ibid.*

[132] *Ibid.*

implicitly of all the ideology of the American lifestyle, for us Europeans it instead translated into a very strong utopian and critical tension.[133]

But reflecting on those early years of the 1960s in the book that would signal his return to the art world, *Dall'Arte Alla Vita, Dalla Vita All'Arte*, Gilardi considers a moment and a way of life that seemed to offer a possibility, a glimpse of a new way of living. He writes:

> With Mondino and Pistoletto, friends of mine at the time, we often spoke about the failure of political ideologies. The lifestyle made possible by advanced capitalism, particularly in America, attracted us a lot because it seemed to give a greater freedom and independence to people. These were the years in which the American pop artist replaced the human and pictorial sign with images of mass media and advertising; these were the years in which the Fiat worker could buy the car and to us it seemed that this growth in consumer products was able to compensate for the alienation of Taylorist factory work models.[134]

If Gilardi's own stance at the time suggests ambivalence, it signals a moment

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[133] Gilardi and Spadoni, *op. cit.* (note 29), pp.31–32.

[134] My translation of 'con I compagni di allora, in particolare con Mondino e Pistoletto, si discuteva della caduta delle ideologie politiche. Il sistema di vita delle società capitalistiche avanzate, in particolare quello Americano, ci attraeva molto perché ci sembrava che desse una maggiore libertà ed autonomia alle persone. Erano gli anni in cui gli artisti pop americani rinunciavano al segno umano e pittorico per rappresentare impersonalmente le immagini dei mass-media e della pubblicità; erano gli anni in cui anche l'operaio Fiat poteva comprarsi l'auto e a noi pareva che questa crescita dei consumi compensasse di gran lunga l'alienazione del lavoro tayloristico in fabbrica.' Gilardi, *Dall'Arte Alla Vita Dalla Vita All'Arte*, *op. cit.* (note 24), p.11.

which could still glimpse a utopian potential in the mass-produced object as a way not only of sidestepping political deadlock but also of posing a more far-reaching question about what those new forms of living might conceivably look like; which is to say, how to embrace the comforts of an object world whilst still remaining committed to transforming it. Gilardi's response to this had come in the form of a synthetic ecology, which in subsequent years he would transform into a social one.

Gilardi's desire to transform the spaces of social relations is an attitude that he shares with Carla Lonzi. If Gilardi sought to do this through a body of work that negotiates the materiality of home, the circuits of industrial production and the relationship between nature and culture as a way of thinking about everyday lived experience then in the next chapter I want to consider Carla Lonzi's *Autoritratto* as it sought to transform the spaces of social relations in a different way. Through the transcription of interviews that she recorded with her contemporaries throughout the sixties, *Autoritratto* evokes the inhabited space and subjective experience of her interlocutors. It is the way that Lonzi constructs the domestic setting in which those conversations took place that will be the focus of Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR

Picturing Home: Carla Lonzi's *Autoritratto* (1969)

A kind of coexistence:

When Carla Lonzi published *Autoritratto* (Self-Portrait) in 1969, it marked the end of a career that had spanned a little over ten years.[1] *Autoritratto* is Lonzi's swan song to art criticism[2] before she abandoned the circuits of artistic production to found one of the better-known feminist movements in Italy: La Rivolta Femminile.[3] The book collects much of Lonzi's art-critical output of this period, collating dozens of recorded interviews with a roll call of artists that included Carla

[1] Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto* (Bari: De Donato Editore, 1969). The second edition was published in 2010, see Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri* (Milan: Et Al. Edizioni, 2010). Lonzi began her career as an art critic in the mid-1950s. Her first published essay on Ben Shahn was jointly written with Marisa Volpi and appeared in *Paragone*, a.iv, n.69, September 1955, pp.38–59.

[2] Lonzi did publish a number of articles after *Autoritratto*, for example 'La Critica è Potere', which appeared in *NAC. Notiziario d'arte contemporanea*, n.3, December 1970, pp.5–6 and the catalogue essay for the exhibition curated by Germano Celant: *Identité Italienne, L'Art en Italie Depuis 1959* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1981), p.31. Lonzi's entire art critical writings have recently been republished in Carla Lonzi, *Scritti sull'Arte* (Milan: Et Al., 2012).

[3] For an in depth study of La Rivolta Femminile see Teresa Bertilotti and Anna Scattigno, *Il Femminismo degli Anni Settanta* (Rome: Viella, 2005); on La Rivolta Femminile and the origins of feminism in Italy see Maria Luisa Boccia, *L'Io in Rivolta Vissuto e Pensiero Di Carla Lonzi* (Milan: La Tartaruga edizioni, 1990), chap.3; Maria Luisa Boccia, 'l'io in rivolta. Sessualità e pensiero politico di Carla Lonzi', in Lara Conte et al. (eds), *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2011), pp.145–61; Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Liliana Ellena, 'Carla Lonzi e il neo-femminismo radicale degli anni '70: disfare la cultura, disfare la politica', in Lara Conte et al. (eds), *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2011), pp.117–44; Carla Lonzi, *Scacco Ragionato Poesie Dal '58 Al '63* (Milan: Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1985), pp.27–63; Graziella Parati and Rebecca West, *Italian Feminist Theory and Practice: Equality and Sexual Difference* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002); Anna Scattigno, 'La ricenzione di Carla Lonzi nel femminismo italiano. Una presenza rimossa', in Lara Conte et al. (eds), *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2011), pp.161–71.

Accardi, Getulio Alviano, Enrico Castellani, Pietro Consagra, Luciano Fabro, Lucio Fontana, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Nigro, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Mimmo Rotella, Salvatore Scarpitta, Giulio Turcato and Cy Twombly.[4] What results is something that resembles an autobiographical novel. It is, after all, a self-portrait and as befits this genre there are over a hundred images peppered throughout its pages: camel riders in the Rub'al Khali desert, the skyline of Milan, dozens of family portraits, Lonzi with her son Tita (Battista) or in various locations around the US, a young Accardi dressed as the queen of hearts, Chief Washakie's tipi, holiday snapshots, photographs of gallery openings, the heavyweight boxing champion Cassius Clay. The list goes on. The sequence of images does not follow a particular order and certainly no chronology. Furthermore, they are reproduced as black and white photographs, often small in size, with some no larger than a postage stamp. Their at times grainy, overexposed, or out-of-focus quality gives them a homely, amateur feel, like the kinds of photographs that might have been culled from a family album or scrapbook. Taken together they constitute a surprising collection of images in what is a remarkable book about the life and work of fourteen prominent Italian artists.

Whilst *Autoritratto* would not appear to be a work of art comparable to those considered so far, I want to analyse it as one; not least since this is also how it had

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[4] Many of the artists shared Lonzi's close connection to Luciano Pistoi's Galleria Notizie in Turin, and have since been associated with a range of movements that include Arte Povera, Conceptual, Art Informel and Pop Art. With reference to her experience of collaborating with Luciano Pistoi Lonzi explains: 'I was center stage in a world of art, I made acquaintances with artists, I savored their creativity, I studied them, I measured myself against them, I found a way of identifying myself in a masculine world.' Lonzi's first exhibition for the Galleria Notizie was Pinot Gallizio's Gibigianna series, which opened on the 28th June 1960. On Lonzi's connection to the gallery see also Mirella Bandini et al., *Luciano Pistoi: Inseguo Un Mio Disegno* (Turin: Hopefulmonster, 2008); Lonzi, *Scacco Ragionato Poesie Dal '58 Al '63*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.17.

been envisaged by its author. Lonzi had expressed something like disappointment that *Autoritratto* had not been fully appreciated in this way when, in a diary entry from 1972, she describes Carla Accardi's reaction (who is given the name Ester in Lonzi's diary): 'even Ester would make me feel that it was not very creative.'[5] In many ways *Autoritratto* does mark a departure from previous chapters but I have chosen to discuss it here because it speaks so eloquently to the themes of the thesis. *Autoritratto* asks us to look in a particular way and at specific categories of photographs that evoke an explicitly domestic setting. It also extends beyond the realm of home to catalogue a variety of social spaces through an atlas of images that points to the studio, gallery, newer installation and performance work of the period, holiday destinations, friendships and childhood memories in ways that suggestively expand the traditional circuits of artistic production beyond artist–gallery–market.[6] What I am arguing for here then, is an expanded sense of the word

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[5] This appears in the diary entry for 13th September 1972 in which Lonzi discusses *Autoritratto*. She writes (my translation): 'what disturbed me was that they viewed me as a spectator; today I understand the reason why. Even Ester would make me feel, at the start of the book, that it was not very creative … whilst I was trying to do something that was little understood. After, it made me laugh that the critics would take a tape-recorder and record conversations … perhaps they thought that I was more intelligent, more sensitive, better at recording, certainly more honest, but that is as far as it would go, an ideal spectator.' Lonzi is referring to a passage in *Autoritratto* in which Accardi says: 'when someone wants to create a book like this, they have to be able to put themselves in it entirely, as if it were a part of their life, you understand? You could never do it Carla, like you would want to, I am sorry to say.' See Carla Lonzi, *Taci, anzi parla: diario di una femminista* (Milan: Et Al., 2010), p.58; See Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.17.

[6] For further discussion of the spaces of artistic production in this period see Robert Lumley, 'The Spaces of Arte Povera', in Tate Modern (Gallery) and Walker Art Center (eds), *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 2001), p.46; see also Robert Lumley, '"Una Città strana, metafisica": L'Arte Povera e la Torino di Alighiero Boetti, Germano Celant e del Deposito D'Arte Presente', in Luca Massimo Barbero (ed.), *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2010), pp.493–527; Francesco Pola, 'Intersezioni e

domestic understood more broadly in terms of lived social relations that form its coordinates. *Autoritratto* 'lives out' the lives of the artists included in its pages, and it does so through the inclusion of an array of photographs for which the camera was turned towards an everyday lived experience. If it responds to what, at the time, seemed like an urgent need to eliminate the distance between art and life, then it also rethinks this traditional opposition innovatively, reformulating it through the spaces and the texture of lived experience. *Autoritratto* is the realisation of a project that wants to reimagine artistic practice through the lens of the everyday, pressing further the kinds of experiments such as *Arte Abitabile* and *Lo Spazio dell'Immagine* that had also sought to define art in this way.[7]

By focusing on the domestic as the site where *Autoritratto* is played out, it asks us to think about the politics of artistic practice in ways that challenge the conventional metaphorics of avant-gardism, and in particular those of violence and guerrilla warfare, used by Germano Celant.[8] Lonzi's politics is fought through the pages of *Autoritratto* on a different scale and anticipates an entire generation of feminist politics that would claim the home and personal space as their locus.[9] In

sconfinamenti. Luoghi di una identità plurale', in Luca Massimo Barbero (ed.), *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2010), pp.427–55.

[7] Robert Lumley, 'Habitable Art: In and Around Piero Gilardi' (Paper presented at 'Collaborative Effects', Nottingham Contemporary, 23 March 2013); Anna Minola, *Gian Enzo Sperone Torino-Roma-New York: 35 Anni Di Mostre Tra Europa E America* (Turin: Hopefulmonster, 2000), pp.22–23; Palazzo Trinci (Foligno, Italy), *Lo Spazio Dell'immagine* (Venice: Alfieri edizioni d'arte, 1967); Italo Tomassoni, *Lo Spazio Dell'Immagine e Il Suo Tempo* (Milan: Skira, 2009), pp.13–19.

[8] Germano Celant, 'Arte Povera. Appunti per Una Guerriglia', *Flash Art*, 5 (1967), p.3; see also Jacopo Galimberti, 'A Third-Worldist Art? Germano Celant's Invention of Arte Povera', *Art History*, 36, 2 (2013), pp.418–41; Robert Lumley, 'Michelangelo Pistoletto: Stepping Sideways, Changing Direction', *Pistoletto Politico: Works by Michelangelo Pistoletto* (London: Luxembourg & Dayan, 2013), pp.12–13.

[9] There is a vast literature on this subject. Bertilotti and Scattigno, *op. cit.* (note 3); Bono and Kemp, *op. cit.* (note 3); Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen: Wages for*

subsequent years the acuity of Lonzi's approach would be articulated through her own feminist critique, as has since been recognised by Celant.[10] In a marked and surprising shift in his position, and also from the way in which I have characterised his writing in previous chapters, Celant has since described the political climate at the time that Lonzi was writing *Autoritratto* in the following way: 'I think everyone felt subjective, more than collective responsibility, so political commitment was a matter of secondary importance.'[11] The point is that Lonzi foregrounds subjectivity as a means of effecting a radical change to a system of art making by looking to a poetics of living space and the relations that could found and encountered there. She frames *Autoritratto* around the life and work of the artists she interviews. In this way, she emphatically rejects the 'frame-and-pedestal syndrome' of art, as Lucy Lippard once characterised it, in favour of foregrounding the experience of working and living as an artist.[12]

Housework, 2nd ed. (New York: New York Wages for Housework Committee, 1976); On this subject see for example Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012); Parati and West, *op. cit.* (note 3).

[10] Germano Celant, *Arte povera: history and stories*, Milan, 2011, pp.22, 25–26; for an Italian example of a book modelled after *Autoritratto* see Ivana Mulatero, Lisa Parola, and Associazione culturale divina, *Rrragazze*, (Turin: F.Masoero edizioni d'arte, 1996); Lonzi's contribution does, however, continue to be eclipsed by such figures as Harold Szeeman. See for example the way Szeeman is characterised by Teresa Gleadowe as 'internationally celebrated both as the first curator to work outside the traditional structure of the art institution as an 'independent' and as one of the first to exemplify the idea of the curator as auteur'. See Christian Rattemeyer, *Exhibiting the new art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form', 1969*, London, 2010, p.9.

[11] Celant is here responding to the question: 'How did the contemporary political atmosphere influence the behaviour and the work of [artists associated with Arte Povera]?' See Celant, *Arte Povera*, *op. cit.* (note 10), p.23.

[12] Lucy Lippard, 'Escape Attempts', in Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (eds), *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, Cambridge, MA; London, 1995), p.18.

Lonzi had spoken about offering a way of recasting the artist through a new set of relations with society, imagining those relations in terms of community.[13] In the preface to *Autoritratto* she described it explicitly in these terms, as 'una specie di convivio' (a kind of coexistence), envisaging the conversants as part of an extended family. Lonzi explains that this sense of community was founded on the dialogic structure of *Autoritratto*. As the author puts it: 'this book is composed of fragments that I edited freely in such a way as to reproduce a kind of coexistence, that felt real to me as I had lived it.'[14] Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that among the interlocutors are a close circle of friends (Accardi, Castellani, Paolini, her then partner Consagra) with whom Lonzi had regularly worked throughout the sixties.[15] Here Lonzi's professional and personal lives are collapsed in what is clearly a privileged position based on affinity. At the same time, by foregrounding a sense of community *Autoritratto* chimes with utopian experiments in alternative living, in ways that also correspond with Accardi's own practice of this moment.[16] By redefining artistic practice along these lines *Autoritratto* rethinks the role of the artist in society beyond the strictures of the art object and beyond the view of the period as it had been framed by Celant that saw the artist simply as an instrument of politics.[17]

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[13] Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.3–6.

[14] My translation of 'questo libro è composto di brani montati liberamente in modo da riprodurre una specie di convivio, reale per me che l'ho vissuto.' Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.8.

[15] Lonzi met Accardi in Rome in the early sixties and Consagra for the first time in Paris at the exhibition *Les Sources du XXe siècle*. See Carla Lonzi's biography written by Marta Lonzi and Anna Jaquinta in Lonz*i, Scacco Ragionato Poesie Dal '58 Al '63*, pp.9–73.

[16] There is even a passage in *Autoritratto* in which Lonzi discusses the significance of the counter-culture movement. See Boccia, *L'io in Rivolta Vissuto e Pensiero Di Carla Lonzi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.54; Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.281.

[17] See for example the way the artist is characterised as 'court jester' by Celant or beholden to the superstructure by Gilardi in the following: Celant, 'Arte Povera. Appunti per Una Guerriglia', *op.*

Despite Lonzi's insistence on the idea of community, it is worth noting that at times *Autoritratto* necessarily occasions a breakdown, and concomitant rethinking and reconstitution, of the familial structures that it would at first seem straightforwardly to uphold. This is played out in complex and subtle ways through the body of images in *Autoritratto* which appear in unexpected, mismatched and dispersed sequences, challenging the conventional notion of family structures and replacing this with what might usefully be described in terms of a community. When for example Lonzi uses family photographs—paradigms of domestic spaces—and reproduces them in *Autoritratto* without captions, they prove difficult to read. It is clear, then, that *Autoritratto*'s connection to the domestic is complex, sometimes contradictory and on occasion problematic. If it would seem to uphold the myth of the family romance,[18] this sits uneasily with the way in which, more recently, family photography has been subjected to feminist critique for its images of family life emptied of emotional conflict, or of the labour involved in its production.[19] In light of such claims, how might it be possible to think of

cit. (note 8); Piero Gilardi, 'Primary Energy and the Microemotive Artists', *Arts Magazine*, 43, September, 1968, p.52.

[18] I am using the term 'family romance' as it is discussed by Allan Sekula with reference to *The Family of* Man as 'a globalized, utopian family album, a family romance imposed on every corner of the earth.' See Allan Sekula in 'The Traffic in Photographs', *Photography against the grain: essays and photo works, 1973–1983* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), p.89. For a definition of the term as it is defined by Sigmund Freud in terms of a fantasy of the replacement of one's parents or family with an idealised family see 'Family Romances', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological works of Sigmund Freud, vol. 9* (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 236–41. For a further discussion of the idea of the family romance as it applies to the politics of *The Family of Man* see Victor Burgin in 'Family Romance', in Lucien Castaing-Taylor (ed.), *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R., 1990–1994* (New York; London: Routledge, 1994), pp.452–53.

[19] On this subject see Deborah Chambers, 'Family as Place: Family Photograph Albums and the Domestication of Public and Private Sphere', in Joan M Schwartz and James M Ryan (eds), *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (London: IBTauris, 2003), pp.96–

Autoritratto in relation to Lonzi's subsequent feminist politics?[20] Might it be possible to view the problem of photography's failure-to-function in *Autoritratto* as an implicit critique of the familial structures that it ostensibly seems to want to reproduce and as such, an anticipation of Lonzi's subsequent and necessary move into feminism?

If for many years *Autoritratto*'s significance has been ignored in the scholarship on this period, it has now gradually begun to receive the attention it deserves, though this is still largely confined to Italian-language contributions.[21] In these accounts *Autoritratto* tends to be read as an experimental way of performing

114; Deborah Chambers, *Representing the Family* (London: SAGE, 2001); Jessica Evans, 'Feminism and Photography', in Fiona Carson and Claire Pajaczkowska (eds), *Feminist Visual Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995), p.25; Jo Spence and Patricia Holland, *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography* (London: Virago, 1991), p.1; see also Valerie Walkerdine, *Schoolgirl Fictions* (London: Verso, 1990).

[20] This question seems particularly pressing since Lonzi only included one woman artist in *Autoritratto* (Carla Accardi).

[21] In recent years, Lonzi's practice has begun to be addressed through a number of important Italian-language contributions. Lara Conte, Laura Iamurri and Vanessa Martini have been responsible for the republication of *Autoritratto* (Milan: Et Al., 2010), *Taci Anzi Parla: Diario di Una Femminista* (Milan: Et Al., 2011), *Vai Pure. Dialogo Con Pietro Consagra* (Milan: Et Al., 2011). Lonzi's art critical writings have also been collated and published as *Scritti sull'arte* (Milan: Et.Al., 2012). The major conference on Lonzi, titled *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità,* was organised by the History of Art department of the University of Pisa on 18th March 2009, with conference proceedings published by Edizioni ETS in 2011; Michela Baldini, 'Le Arti figurative all'Approdo. Carla Lonzi: un'allieva dissidente di Roberto Longhi', *Italianistica*, 3 (2009), pp.115–30; see also Boccia, *L'io in Rivolta Vissuto e Pensiero Di Carla Lonzi*, *op. cit.* (note 3); see the essays in Lara Conte et al. (eds), *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2011); Lumley, 'Habitable Art: In and Around Piero Gilardi', *op. cit.* (note 7), n/p. Lumley encapsulates the significance of this book when he writes: no catalogue of an exhibition of Pino Pascali or Giulio Paolini is complete without extended quotations from Lonzi's *Autoritratto*. For English-language contributions see Lucia Re, 'Language, Gender and Sexuality in the Italian Neo-Avant-Garde', *MLN*, 119, 1 (2004), pp.135–73; Laura Iamuuri, 'Un Mestiere Fasullo: Note Su Autoritratto Di Carla Lonzi', *Donne D'arte Storie e Generazioni* (Rome: Meltemi, 2006); see also Claire Fontaine, 'We Are All Clitoridian Women: Notes on Carla Lonzi's Legacy | E-Flux' (n.d.), online.

the role of critic; a manifesto announcing the death of traditional, mediated art criticism in which Lonzi is largely erased from the dialogues.[22] This is Lonzi's coup de théâtre: she ends up writing herself out of the text. For example this is how a recorded dialogue with Lucio Fontana had unfolded:

> Lucio Fontana: In my view, the greats that did an American thing, worthwhile, are precisely that group … Lichtenstein, Oldenburg
>
> Carla Lonzi: … Warhol
>
> Lucio Fontana: …Warhol … and that other sculptor who did those figures
>
> Carla Lonzi: …Chamberlain
>
> Lucio Fontana: Not Chamberlain, he's a bit of a bastard …
>
> Carla Lonzi: Segal
>
> Lucio Fontana: Segal! Yes, there are five or six of them … he is truly American …[23]

When it is transcribed in *Autoritratto*, it appears condensed and Lonzi's interjections have disappeared only to be replaced by a series of elipses:

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[22] See for example Stefano Chiodi, 'Autoritratto in assenza', *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2011), pp.111–16; Laura Iamurri, 'Intorno a Autoritratto: fonti, ipotesi, riflessioni', *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2011), pp.82–84.

[23] The interview is transcribed in full in Lucio Fontana, 'Milano 10 Ottobre 1967: Carla Lonzi Intervista Lucio Fontana', in Paolo Campiglio (ed.), *Lucio Fontana: Sedici Sculture 1937–1967* (Cinisello Balsamo (Milan): Silvana, 2007), pp.26–65; I am indebted to Laura Imaurri for this observation see Iamurri, *op. cit.* (note 22), p.83.

In my view, the greats that did an American thing, something worthwhile,

are precisely that group … Lichtenstein, Oldenburg and the other, that

sculptor that did figures … not Chamberlain, he's a bit of a bastard … yes,

Segal, there are five or six of them. He is truly American …[24]

But beyond this conceit, a complex picture emerges through the process of editing. *Autoritratto* was the culmination of a decade spent challenging art-critical writing. Already by the early 1960s, Lonzi had begun to express reservation about this practice. In a fragment of a letter dating from 19 November 1964 that is reproduced in her diary *Taci Anzi Parla*, Lonzi reveals: 'I've decided not to write art criticism anymore and I feel a kind of liberation inside.'[25] Lonzi's involvement with the artistic milieu of this period did, however, continue throughout the 1960s.[26] But during this time, she completely transformed the structure and function of the interview.[27] With greater emphasis placed on the voice of the artist, Lonzi reformulated this traditional genre into something she likens to an 'encounter', which takes the form of an ongoing dialogue.[28] The results would go by the name of discorsi (dialogues) and appeared in *Marcatrè* from the mid 1960s onwards.

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[24] Iamurri, *op. cit.* (note 22), p.83; Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri, op. cit.* (note 1), p.105.

[25] My translation of 'ho deciso di non scrivere più di critica d'arte e mi sento una specie di liberazione dentro.' This is also quoted in Iamurri, *op. cit.* (note 22), p.76; see Lonzi, *Taci, anzi parla, op. cit.* (note 5), p.501

[26] See for example the vast collection of writings by the author from this period in Lonzi, *Scritti sull'Arte, op. cit.* (note 2).

[27] Lara Conte describes Lonzi's adoption of the interview form as highly original and as a forerunner to what is now a widespread practice in art criticism. See Lara Conte, 'La critica è potere. Percorsi e momenti della critica italiana negli anni Sessanta,' in *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radical*ità, Studi culturali 6 (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, n.d.), p.87.

[28] Laura Iamurri, 'Prefazione' in Lonzi, *with a Preface by Laura Iamurri, op. cit.* (note 1), p.ix.

Lonzi would continue to press this technique further so that by the time she interviews Pascali in 1967 the usual format of domande and risposte (questions and answers) had been altogether restructured. Here Lonzi's questions are entirely replaced by a series of elipses.[29]

In *Autoritratto*, Lonzi's signature interview style is replicated on an ambitious scale, expanded to incorporate all the conversations she had recorded throughout the 1960s and edited together into a single dialogue. The work is conceived as polyphony in which each artist takes part in a conversation that unfolds over the course of the book and where Lonzi weaves fragments from these interviews together to create the necessary counterpoint between the different voices. The result is more akin to a sound collage in which extracts from dialogues once held with Lonzi alone are shoehorned to fit into a multi-stranded conversation in which the voices speak among themselves, often incoherently, and in which Lonzi is silenced.

Much has been made of the structure and language of the text in recent literature, particularly as it is here that Lonzi seems to edit herself out of *Autoritratto*.[30] Commentators have recognised that Lonzi's presence has somehow been recuperated in her almost obsessive capacity to register the artists' voices: their every sound transcribed with all their idiosyncrasies retained so as to evoke

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[29] 'Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Pino Pascali', *Marcatrè*, 30–33, July 1967, pp.239–45. Before the publication of the *Discorsi*, Lonzi's contributions to *Marcatrè* had been intermittent (with only one article ('Una categoria operativa' published in July–September 1964) and three further extracts from exhibition catalogues of shows she had curated at the Galleria Notizie). On this subject see Giorgina Bertolino, 'Carla Lonzi: discorsi. Dai testi sull'art autre al lavoro della scrittura 1960–1969', in Lara Conte et al. (eds), *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2011), pp.61–62; Iamurri, *op. cit.* (note 22), p.76. Bertolino identifies three phases in Lonzi's interview practice as it develops through the *Discorsi* published in *Marcatrè*.

[30] See for example Chiodi, *op. cit.* (note 22).

the texture of the interactions between the interlocutors.[31] For example when Lonzi

transcribes the following display of affection: 'Bp! Bacio di Luciano Fabro' (Kiss

from Luciano Fabro),[32] or elsewhere when Lonzi records Scarpitta playfully

mocking the American pronunciation of his name: 'One, two, three, four … One,

two, three, four … Scarpida … Scarpida …'[33] This level of informality

characterises *Autoritratto* throughout and signals an unapologetic rejection of the

traditional interview format in order to create something that cooresponded to the

sense of the 'as lived'. Lonzi makes this aim clear from the start, where her

interlocutor is Fontana, who, apparently thrown by this new approach, asks: 'What

can I say, if you don't tell me what you want me to talk about.'[34]

But if it has been widely argued that *Autoritratto* offers a striking

alternative to traditional art criticism in the post-war period, and has continued to

be framed in this way, then in this chapter I want to ask what made it possible for it

to be structured in such a way that registered the intimacy of home and the

proximity of relations with friends and family.[35] To pose this problem is in some

sense to regard *Autoritratto* as symptomatic of a way of thinking that animated this

period, to see it as registering a particular attitude. It is also to ask how *Autoritratto*

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[31] Bertolino, *op. cit.* (note 29); Iamurri, *op. cit.* (note 22).

[32] Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.25.

[33] See Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.37; for a further discussion of this strategy see Lonzi,
Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.x.

[34] Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.7.

[35] For an account of the transformation of art criticism in Italy in the postwar period in response to
developments in abstract art see Flavio Fergonzi, 'La critica militante', *La pittura in Italia Il
Novecento 2, 1945–1990* (Milan: Electa, 1993), pp.569–90; see also Gwen Allen, *Artists'
Magazines an Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); Amy Newman,
Challenging Art Artforum 1962–1974 (New York: Soho, 2004). Both these latter deal with the
changing landscape of art criticism in America in the 1960s.

both imagines and foregrounds the domestic *mise-en-scène* which made it possible to think of art as living.

Framing the collective self-portrait:

What I am interested in here is the way in which photography works in *Autoritratto* to create the semblance of an inhabited space and furthermore how it works in relation to the text. If Lonzi's techniques of self-effacement play such a central role, then why does the book go by the name of *Autoritratto*?[36] There are times when *Autoritratto* comes to seem like a scarcely veiled self-portrait despite the author's rhetoric of erasure. Describing *Autoritratto* in a diary entry from 1972, Lonzi writes: 'right at the start there is a photo of St. Teresa of Lisieux, a soul that burned in another world. I wanted to put the image of her […] performing the role of Joan of Arc on the front cover. Naturally it didn't make sense to the publisher, and I was unable to explain my request. For me this was the perfect image for my self-portrait.'[37] Lonzi had been interested in Teresa Martin (who was canonised in 1925) for some time and there is an obvious correspondence with this figure whose own autobiographical manuscripts, *The Story of the Soul*, had been published to

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[36] It has been observed in the literature that the title also refers to the way in which each artist was given the chance to create their own self-portrait. See for example: Boccia, *L'io in Rivolta Vissuto e Pensiero Di Carla Lonzi*, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.52; on the self-effacement of the author see Chiodi, *op. cit.* (note 22), p.114; Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.vii.

[37] Lonzi, *Taci, anzi parla*, *op. cit.* (note 5), p.34. The first edition of *Autoritratto* has a detail from Lucio Fontana's *Concetto Spaziale Attese* (1961–62) reproduced on the front cover. Maddalena Disch and Laura Iamurri provide an interesting account of the image that Lonzi had wanted to include, see 'Nota sull'immagine di copertina' in Lonzi, *Autoritratto,* pp.303–06.

great acclaim.[38] Lonzi reproduces a small detail of the face of St Teresa of Lisieux

in *Autoritratto* (figure 4.1) (*Autoritratto* fig.11),[39] taken from a photograph of the

Carmelite nun playing the part of Joan of Arc.[40] The photograph is a detail from

Paolini's *Teresa nella parte di Giovanna d'arco in prigione* (tavola ottica) (Teresa

in the role of Joan of Arc in Prison) (1969) (figure 4.2), a work that was dedicated

to Lonzi (and for a time had been in her collection).[41] Only this recognisable detail

of the original photograph (figure 4.3), cropped around the nun's melancholy face

and resting in the figure's right hand, is reproduced in *Autoritratto*, as she looks

straight at the camera.[42] It appears alongside an autobiographical passage where

Lonzi describes her early interest in religion as if she had somehow wanted to

conflate her own experiences with those of the nun.[43]

In contrast to the way in which Lonzi had spoken about eliminating her own

voice from the texture of *Autoritratto*, it is particularly striking that she seems

almost to insist on her visibility through the photographs that are included

throughout the text. Consider a photograph taken in her apartment in Minneapolis,

which she shared with Consagra, her partner at the time (figure 4.4) (AR fig.10).

This is a photograph of Lonzi at work. It was here, perched at a desk with the reel-

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[38] Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1); Maddalena Disch, *Giulio Paolini: Catalogo Ragionato* (Milan: Skira, 2008), p.188.

[39] Hereafter, references to the original figure numbers in *Autoritratto* are indicated by the prefix '*AR*'.

[40] The photograph was taken some time in the 1880s as Teresa Martin performs in one of the plays she had written about Joan of Arc.

[41] Maddalena Disch, *op. cit.* (note 38), pp.188, 914.

[42] The work comprises four small photographs, slightly smaller than A4 paper (25 x 20 cm each), mounted on canvas. One of the photographs clearly features the face of Teresa Martin. The remaining three are difficult to make out; two are completely blank and the last is a grainy image. Each panel is an enlarged reproduction taken at a different magnitude.

[43] Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto* (Bari: De Donato Editore, 1969), pp.42–44.

to-reel recorder in front of her, that *Autoritratto* was realised in the spring of 1968.

Through the process of recording she explains, she had been able to get 'close to

the artist ... listening to them repeatedly' particularly if she 'hadn't understood the

first time round'.[44] Lonzi sits on the edge of her seat in this obviously domestic

setting, wearing fur-lined slippers, the sheer curtains drawn, the low bed on the left

only just cropped out of the frame. This is an image of everyday activity that would

serve as a model for the entire book. It quietly registers the laborious technique of

transcription, as Lonzi creates her fictional group portrait. This is the process by

which *Autoritratto* is brought to life in all its contradictions: it is an image of the

solitude in which Lonzi had conjured her community of artists; an image of

isolation by which Lonzi had wanted to gain proximity to her interlocutors; and

finally, an image of professional work completely unrelated to the chores of

homemaking that might have been the conventional cognates of such a domestic

setting within established ideological norms.

Lonzi appears throughout *Autoritratto* where, paradoxically, despite the

supposed self-erasure, she remains centre stage. In two photographs taken by Ugo

Mulas figure 4.5 (AR fig. 72) and figure 4.6 (AR fig.28)) she at once signals her

close connection and enduring support to the artists included in *Autoritratto*. In

figure 4.5, Lonzi appears alongside Castellani at the Galleria dell'Ariete, Milan to

mark the opening of Accardi's 1966 show there, and in figure 4.6, at the opening of

Fabro's 1969 exhibition at the Galleria De Nieubourg, Milan. In the first of these,

Castellani and Lonzi appear caught off-guard; Castellani directs his gaze at Lonzi,

whose mouth, half-open, is caught in a friendly exchange with the photographer.

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[44] My translation of 'oggi si può essere vicino agli artisti anche ascoltandoli e poi riascoltandoli, se non li hai capiti alla prima.' See Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.60.

This is as much about Lonzi's close connection to the photographer, who demonstrates his ability to document the feeling of spontaneity rather than the artwork on display and visible in the background. In figure 4.6 the affinity between Lonzi and Fabro is suggested by their matching stance, both face forwards casually smoking (another photograph by Ugo Mulas, who specialised in art world photography, taken on the same occasion though not reproduced in *Autoritratto*, shows Fabro gallantly kissing Lonzi's hand (figure 4.7)). There is a deceptive innocence about the inclusion of these photographs that belies the tension at the heart of book. *Autoritratto* is no ordinary self-portrait; its subject remains ever elusive, shifting from author to artist and back again. It has recently been described as 'an ensemble of first person narratives'[45] and the prominence given to the artists suggests that this is as much their self-portrait as it is Lonzi's.[46]

The role of montage in structuring the text is vividly extended through the images interwoven in *Autoritratto*, recording the life and habitat of each artist and his or her work in unexpected combinations that register different degrees of intimacy and an ever-changing chronology. Candid photographs introduce siblings, partners, children, and holiday snaps alongside studio photographs, gallery openings and installation shots. Consider figure 4.8 (AR fig. 52), a photograph of Jannis Kounellis with his wife Efi and friends during a carnival in Venezuela in 1958. Efi laughs at the comic figure in drag, performing for the camera whilst Kounellis offers a smile straight into the lens. The photograph captures the friendly gazes that dart in different directions around the room. Above all else, it registers the kind of casualness and spontaneity that characterises the friendship of the figures gathered there. In another photograph reproduced in *Autoritratto*, Accardi

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[45] Conte, 'La critica è potere. Percorsi e momenti della critica italiana negli anni Sessanta,' p.94.

[46] Boccia, *L'io in Rivolta Vissuto e Pensiero Di Carla Lonzi*, *op. cit.* (note 3).

stands between Rotella and Dorazio in Piazza San Marco on the occasion of the 27th Venice Biennale in 1954 (figure 4.9) (AR fig. 93). Rotella points to San Marco behind him as he looks straight towards the camera, whose lens is angled close to the ground in order to fit the landmark into the frame. Again, like figure 4.8, this image registers the enthusiasm and informality associated with a holiday spent with friends—the relaxed attire and performance in front of the camera. Of course these photographs reveal something of the place where they were taken and the members of particular friendship groups but the point is that above all else the artist is seen through the lens of their relations with those friends and their experiences outside of making work.

The inclusion of these kinds of photographs certainly raises the question of the function of photography in *Autoritratto*, as compared to Lonzi's interviews published in *Collage* and *Marcatrè* in the 1960s. Much of the contents of those interviews appeared faithfully transcribed in *Autoritratto* (though not in the same order).[47] Photographs as they appeared in these interviews largely correspond in some way to the artist's practice (showing the artist in their studio or in front of their work, as seen in the pages of *Marcatrè* (figure 4.10)). A number of these photographs were included in *Autoritratto* but additionally, Lonzi introduces a wide range of very different categories of images (see for example, figure 4.11) that explicitly register the author's reliance on portraiture, which throughout *Autoritratto* vacillates between the individual and the group.[48]

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[47] As explained by the author in the preface. See Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.8–9.

[48] For an in depth study on the subject of self-portraiture and autobiography in literature and the visual arts see Monique Yaari, 'Who/What is the Subject? Representations of Self in Late Twentieth-Century French Art', *Word & Image: A Journal of verbal/visual enquiry*, 16, part 4 (2000), p.363. Yaari traces the return of 'self-presentation with a twist' (following Michael Sheringham) in the literature of the 1970s to *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, Perec's *W* and

Autoritratto was realised at a particular moment when the genre of

portraiture had become 'bankrupt', to borrow a term from Mark Godfrey in his

analysis of Alighiero Boetti, an artist not included in Lonzi's book but closely

associated with Arte Povera. Boetti continued to interrogate the notion of artist-

subject through self-portraiture 'of a kind', as Godfrey puts it.[49] Since the historical

project of portraiture had lost all credibility, the only credible form that it could

take was one that played out this failure or loss through strategies of negation, self-

effacement and hiding.[50] In other words, as Godfrey explains, the numerous

portraits that Boetti made during this period might be better understood as anti-

portraits. *Autoritratto in negativo* (1968) (figure 4.12), shown at Boetti's solo

exhibition Shaman/Showman at the Galleria de Nieubourg in 1968, is one such

work made from a boulder carved out to reveal a barely recognisable face.

Autoritratto in negativo was an unconventional self-portrait; when it was exhibited

it played with this notion of withdrawal and hiding: at the Galleria de Nieubourg it

was hidden out of view among a mass of rocks and boulders that covered the

gallery floor.[51]

Boetti's portraits can be understood as functioning in dialogue with the

rhetoric surrounding the artist-subject that held sway in the post-war period (the

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Philippe LeJeune's *Le Pacte autobiographique*. In the latter part of the decade this was followed by
contributions from Michel Beaujour and in the 1980s with autobiographical narratives by Duras,
Sarraute, and Robbe-Grillet. This, Yaari explains has also been accompanied by intellectual
autobiographies. A parallel trend is evident in the visual arts with exhibitions such as *Mythologies
Individuelles*, *Pour mémoire* and *Nouvelle subjectivité*, which all took place in the 1970s.

[49] Mark Godfrey, *Alighiero e Boetti* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011), pp.75–76.

[50] *Ibid*., ch. 3.

[51] *Ibid*., p.73.

rhetoric of artist as expressive or cult figure).[52] As Godfrey reminds us, if the genre

of portraiture had been exhausted, it continued to persist throughout this period as a

way of questioning the role of the artist in response to the increasing codification of

the individual through legal frameworks, administrative systems and

spectacularisation.[53] This is brought to the fore in a discussion of Boetti's

Autoritratto (1969) (figure 4.13), a series of twelve photocopies of the artist's face

and right hand spelling out the letters of the work's title in sign language. It has

been read by Godfrey as a criticism of the utopian potential of such reproductive

technologies as the Xerox machine.[54] Lonzi's *Autoritratto* belongs to this same

narrative: it is both anti-portrait at the same time as it aims at a collective self-

portrait. However, its reliance on conventional family photography is at odds with

the artistic practice of artists such as Boetti. It was through photography that Lonzi

was able to figure herself at all and certainly more assertively than through the text.

Lonzi remains in thrall to the recording device which, she claimed, made it possible

for her to faithfully capture the artist-subject. Lonzi constructs her self-portrait

whilst deflecting attention onto others. This is how she figures within *Autoritratto*

while claiming to hold up a mirror to each artist. Moving in and out of visibility

could be seen as a trope to capture the 'as lived' quality she strove for.

This of course raises the issue of the role of the individual within the group,

particularly as it relates to the collective. A work by Paolini from this period titled

Autoritratto (1968) treats the subject of the group portrait through collage. The

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[52] Godfrey and Boetti, *op. cit.* (note 49); on this subject see also Alex Potts, 'Autonomy in Post-War Art, Quasi-Heroic and Casual', *Oxford Art Journal*, 27, 1 (2004), pp.45–59.

[53] On this subject see B. H. D. Buchloh, 'Plenty or Nothing: From Yves Klein's "Le Vide" to Arman's "Le Plein"', *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 257–83.

[54] Godfrey reads the 'auto' of Boetti's *Autoritratto* as short-hand for 'automatic' and as a sign of overproduction or information overload Godfrey and Boetti, *op. cit.* (note 49), p.81.

work is reproduced in Lonzi's *Autoritratto* (figure 4.14) (AR fig. 103). With the inclusion of the stylised self-portrait of Henri Rousseau in the foreground, Paolini's black and white photocollage is a clear acknowledgement of Lonzi whose book on Le Douanier was published in 1965. Paolini's *Autoritratto* is populated by artists, art historians and critics; a crowd of people that recede as a mass of heads towards the horizon, below a stylised sky. With the exception of a few smiling faces that appear as if they could be interacting with each other, the cut-out figures all look in different directions, isolated and free-floating. Among the multitude of heads that recedes into the background there are familiar faces from the period as well as the recognisable figure of Henri Rousseau (taken from the artist's self-portrait *Moi-Même* of 1890) who appears in the front row. Lonzi figures just behind, alongside Corrado Levi, Fontana, and Tano Festa.[55] Despite the title of 'self-portrait', Paolini is omitted, as Lonzi had claimed to be in *Autoritratto*. It suggests perhaps the impossibility of such an attempt at collective self-portraiture. Instead, it conjures the kind of awkward and at times disconnected imaginary community that would also structure Lonzi's book, where again the possibility and impossibility of this aim appear to be played out. The singularity of each voice remains in constant tension in *Autoritratto*'s attempt to register a collective experience. This is reflected through the selection of photographs that register an ambivalence between a focus on the individual (at times, cropped from a larger group portrait) and photographs that foreground families and friends.

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[55] The second row comprises the figures of Carla Accardi, Marisa Volpi, Pietro Consagra, Luciano Fabro, Nino Franchina and further back, Luciano Pistoi, Maurizio Calvesi, Sergio Lombardo, Cessare Tacchi, Plinio de Martiis, Severio Vertone, Cy Twombly, Ninì Pirandello, Anna Piva, Alighiero Boetti, Franco Angeli, and Giulio Carlo Argan. See Maddalena Disch, *op. cit.* (note 38), p.909.

Lonzi's *Autoritratto* might also usefully be considered in relation to Michelangelo Pistoletto's mirror paintings, particularly as these works register an experience of the self so tightly bound with the environment. Pistoletto's portraits seem to want to reconfigure the relationship between viewer and work, collapsing expectations of both. In so doing, Pistoletto also offers a critique of portraiture, and more broadly of representation, whilst simultaneously highlighting the enduring tenacity of this genre.[56] Pistoletto's mirrors function as meta-portraits. At once they point to the impossibility of representation whilst conceding that if the individual is figured at all then this is inevitably determined by their environment and relations constructed within that space.

In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition Accardi, Castellani, Paolini, Pistoletto, Twombly held at Galleria Notizie, Turin in 1965, there are two photographs of Pistoletto's studio.[57] These were taken during a studio visit by the

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[56] For a detailed description of the way Pistoletto made the mirror works (particularly their transformation from canvas to reflective surface), see Claire Gilman, 'Pistoletto's Staged Subjects' in *Arte Povera's Theater: Artifice and Anti-Modernism in Italian Art of the 1960s*, doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 2006, reprinted in October, No.124, 2008, pp.53–74. Gilman's account is an important early contribution to the literature of Pistoletto's mirror works, specifically in relation theories of perception and subjectivity. On this subject see also Carlos Basualdo (ed.), *Michelangelo Pistoletto—From One to Many*, *1956–1974*, published on the occasion of the exhibition held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Nov 2010–Jan 2011) and MAXXI—Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo, Rome (March–June 2011). For important contributions to the debates on portraiture and representation see Yves-Alain Bois, 'Kahnweiler's Lesson' in *Painting as Model*, (Cambridge, MA; London, England: MIT Press), pp.65–97. Bois traces out a structural reading of Cubism that is key to subsequent accounts of portraiture in the second half of the twentieth century for example Benjamin Buchloh, 'Residual Resemblance' in Melissa Feldman (ed.), *Face-off*, *The Portrait in Recent Art*, (Philadelphia, Pa.: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1994), pp.53–69; Ernst van Alphen, 'The Portrait's dispersal: Concepts of Representation and Subjectivity in Contemporary Portraiture,' Joanna Woodall, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.239.

[57] The exhibition ran from 28th May to 15th June 1965. I am indebted to Iamurri for drawing my attention to these images in *op. cit.* (note 22), pp.76–77. Iamurri draws a comparison between the

organisers of the show, Pistoi and Lonzi.[58] The result is a kind obliteration of the

space between spectator and works through a flattening effect that occurs

specifically through photographic reproduction of Pistoletto's mirror works. Here

Pistoletto's cut-out figures and the figures reflected on the mirrored surface are

difficult to tell apart.[59] One of the three tissue-paper figures of *Tre Ragazze alla*

Balconata (*Three Girls on a Balcony*) (1964), glued to polished stainless steel can

be made out in figure 4.15, standing alongside Lonzi and Pistoletto, as if facing

towards them. Meanwhile on the opposite page (figure 4.16), Lonzi appears in the

photograph with another of Pistoletto's leaning figures (alongside Pistoi, and the

photographer in the background), standing at a distance, with his back turned away.

The leaning cut-outs appear as if facing the camera. These are vertiginous

photographs where precisely who or what is visible remains ambiguous.[60] The

point is that in Pistoletto's mirrors the act of viewing is inextricable from the

staging of these images and the way in which Lonzi is inscribed in *Autoritratto*. She explains:
'Lonzi appears as an image reflected in these works by Pistoletto, [she appears] on the scene […] a
silent witness […] in the place of words, of a […] critical discussion, it is her physical presence that
is put into play here in this set of relations that includes artist, gallerist, photographer […] [turning
her back on] a professional attitude that passes judgement, to participate in the debate, to discuss,
siding up with or against other points of view.'

[58] The photograph appears in *Accardi, Castellani, Paolini, Pistoletto, Twombly* (Turin: Galleria
Notizie, 1965). The images are reprinted in Bandini, Mundici, and Roberto, *Luciano Pistoi. Inseguo
Un Mio Disegno*, (Turin: Hopefulmonster, 2008), pp.172–73. *Tre ragazze alla balconata* (Three
Girls on a Balcony), 1964 is reprinted in *Michelangelo Pistoletto—From One to Many, 1956–1974*,
p.205; it also appears in *Michelangelo Pistoletto, A Reflected World*, published on the occasion of
the exhibition organised by Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, April 4–May 8, 1966.

[59] Romay Golan addresses this particular characteristic of Pistoletto's mirror work in 'Flashbacks
and Eclipses in Italian Art in the 1960s', *Grey Room*, 49 (2012), pp.102–27.

[60] For a meditation on the way that vision is constructed as a series of relations between the artist,
the work, the spectator, and the model, see the chapter dedicated to Velázquez*'s Las Meninas* in
Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Scien*ces, 2nd ed. (London:
Routledge, 2001), pp.1–18. Foucault is able to highlight with particular acuity the impossibility or
paradox of vision that results in representation.

environment at any specific moment. Much the same could be said of *Autoritratto*, in which Lonzi aimed to define identity in explicitly relational terms through each artist's specific sense of his or her own experience. Lonzi's *Autoritratto* dramatises this double-action, underscoring how experience is always necessarily mediated.

In search of a new sensibility:

However, when Paolo Fossati reviewed *Autoritratto* for *NAC* (Notiziario Arte Contemporanea) in 1969, it was precisely this emphasis on the idiosyncratic and individual experience that met with such disapproval.[61] In his review, he describes *Autoritratto* as a manifesto against what is characterised as the codifying practice of art criticism. This initial praise is quickly replaced by the accusation that Lonzi simply ends up exchanging one codified system for another, which as he explains, takes the form of a tribe.[62] Fossati's review is peppered with vocabulary aimed at evoking this ethnographic image; he describes the palpable 'totemism' and Lonzi's tribalism as a politics of exclusion.[63] The real cause of irritation for Fossati is that *Autoritratto* announces its gang with little more logic or substance than a declaration and relies on rhetoric designed to be emotive. Fossati describes *Autoritratto* unforgivingly as 'emotionally susceptible' and 'obsessively autobiographical'.[64] Whilst for Fossati the tribalism of *Autoritratto* is simply

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[61] Paolo Fossati, 'Carla Lonzi, Autoritratto, Ed De Donato', *NAC*, 27 (1969), p.28.

[62] Fossati writes: 'it becomes clear that the desire to refute one sclerotic system in order to consent to a free circulation of the ideas and human responsibilities of art, leads to another and equally codified system.' *Ibid*.

[63] Republished in M. Panzeri G. Contessi, 'Carla Lonzi, Autoritratto, Ed De Donato', *Paolo Fossati. La Passione Del Critico. Scritti Scelti Sulle Arti e La Cultura Del Novecento* (Milan: Mondadori Bruno, 2009), pp.52–53; Fossati, *op. cit.* (note 61), p.28.

[64] Fossati, *op. cit.* (note 61), p.28.

dismissed as a familiar trope of this period, it is clear that Lonzi's emphasis on the individual and on subjective experience as a way of challenging art criticism appears markedly different from that of her contemporaries.[65]

Lonzi was not alone in her desire to challenge art criticism. As has been noted in the recent scholarship, she was responding to a context that had developed in the postwar period around the much-contested roles of both artist and critic.[66] By the 1950s in Italy, the critic would come to be associated with a rigid and ideologically loaded practice.[67] When the poet Emilio Villa wrote to Piero Manzoni and Agostino Bonalumi in 1959, he would put it rather more starkly: 'Let's start again. Don't ever say critical activity, but enthusiasm, eye, poetry. Critics are shit.'[68] It was an attitude that chimed with the widespread disregard for official criticism in this period.[69] By 1960 Lonzi had also begun to make a stand against

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[65] See for example the way that Germano Celant evokes this sense of tribal politics at the time in *Celant*, *Arte Pov*era, p.21. He explains, with reference to the conference held at Verucchio in 1963: 'I became aware of the relationship that existed between theory and power. I decided to work freelance, without adhering to any particular school or university clan.'

[66] On this subject see Chiodi, *op. cit.* (note 22); Conte, 'La Critica è Potere. Percorsi e Momenti della Critica Italiana negli Anni Sessanta', *op. cit.* (note 27); Lara Conte, *Materia, Corpo, Azione: Ricerche Artistiche Processuali Tra Europa e Stati Uniti 1966–1970* (Milan: Electa, 2010), pp.213–23; Iamurri, *op. cit.* (note 22).

[67] For important contributions to the narrative of art criticism in postwar Italy see Conte, 'La Critica è Potere. Percorsi e Momenti della Critica Italiana negli Anni Sessanta', *op. cit.* (note 27); Michele Dantini, 'Ytalya Subjecta. Narrazioni Identitarie E Critica d'Arte 1963–2009', in G. Guercio and A. Mattirolo (eds), *Il Confine Evanescente. Arte Italiana 1960–2000* (Milan; Rome: Mondadori Electa, 2010); Fergonzi, *op. cit.* (note 35).

[68] My translation of 'Dunque ricominciamo. Non dire mai attività critica. Ma entusiasmo, occhio, poesia. I critici sono la merda.' Quoted in Elisa Bagnoni, *L' Arte Del XX Secolo* (Milan: Skira, 2006), p.223.

[69] Elisa Bagnoni explains that the polemic around art criticism developed in the postwar period out of attempts to reappraise the narrative of Italian painting of the early decades of the twentieth century. In the 1940s these debates were framed around realism and abstraction. In the following decade, this slowly gave way to a new form of criticism which emphasised the social and cultural context out of which artistic practice developed. See *Ibid.*, p.224.

this practice in an essay for the 30th Venice Biennale. There, Lonzi describes the critic as increasingly at the mercy of the market.[70] Echoes of this sentiment can be heard in *Autoritratto*, when Lonzi characterises art criticism as a 'sham' profession ('un mestiere fasullo').[71] Her repeated references to the failings of the critic have served as the point of departure for the narratives written around *Autoritratto*.[72] There has been an overwhelming tendency in these important Italian-language contributions, to situate *Autoritratto* along a trajectory whose endpoint turns art criticism on its head. This trajectory is book-ended by the essay 'La solitudine del critico' published in *Avanti!* in 1963 (Lonzi's 'year zero', as it had been called by Consagra), and the article signalling her departure from the art world, 'La critica è potere' published in *NAC*, in 1970.[73] Lara Conte outlines the different positions in an ongoing debate over the function and methods of art criticism. Her account begins in 1963 with the Convegno internazionale di Artisti, Critici, Studiosi d'arte

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[70] 'The art market governs all cultural endeavours to the extent that the dealer now has the critic in tow.' My translation, see Baldini, 'Le Arti Figurative all'Approdo. Carla Lonzi: Un'allieva Dissidente Di Roberto Longhi.'

[71] See Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.5.

[72] Elsewhere, Lonzi further outlines her unsympathetic attitude towards the critic: 'there have been situations in which I have heard artists saying good things about dealers; good things said about critics, only seldom and then only with reservation.' This, in part, is the result of 'an underlying mistrust between those that produce art and those that represent the link between them and the public. The critics have approached this with self-assurance […] and in any case with a refusal to view it as a symptom of their inefficiency […] a desperate profession 'entirely up for reinvention.' My Translation of 'sottofondo di sfiducia tra chi produce opere d'arte e chi dovrebbe costituire il *trait d'union* tra esse e il pubblico, I critici hanno preso atto con disinvoltura assumendolo come una fatalità e comunque rifiutandosi di considerarlo come un sintomo della loro inefficienza.' See Carla Lonzi, 'La Solitudine Del Critico', *L'Avanti!*, December 13, 1963, p.23. Carla Lonzi, *op. cit.*

[73] Referring to Pietro Consagra's *Vita Mia* Conte notes that 1963 was defined as 'l'anno zero' (Year Zero) by Lonzi's partner of fifteen years. See Conte, 'La Critica è Potere. Percorsi e Momenti della Critica Italiana negli Anni Sessanta', *op. cit.* (note 27), p.89.

held at Verucchio.[74] In the opening address, Giulio Carlo Argan had outlined the relationship between artist and critic, insisting on the separation of artists from their work.[75] Furthermore, it was here that the divisive tensions were felt between those aligned to Art Informel on the one hand and, on the other, the promotion of gestalt groups at the IV San Marino Biennale.[76] Awards presented to Gruppo N, Zero, Uno and Grav had caused offence, especially to those artists and critics excluded by such collective categories. This had gone on to fuel fierce debates about the role of the critic in determining and promoting the visual arts. One of the most aggressive responses would take the form of a letter signed by a group of artists based in Rome in which they explained the reason for their absence from the conference.

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[74] It was the first event of its kind to unite artists, critics and historians in Italy 'to contribute with discussion and through research to the problems of contemporary art.' The conference was held in September and organised into the following sections: A: Arte e Libertà—L'impegno ideologico nelle correnti artistiche contemporarnee; Section B: Poetiche ed estetica ed i suoi strumenti; C: Le più recenti ricerche sperimentali nel campo dell'espressione artistica.' See also *Ibid*., p.89, ft.8.

[75] He writes: 'to the extent that criticism receives the work from the hands of the artists and admits it into the world of objects and existing social values, the relationship between artist and their work is severed […] the work exists in the context of society rather than in relation to the artist.' My trans. of 'in quanto la critica riceve quest'opera dalle mani dell'artista e la immette nel circolo dei fatto e dei valori attuali della società, conclude il rapporto dell'artista con la propria opera, che da quello momento non vivrà più di una vita collegata a quella dell'artista ma a quella della società.' *XII Convegno Internazionale artisti, critici e studiosi d'arte: Rimini, Verucchio, Riccione, 1963* (1963), p.8.

[76] In the weeks leading up to the conference and to coincide with the San Marino Biennale held over the summer of 1963, Giulio Carlo Argan published three essays in *Il Messaggero*, defending the gestalt experiments of artistic groups such as Gruppo N, Gruppo T, and Gruppo Uno: 'La Ricerca Gestaltica', 'Forma e Formazione', and 'Le Ragioni del Gruppo.' For an account of events surrounding the conference see Italo Mussa, *Il Gruppo Enne La Situazione Dei Gruppi in Europa Negli Anni 60* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1976), pp.351–54. For an in depth study of the art collectives supported by Argan see Jacopo Galimberti, *Art Collectives–Collective Art: Authorship and the Cold War in Western Europe (1957–1969)* (Ph.D Thesis: Courtauld Institute of Art, 2013); see also Giulio Carlo Argan, 'Aut-Aut' in *Il Messaggero*, 7th August, 1963.

This was subsequently published in the first issue of *Marcatrè* in November 1963. It states:

> We declare with absolute certainty that under no circumstances can art criticism impose demands, nor outline programmes for the artist. We believe that Prof. Giulio Carlo Argan, chair of the Conference at Verucchio, has recently adopted a critical attitude that is incompatible with his role as […] historian of art. (Signed by Gastone Novelli, Giuseppe Santomaso, Giulio Turcato, Toti Scialoja, Carla Accardi, Pietro Consagra, Antonio Corpora, Piero Dorazio, Umberto Mastroianni).[77]

A polemic ensued over the course of several months in the pages of *La Fiera Letteraria*, *Arte Oggi* and *L'Avanti!*.[78] This was followed by a steady stream

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[77] My translations of '[…] una volontà di sopraffazione […], una volontà d'arbitrio anticipatore che sta prendendo la mano ai critici d'arte […] Affermiamo con assoluta certezza che in nessun caso la critica d'arte può imporre compiti, né tracciare programmi all'artista. Noi riteniamo che il prof. Giulio Carlo Argan che ha presieduto il Convegno di Verucchio, ha assunto in questi ultimi tempi un atteggiamento critico incompatibile con la sua funzione di studioso e di storico dell'arte.' Published in *Marcatrè* no.1, November 1963, pp.27–29; reprinted in part in Bagnon*i, L' Arte Del XX Seco*lo, p.231.

[78] Particularly in the pages of *La Fiera Letteraria*, in which a series of contributions were published by the leading critics in Italy in favour or against the conference. See also the appendix of *Il Gruppo enne la situazione dei gruppi in Europa negli anni 60* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1976) for the range of responses that appeared in *L'Avanti!*, *Il Messaggero* and *La Fiera Letteraria*. Among these, the article that appeared in *L'Avanti!* on the 20th October 1963 by Nello Ponente evokes the kind of bitter exchanges that took place at the conference. Argan read the declaration by the artists who refused to attend but in response accused them of failing to recognise the spirit in which the conference had been organised and for not taking part in an open debate. Additionally, Argan had sought to undermine one of the artists whose signature had appeared in the letter from Rome by referring to a telegram from that same artist who had asked to be considered for prizes at the Sao Paolo Biennale in Brazil.' See Nello Ponente, 'Riaffermare la vitalità dell'arte e della critica,' in

of articles and special issues that appeared throughout the decade in *NAC*, *Marcatrè* and *BIT* addressing this issue. Lonzi emerges as an important voice in that debate. Rejecting Argan's self-assured posturing and championing of collective practices, she adopted the most radical position among the different voices and offered the most vehement critique of Argan's authority.[79] Lonzi's position has come to be regarded as diametrically opposed to Argan's: she favoured an art criticism that foregrounded the individual and their immediacy of experience, in contrast to Argan, who continued to call for mediation between the artist and the wider cultural context.[80] This difference is encapsulated by art historian Michele Dantini who characterises Argan's efforts to institute a cultural programme as hierarchical and Lonzi's own position as promoting a personality cult.[81]

Lonzi would anticipate much of the criticism levelled against her in the preface to *Autoritratto*. There she rebuffs the charge of fetishisation and instead defends her aim of transforming the relationship between artist and society. Lonzi envisages an artist freed from an increasingly determined and instrumentalised role according to the prevailing attitude of the 1960s.[82] In language typical of the

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L'Avanti!, 20th October, 1963 reprinted in *Il Gruppo Enne la Situazione dei Gruppi in Europa negli anni 60* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1976), p.357.

[79] Conte, 'La critica è potere. Percorsi e momenti della critica italiana negli anni Sessanta,' p.87.

[80] See Michele Dantini, '*ytalya* subjecta. Narrazioni identitarie e critica d'arte 1963–2009' in Gabriele Guercio and Anna Mattirolo (eds), *Il Confine Evanescente. Arte Italiana 1960–2000* (Milan; Rome: Mondadori Electa, 2010), p.265.

[81] This view is reiterated by Vanessa Martini who characterises *La Solitudine del Critico* as 'an extreme position […] that promotes the individual artist, a poetics of the individual.' See Vanessa Martini, 'Gli inizi della straordinaria stagione di Carla Lonzi: 1953–1963', *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2011), p.41.

[82] There she writes 'this book doesn't wish to propose the fetishization of the artist, but to call it into another relation with society, refusing the function, and therefore the power, of the critic as ideology of art.' See Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.3.

utopianism that coloured this period, Lonzi proposes an alternative way of living where the artist, liberated from the strictures of the art market as well as the authoritarian grasp of the art critic, could instead function as the vanguard for a new society:

> That part of humanity that produces [artists] should, I think, encourage another part of humanity to […] produce for themselves. Not to produce something specific like a painting or an object but to […] draw from life, as living beings […] to encourage creativity in people so that they might be able to live in a creative way, and not in a way that responds obediently to those rules determined by society.[83]

The point I want to emphasise here is that, for Lonzi, this new set of relations would need to take place on what might be characterised as a domestic scale (rather than an exclusively domestic setting), based on proximity, individual experience and affection (rather than the kind of cultural programming that Argan had wanted to institute). With its exaltation of the personal and individual, *Autoritratto* remains far removed from the militant rhetoric that shaped the art criticism of that entire generation (that looked to collective action) and certainly from Fossati's own social-historical perspective.[84] Within two decades of publishing his review, Fossati would in fact go on to acknowledge *Autoritratto*'s importance, deeming it one of six contributions to postwar artistic practice in Italy

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[83] My translation of 'produrre non sul piano specifico del fare il quadro o fare l'oggetto, ma a produrre dei gesti della vita, come esseri […] a sviluppare una condizione creative nella persona perché viva la vita in un modo creativo, non in un modo di rispondere ubbidientemente ai modelli che la società volta a volta propone.' Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a preface by Laura Iamurri*, p.35.

[84] See Galimberti, *Art Collectives–Collective Art*, *op. cit.* (note 76).

worthy of mention.[85] After a period of relative obscurity following its first publication and Lonzi's withdrawal from the circuits of artistic production, *Autoritratto* has now taken its place in the narrative of Italian post-war art practice; its author recognised as having anticipated an entire generation of European critics and curators.

Lonzi had made much of the editing process which results in an artificial and highly orchestrated semblance of dialogue, what has been described by Laura Iamurri as the 'bewitching' fiction at its heart. Exploring Lonzi's unusual adoption of reel-to-reel recording, Iamurri details the process of transcription by which Lonzi rendered the texture of the conversations palpable, casting light on *Autoritratto*'s often impenetrable structure. It is clear that Lonzi had been aware of the radical possibilities of using a tape recorder, and the proximity it was assumed to be able to deliver in relation to the artist. There are repeated references in *Autoritratto* to the psychic and political implications of using a reel-to-reel recorder:

> If you use a tape-recorder, it means that as critic, you no longer exist in the traditional sense […] the first time I used the recorder I asked myself 'what is happening?' I couldn't understand, I really felt strange in the presence of the recorder, it isn't an obvious choice, then I said 'well, it's logical that this is what I wanted to say' that is I wanted to be close to the artist and [I wanted to] free myself. [86]

[85] See Iamurri, 'Prefazione' in Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.xiv.

[86] My translation of 'se prendi un registratore significa che, come critico, non esisti più nel senso tradizionale […] La prima volta che ho adoprato il registratore dicevo "ma cosa sta succedendo?" Non capivo bene, proprio mi sono sentita strana con questo registratore, non è una cosa così ovvia, e

This choice was governed by a particular attitude towards the critic, an ethics of the respondent, and a priority given to spoken word.[87] Lonzi is explicit that the moment of recording could offer a way of eliminating the need for mediation. This was the trick behind her disappearing act, which she reveals to Consagra when she explains: 'in that moment there, I disappeared, and rightly so, because […] I was simply an instance of something which assisted others in developing their own awareness.'[88] Lonzi demonstrates a strategic commitment to the use of technology. The reel-to-reel recorder is enshrined by her as a means of eliminating the need for interpretation and distancing herself from her role as critic. Additionally Lonzi likens the effects of transcription to those of a chemical reaction, underscoring her faith in the creative possibilities of this process. In terms that resemble a sound collage, Lonzi explains: 'when there is condensation […] a sound condenses into a sign […] there, like a gas turning to liquid. I like this a lot, I don't know why.'[89] Lonzi embraces the role of facilitator here but just how far this role, and the

poi ho detto "beh, è logico che voleva dire questo," cioè io voglio stare vicino agli artisti e liberarmi io.' See *Ibid.*, p.60; there is an affinity here with the way in which Andy Warhol had described the implications of using the tape recorder. See for example Andy Warhol, 'The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again' (New York: Harcourt, 1977), p.26.

[87] On this subject see Allen, *op. cit.* (note 35); Cindy Nemser, *Art Talk: Conversations with 12 Women Artists* (New York: Scribners, 1975).

[88] 'Mentre io a quell momento lì sono sparita, e giustamente, perché non ero una coscienza, ero semplicemente un'istanza di qualcosa che aiutava gli altri a prendere coscienza.' See Pietro Consagra and Carla Lonzi, *Vai Pure. Dialogo Con Pietro Consagra* (Milan: Et Al., 2011), p.72.

[89] Lonzi writes: 'quando c'è la condensazione […] che da un suono si condensa in segno, ecco, come da un gas va in liquido. Questo mi piace molto, non saprei perché […] e mi piace molto poter leggere una cosa che è diversa da quello che in genere tu leggi e che è prodotto sempre da uno sforzo del cervello che è così stancante ormai, a pensarlo. Una persona che si siede a un tavolo e mette giù delle idée, sola con se stessa e con questo suo impegno di mettere giù delle idée […] mi pare che il suo sforzo è cosi innaturale, la sua prova così faticosa, che io già ci sento la nevrosi […]' Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.29.

subsequent editing process, might be considered different from the kind of mediation that Lonzi so emphatically rejected, is an issue that remains unaddressed by Iamurri's assessment. Iamurri is keen to reiterate Lonzi's stance against the critic. She takes Lonzi at her word without perhaps interrogating the extent to which Lonzi's approach was underpinned by a particular outlook that equated the use of technology with the myth of pure or raw experience. Despite Lonzi's intentions, the point would be to say how *Autoritratto* is undeniably so artfully made.

Lonzi's approach clearly resonates with the way that other writers had articulated their concerns about mediation in this period. But perhaps beyond Lonzi's rhetoric, what remains so striking about *Autoritratto* is that it seems to register the impossibility of such unmediated experience at the very moment when this issue is foregrounded so emphatically by Susan Sontag and perhaps most famously in the polemical essays 'Against Interpretation' (1964) and 'One Culture and the New Sensibility' (1965).[90] Sontag's 'new sensibility' was put forward in defiance of what had become a rigid framework (an ideal of critical practice) that had dominated art critical writing in the postwar period, particularly as it was associated with the New York Intellectuals. Sontag belonged to a new generation of writers in search of an alternative model of criticism. 'Against Interpretation' was not just about promoting new kinds of work that would have fallen outside the purview of the codified critical practice (the work of Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage and Williams Burroughs for example) of the 1950s but about altogether transforming that practice of writing.

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[90] These are reproduced in Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp.3–14, 293–304.

Sontag's description of the interpreter as not 'actually erasing or rewriting the text' but as still 'altering it' chimes with Lonzi's own thinking about critical practice.[91] With the critic likened to the toxic effects of industry, Sontag writes:

> Today is such a time, when the project of interpretation is largely reactionary, stifling. Like the fumes of the automobile and of heavy industry which befoul the urban atmosphere, the effusion of interpretations of art today poisons our sensibilities […] to interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world in order to set up a shadow world of meanings. It is to turn the world into this world.[92]

Interpretation, according to Sontag, has a numbing effect, a hollow replacement for experience. Instead, Sontag advocates a pure, sensuous, immediacy with regard to the work and asks: 'what would criticism look like that would serve the work of art, not usurp its place?'[93] There are obvious parallels with the way that Lonzi characterises the toxic effects of the critic as 'no longer about making something live but about making something sterile.'[94] Lonzi is setting out terms very similar to Sontag's challenge of proposing a new type of criticism, which is also founded on the myth of immediacy:

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[91] Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation,' *in Against Interpretat*ion (London: Vintage, 1994), p.6.

[92] *Ibid*., p.7.

[93] *Ibid*., p.12.

[94] My translation of 'I critici contemporanei veramente appartengono a un anacronismo, poiché non si tratta più, qui, di far vivere, ma di rendere sterile.' Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.4.

A means of listening and recording in which interpretation disappears, as if

it truly were of no value, and the words of the artist on their own work

emerge directly, sensitive and illuminated, in a flow of dialogue that passes

and returns and draws in others. A means of dialogue and of non-

interference that does not mean an abdication from the duty nor a crisis of

interpretation, but indicates that the only way of relinquishing the role of

power in favour of a direct and existential relationship, is made possible

through conversation, listening, the possibility of encounter.[95]

That Lonzi should align herself with this kind of thinking at a time when the idea

of art as a form of representation had been rejected wholesale is hardly surprising.

Importantly, Sontag's *Against Interpretation* had been published in Italy in 1967.

Like Sontag, Lonzi speaks of *Autoritratto* as a response to the work of art

conceived in terms of encounter when she explains that:

[These conversations] respond less to a need to understand than they do to a

need to speak with someone in a way that is both frank and humanly

satisfying. The work of art, at a certain point, was seen by me as a

possibility of encounter, as an invitation from the artist to each of us to

participate. It seemed to me a gesture that I could not respond to in a

professional way.[96]

Lonzi made much of the encounter that she claimed lay at the heart of *Autoritratto*.

This is played out at the level of intimate and subjective experience. Conversations

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[95] Elisa Bagnoni, *L' Arte Del XX Secolo* (Milan: Skira, 2006), p.232.

[96] Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.2.

with Lonzi's then partner Consagra are interwoven with those of close friends Castellani, Paolini, Fabro and Accardi in a rejection of what it was to perform art criticism at the time.[97] Elsewhere Lonzi transcribes the pauses and disruptions so as to give the impression of an unscripted dialogue.[98] These palpably render the intimacy of the relations as well as the domestic setting that framed these conversations. This is keenly felt when Lonzi's son Tita (Battista) bursts into the room and calls out 'Mamma! Mamma!'[99] And elsewhere when Battista interrupts the conversation between Lonzi and Fabro with: 'Oh … Prrr! […] I too will be famous … I too entered the Cube.'[100] In these instances, the intersection with the personal and the familial spill over into Lonzi's art critical practice; a reminder perhaps of the fluidity of those spaces as they are underscored in *Autoritratto*.

It is as if *Autoritratto* wants to recuperate the kind of conversation that would normally have remained beyond the remit of critical writing. These include confessions of love by both Accardi and Paolini, which perhaps suggests ways of inscribing the artist-subject through a range of more human emotions rather than the categories of hero or cult figure. At times, it is indeed difficult to avoid feeling like an intruder on a romantic scene in *Autoritratto*: for instance the tender embrace between Kounellis and his wife Efi (figure 4.17) (AR fig.98) reproduced as a small rectangular photograph that is not much larger than a postage stamp. With their arms interlocking, the photograph is cropped around their shoulders and face in such a way as to close in on their affectionate exchange. *Autoritratto* is replete with

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[97] Laura Iamurri, 'Un Mestiere Fasullo: Note Su Autoritratto Di Carla Lonzi', *op. cit.* (note 21), p.122.

[98] These are described as following unusual rhythms and themes by Laura Iamurri. See Iamurri, *op. cit.* (note 22), p.68.

[99] Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.168.

[100] *Ibid.*, p.165.

variations on this theme, as for example figure 4.18 (AR fig.77), a photograph of Pascali with his girlfriend Michèle. It was taken in the summer of 1968 on the banks of the River Tiber in Rome; their bodies intertwined, Pascali holds on to Michèle's leg with one hand as he stretches his other towards the setting sun in the horizon. The backlighting bleaches their faces, and further dramatises its effect by creating a halo around the figures as they are caught mid-conversation and breaking out into laughter. The photograph was taken by Mulas and suggests, perhaps, in contrast to figure 4.17, a kind of performance of intimacy, somewhere between a private moment, and a performance of that privacy for the camera: a reminder that if *Autoritratto* looks to the domestic and the personal, then it is also a performance of those casual relations associated with this setting as it had been enshrined in the casual rhetoric of the studio introduced by art world photographers (such as Ugo Mulas, Hans Namuth, and Harry Shunk-Kender) in the postwar period.[101]

Lonzi has intriguingly described *Autoritratto* as 'a kind of coexistence' and was clear from the outset about the book's conceit.[102] As mentioned above, this impression of coexistence relies on Lonzi's editing but additionally, on the general sense of dialogue created by the lack of direction, by the uninterrupted flow of conversation (*Autoritratto* is not divided into chapters or sections), and the impression that many more conversations could have taken place. Photography functions here to fill in those gaps. But it does so by both reiterating and confounding the pure fiction that Lonzi seems to want to present through the text.

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[101] On this subject see also Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); on the practice of Ugo Mulas see for example Ugo Mulas, *Ugo e Gli Scultori: Fotografie Di Ugo Mulas Dal 1960 Al 1970* (Rome: Galleria L'Isola, 1988); Ugo Mulas, *Ugo Mulas* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990); Ugo Mulas, *Ugo Mulas, Fotografo 1928–1973* (1984); Ugo Mulas et al., *Ugo Mulas: Vitalità Del Negativo* (Monza: Johan & Levi, 2011).

[102] Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.5–6.

The photographs, like the recordings, have been interwoven in a way that shows a marked lack of fidelity to both the time and the place they were taken, precluding any sense of unity. Furthermore, a disquieting effect is created by the posthumous transcription of recordings taken with Fontana and Pascali when the text was published in 1969.[103]

This appeal to coexistence is further underpinned by the inclusion of countless portraits that record a variety of social relations that date from the turn of the century to the late 1960s—as if it were a family album, a mnemonic. Perhaps unwittingly, they chronicle the changing level of formality that would transform the family unit in these decades and suggest ways in which *Autoritratto* might offer a critique of the family structure. There are numerous archaic portraits of the staged nuclear family, as in figure 4.19 (AR fig 4), of Pascali as a baby held in the arms of his parents (1936). Pascali is dressed in white in the centre of the photograph with his parents on either side, and in half-shadow, as they look proudly down at their son but with the kind of formality and restraint characteristic of studio photography. Much the same could be said of this photograph taken in 1939 of a young Kounellis standing at shoulder height to his mother (figure 4.20) (AR fig.90). The mask-like quality of their faces and the sombre mood of this studio portrait stands in stark contrast to the relaxed feel of this family snap, taken several decades later, of Nigro with his wife Violetta and son Gianni casually sprawled one on top of the other in the countryside near Livorno (figure 4.21) (AR fig.69). Perhaps more striking still is the relaxed ambiance and intimate surroundings of this photograph of Accardi dressed in a dark robe and polka-dotted pyjamas

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[103] For an interesting discussion of the techniques adopted by Lonzi see Iamurri, 'Intorno a *Autoritratto*: fonti, ipotesi, riflessioni,' pp.69–70.

propped up in bed with her daughter Antonella, both of whom are distracted and looking in opposite directions away from the camera (figure 4.22) (AR fig.39).

There is a noticeable emphasis on the relations between mother and child in a whole series of photographs that seem to want to inscribe the maternal subject into the text. Lonzi and her son Battista figure among these. In figure 4.23 (AR fig.74), taken in 1960, Lonzi stands by a window of a darkened room as she bottle-feeds a newly born Battista wrapped up in a blanket in her arms. The inclusion of these kinds of images is unusual. They register a shift in how we might be expected to look and for whom these photographs might have been taken. There are affinities here in the foregrounding of the maternal axis of the family album—the repeated imagery of mother and sons—and the way in which Merz had characterised her own practice explicitly in these terms. In this way Lonzi signals a world beyond her professional life through the inclusion of amateur photography. She provides a view into her role as mother and allows this to exist alongside her practice of writing. This is perhaps made most explicit in a photograph, again of Lonzi and her son, taken four years later (figure 4.24) (AR fig. 60). The frame is cropped at the shoulder, as mother and son sit side by side at a table in an apparently domestic setting, looking in different directions and away from the camera; the young Battista breaks into a smile as he appears to be listening intently to a conversation taking place beyond the frame.

This glimpse into the family life of the author and her son is replicated in photographs throughout *Autoritratto*. There are countless images of the infant and their surroundings that direct attention away from the domain normally associated with the professional artist. These images point to a dream world or to the infant's immediate environment, for example in this photograph taken in 1923 of a young

Scarpitta (figure 4.25) (AR fig.17). The image is out of focus but its drama is clear. It takes place on a small toy cart in a suburban backyard in California in 1923. The young Scarpitta reaches up to kiss his mother, with his head slightly tilted back and to one side in a great show of affection. The inclusion of these kinds of images of artist as infant, such as this photograph of Accardi dressed as the Queen of Hearts (figure 4.26) (AR fig.30), reveals an obvious nostalgia. Accardi wears a white outfit with ruffled collar and cuffs with a large paper heart fixed to her top, holding on to the pleat of her skirt with a worried look on her face. Crucially, the photograph is reproduced alongside a transcription of a dialogue in which Accardi describes a desire to remain unknown, particularly in Italy where she felt her name had become too recognisable.[104] At such instances, *Autoritratto* seems at times to rely unselfconsciously on certain associations of the child with innocence and on the domestic setting of the photograph with a sense of protection.

The images in *Autoritratto* appear without captions (these are printed at the back). Contradictory meanings emerge from Lonzi's attempt to interweave the lives of these different artists into one community (and from the way in which very different kinds of images are employed side-by-side, from professional to amateur photography). The photographs appear in a jolting sequence, as isolated images, at times only obliquely referred to in the text. They fit awkwardly together and resist the kind of narrative overlay that might be expected of an autobiographical account. This is partly the point. Whilst *Autoritratto* is filled with memories and past experiences of the artist it includes, this is far from a return to a biographical account of their work. The conversations jump backwards and forwards spatially

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[104] Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.119–20.

and chronologically in such a way that often resists any attempt at formulating their lives in terms of a linear or causal sequence.

Despite the emphasis on the infant's world, this is not about a return to the way in which the origins of these artists are constituted, nor a way of understanding their work by recourse to their life, but rather an attempt to conjure the inhabited spaces, personal narratives and the web of relations that form their lives beyond the discrete work. *Autoritratto* institutes a form of relational aesthetics avant la lettre—and takes the lived body as a model.[105] Without captions or explanations, the images fall into various categories that come to stand broadly for different forms of the social, and crucially for relations beyond the family structure. The images are often difficult to tell apart and can instead be read as short hand for different types, or put differently, as an atlas of social relations. *Autoritratto* becomes a rehearsal of that encounter that Lonzi had spoken about so emphatically and which is encapsulated in this letter to Pinot Gallizio from 1961:

> I'm increasingly convinced that a new work—a language that represents a way forward from the affirmation of the great masters after the last war can come only from new forms of relationships between people. Basically, despite all our differences, we have one fundamental point in common: our studies and willingness to come together, and the tension that this gives us.[106]

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[105] See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002).

[106] Carla Lonzi to Pinot Gallizio, letter from Milan, 9 March 1961, Turin, Archivio Gallizio quoted in Luca Massimo Barbero (ed.), *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2010).

A wide array of social and sexual relations govern this fictional community, sports teams, friendship groups, tribal communities, gatherings at gallery openings, professional relations, familial connections: *Autoritratto* includes them all. It is a visual experiment as much as a new way of writing, where Lonzi and her interlocutors are inscribed through photography.

Autoritratto makes us think about the artist's engagement with their environment as a powerful way of displacing the object. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the key exhibition to register these changes towards installation and performance-based work was *Lo Spazio dell'Immagine* (1967). A number of works from that exhibition are reproduced in *Autoritratto* including Castellani's *Ambiente* (1967), Fabro's *In Cubo* (1966) and Alviani's *Interrelazione Speculare* (1964) (figure 4.27) (AR fig.67), a series of undulating columns that form a labyrinthine space. The back of the standing figure on the right is reflected and distorted across the room in a series of barely recognisable human forms. Similarly, works that have since been regarded as central to the narrative of artistic practice in Italy of this period, are reproduced here, such as Kounellis's *Untitled* (*12 horses*) from his show at Galleria L'Attico in 1969 and Pascali's *Finte Sculture* at the Galleria Jolas in 1968. Similarly, if *Autoritratto* documents the new type of performance-based practices, then it also registers a shift in the way in which the artist appears to perform for the camera. Consider the photograph of Rotella (figure 4.28) caught wresting posters from hoardings in Rome, the materials for his next décollage. This is Rotella cast as animal tamer in a photograph that would seem to want to evoke the kind of filmic references that had proved such a source of fascination for the artist's practice. *Autoritratto* is peppered with similar moments in the everyday life of each artist and the contemporary realities of making art in postwar Italy as they

perform for the camera. *Autoritratto* ends up looking the way it does in part because it chronicles the production of these new kinds of work. As a way of conceiving of artistic practice it chimes with the many and various radical moves made throughout the 1960s away from object-based work and towards participation or direct action,[107] a term which would signal political action as much as it resonated with artistic practice and it dominated the rhetoric of both. In writings of the latter half of the 1960s this question of direct action is repeatedly framed in terms of encounter. It was of course precisely in these terms that Lonzi had spoken about *Autoritratto*.

When Trini wrote 'A New Alphabet for Body and Matter' in 1969, he began with an international roll call of the different names by which this new work had come to be known; 'from Turin to New York, and from Rome to San Francisco, European and American artists have gradually discovered just how much they have in common.'[108] For Trini this new artistic experience signalled a new attitude, one that he describes as 'an art that is direct action' and whose aim is to work 'beyond the object'.[109] And Trini was not alone. In an essay from 1967, accompanying the Galleria La Bertesca exhibition, Celant asks what happens to art and visual experience when it no longer espouses the logic of representation. The result of this shift is an emphasis on the commonplace, in which art becomes an action whose gestures are necessarily borrowed from everyday life (could it be otherwise?) and take place in everyday settings. In a subsequent essay, Celant

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[107] See for example the chapter on mobility in Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line Re-Making Art after Modernism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), pp.163–88.

[108] Tommaso Trini, 'New Alphabet for Body and Matter', *Domus*, 470 (1969), pp.45–51.

[109] *Ibid*., p.45; the article appears in English translation in Carolyn Christov-Bakargie*v*, *Arte Pov*era (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), pp.200–1.

further explains that these are the spaces we are conditioned not to see.[110] The point here is that the kind of action that Celant has in mind assumes a human scale. For him this is important, as it is the body that has become the locus for such shifts within artistic practice. Celant would continue to ratchet up this emphasis on direct action in the subsequent iterations of his manifesto for Arte Povera in ways that, as I have claimed, are divergent from the kinds of artistic practice I have been considering.[111] What is worth highlighting here is the specifically humanist perspective that Celant embraces which is then taken up elsewhere. In her essay for *Con temp-l'azione*, the exhibition held in Turin in 1967, the curator and critic Daniela Palazzoli proposes a reorientation in thinking about object-relations by extending the idea of direct action to things. This is action transformed into interaction, as Palazzoli puts it: 'things are no longer considered for themselves. They are considered for what they produce, for the relations they set up.'[112] Lonzi's metaphorics of contact as they are played out in *Autoritratto* belong to these debates. *Autoritratto* radically extends this emphasis on the body and on interaction in ways that go beyond the formulations of her contemporaries.

Taken together, the images in *Autoritratto* emphatically restore the connection between artist and the environment in which their work is produced. At the same time, *Autoritratto* is a declaration that these overlapping worlds cannot be separated or compartmentalised by the critic. *Autoritratto* explores the psychic and

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[110] Celant, 'Arte Povera. Appunti per Una Guerriglia', *op. cit.* (note 8) reproduced in Celant, *Arte Povera*, *op. cit.* (note 10).

[111] So much so that in a response to Celant in the Galleria De Foscherari exhibition catalogue, Renato Barilli—assuming the position of 'non-believer' as he puts it—was able to caricature Celant's position in the following way: 'in our contact with things, absolute priority is given to doing rather than to passive experiencing […] our way of being becomes identical with our way of acting.' Renato Barilli, 'Technological abstraction?' in Celant, *Arte Povera*, *op. cit.* (note 10), p.59.

[112] *Ibid.*, p.39.

social spaces of the artists and importantly for my argument they take place on a domestic scale. The specific inclusion of installation shots and gallery openings, whilst pointing to an inaccessible world and perhaps even mythologising that world, as Fossati had warned in his review, also signals the work in its performative role and a reconceptualisation of the work of art as encounter, with Lonzi at the heart of these experiences. *Autoritratto* proposes a kind of living structure that evokes the inhabited space of its conversants. Perhaps more than any of the examples I have considered so far, the trope of living is negotiated, framed, and held up in the pages of *Autoritratto*. If *Autoritratto* ends up looking the way it does, it is because of a marked shift in the conception of what art could be and where it was situated.

CONCLUSION

The theme of home as it has been taken up within artistic practice extends well beyond the Italian context under examination here.[1] Indeed, The troubled relationship that emerged in the 1960s between feminism and the domestic as it was understood as a site of oppression is familiar terrain and firmly inscribed in the narratives of postwar feminist art, particularly within an Anglo-American context.[2] However, limiting this thesis geographically, I have drawn attention to the way in which these tensions between the personal and the political were negotiated on the site of the work by artists and critics working in Italy.

By returning to the theme of home, I asked how it came to be defined by a 1960s generation at a time when Italy had become synonymous with the design of environments. As we have seen, the domestic not only becomes charged but is altogether transformed in this period into a problem about how to live. Far from the idea of living in any conventional sense of the term, or according to prevailing social or sexual norms, this issue, I argue, came to be redefined as the problem of *living differently*.

Certainly, the desire to reimagine home in these terms is vividly articulated by Carla Accardi through *Tenda* (1965), *Triplice Tenda* (1971) *and Ambiente Arancio* (1968). Accardi's temporary shelters clearly resonate with the utopian thinking of the 1960s as it was underpinned by a rhetoric of alternative living and the popular anti-consumerist image of a life lived free of possessions. In her

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[1] For a discussion of some notable American examples such as Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966-67) see Gill Perry, *Playing at Home: House in Contemporary Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), pp.13–14.

[2] Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows, *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture* (New York; London: Routledge, 2008), pp.1–3.

practice, Accardi negotiated what 'to live differently' might mean and how far this might be connected to the contemporary. If Accardi appropriated the materials of contemporary culture, then she seemed to want to ask how these might be put to use in ways that subverted existing norms, interrogating whether they might still offer a utopian potential for a life that was not dictated by the logic of production and consumption.

The refrain 'living differently' can be seen as part of an on-going avant-garde project in the sense that it carries forward familiar utopian cries to unite art and life. But it also takes a distinctive turn—a domestic turn—which is quite at odds with that legacy. As the complex and inherently paradoxical experience of remaking home testifies, the domestic becomes a site of an impossible utopia in this period. This marks a shift from the well-known avant-gardist attention on the public sphere towards the site of home. Understood in this way, the idea of living differently takes on a very concrete and specific direction here that historicises that avant-garde watchword 'art into life'. Throughout, I have called for this duality to be remade through the trope of living, which, I argue, could be understood as the friction at the heart of this binary. By accepting the contradictions that emerge in the new blurring of these boundaries, I ask instead how the terrain of living was negotiated.

I began with the exhibition *Arte Abitabile* (1966) to draw attention to the way in which the turn towards the domestic was registered within artistic practice. *Arte Abitabile* invited artists to reimagine how the spaces and social relations associated with home might be differently experienced. This exhibition functioned both as a point of departure for thinking through new collective forms of making art at the same time as it highlighted the need to critique that space and the objects

found there.[3] Whilst the foregrounding of the everyday has been a key premise of so many of the accounts of this period, my aim has been to consider how the idea of the domestic is transformed at this time. Throughout the 1960s we see a range of artistic practices develop whose point of view—rather than simply its ostensible subject matter—is the home. As it has developed, the domestic becomes not just a place to turn towards but also a perspective which is generative of new ways of thinking and making art.

The proposition of living differently speaks to a number of concerns in this period about what place aesthetics can have within an everyday lived experience. In a passage in *Autoritratto*, Lonzi underscores this aspect when she refers to the counterculture movement (*gli hippies*), praising what she characterises as their attitude towards living. In Lonzi's conception, the Hippy movement (which she distinguishes from the student movement in ways that anticipate *La Rivolta Femminile*'s rejection of revolutionary politics) was able to bring about a transformation of the individual and of everyday life by addressing the problem of living creatively.[4] This takes an additional significance in the work of the artists and the critic I have considered as it is reformulated through the question of what it might mean not just to adopt a new life style but *to live with art differently*. This would mean that art would move to the very heart of life—an impossible utopia perhaps but one in keeping with, as well as constrained by, the historical moment.

For Marisa Merz, the twin concerns of living differently and living with art differently are inextricably bound. *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture*), vividly evokes the

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[3] With reference to *Soppalco*, or 'terrazza' (terrace) as Gilardi refers to it in a recent interview, the artist explains that it was 'a kind ludic object. I imagined that in the house there would be a terrace to climb up and watch people from.' See 'Intervista a Piero Gilardi' in Luca Massimo Barbero (ed.), *Torino Sperimentale 1959–1969* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 2010), p.281.

[4] Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto with a Preface by Laura Iamurri* (Milan: Et Al. Edizioni, 2010), p.214.

tensions between work- and home-life, between what it is to live with art and what it is to make an art that is lived. When Merz's 'primarily domestic practice' carries over into the spaces of work and leisure, such as the Piper Pluri club, it also powerfully suggests the porosity of the domestic onto all lived experience. Merz transforms our expectations of the kinds of objects that can be made to offer a radically different way of thinking about process-based practices from those more familiar US variants. As the artist's practice threatened to obliterate the space in which it was created, *Untitled* (*Living* Sculpture) points to an experience of home in terms of claustrophobia and suffocation as much as it registered the time spent caring for her daughter Beatrice Merz.

As Merz vividly renders the tensions of the subjective experience of the lived context of home, Accardi similarly embraces the associations of her work with the troubled relationship of homemaking. She makes much of the 'repetitive gestures' that underpinned her practice, connecting this latter to the oppressive character of female labour.[5] But she does so in order to effectively liberate her gestures from such associations. Drawing attention to the materials that comprised Accardi's redefinition of home, I ascribed a great deal of importance to the way in which living differently was premised on a way of seeing differently and how far this formulation as it is played out in Accardi's practice might effect a revolution in perception.[6] These concerns suggest how the proposition of living with art becomes

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[5] Helen Molesworth, 'House Work and Art Work', *October*, 92 (2000), pp.71–97. Whilst my own focus has been outside of the American context delineated in Molesworths account, her argument raises many issues relevant to the european context.

[6] These issues would of course be formalised explicitly in terms of a 'revolution in perception' in subsequent years. See Liliana Ellena, 'Carla Lonzi e il neo-femminismo radicale degli anni '70: disfare la cultura, disfare la politica', in Lara Conte et al. (eds), *Carla Lonzi: la duplice radicalità* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2011), p.123.

particularly pressing for Merz, Accardi and Lonzi who brought the terrain of the politics of domesticity to a point of recognition, dramatizing this perspective through their practice in diverse ways. However, as we have seen, these issues are certainly not limited to the purview of women.

The question of living differently was not the exclusive concern of women artists but also widely taken up by men in a variety of directions at this moment, as for example in the practice of Piero Gilardi. His *Nature Carpets* negotiate the question of living in terms of a relay of social relations and circuits of production and consumption that call attention to the mobility of the home, previously encountered in the practice of Accardi and Merz, through a series of shifting habitats. Gilardi's practice expands the possibilities of thinking what the politics of domesticity would become, taking up concerns around ecology and the role of objects in mediating lived experience. The artist would go on to articulate his politics of subjectivity through the concept of *microemotive*, the term he used to characterise artistic practice in this period, which he defined in terms of the process-based, tactile and bodily forms of interaction that could reimagine social relations. But the term *microemotive*, with its emphasis on the small-scale and subjective experience, arguably encapsulates what it was to reimage the domestic as a point of view rather than a place.

Lonzi's *Autoritratto* dramatises this shift most vividly, enacting a fantasy of belonging specifically from this perspective, as it registered the shifts that had taken place within artistic practice in Italy throughout the 1960s. Lonzi had spoken about *Autoritratto* in terms of a fictional community, structuring the book in such a way that registered the intimacy of home and the proximity of friends as the lens through which to think about artistic production. Through image and text,

Autoritratto records the texture of everyday lived experience, rehearsing the idea of living differently in ways that reimagine professional, social and sexual relations. As such, *Autoritratto* articulated an innovative way of thinking about how the concept of living differently and the spaces of lived experience had come to structure artistic practice, as well as shape art criticism at this moment.

In *Autoritratto* Lonzi dismantles and remakes the dualities between private and public and between the personal and the political that informed her feminist practice through *La Rivolta Femminile* in the years after she abandoned the circuits of artistic production. The 'personal is political' quickly became a slogan for Italian feminists as it had elsewhere.[7] And Lonzi certainly continued to interrogate the relationship between the private and the public through *autocoscienza*, a form of political commitment that was able to 'transform home … into a political space, for collective engagement and the development of subjectivity'.[8] In what have since been regarded as unique experiments in *autocoscienza*, Lonzi would go on to explore a rethinking of social and sexual relationships in *Taci anzi parla: Diario di una femminista* (1978) and *Vai Pure* (1980), the transcription of her conversation with Pietro Consagra about the dissolution of their relationship.[9]

Whilst *La Rivolta Femminile*'s appropriation of *autocoscienza* was certainly not unusual, in its call for a separatist praxis and a wholesale rejection of Marxist theory and revolutionary ideology it was not representative of Italian

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[7] Sorcinelli and Calanca, *op. cit.*, (note 5), p.155.

[8] *Autocoscienza* is a collective practice that involves understanding oneself through dialogue with other women. Carmen Leccardi 'Le reinvenzione della vita quotidiana' in Teresa Bertilotti et al., *Il femminismo degli anni Settanta* (Rome: Viella, 2005), p.103.

[9] Carla Lonzi, *Taci, anzi parla: diario di una femminista* (Milano: Et Al., 2010); Pietro Consagra and Carla Lonzi, *Vai Pure. Dialogo Con Pietro Consagra* (Milan: Et Al., 2011).

feminism at the time.[10] Despite these differences, many of the demands called for by *La Rivolta Femminile* in their *Manifesto* (1970) around the institution of marriage and motherhood, domestic labour and such issues as productivity, competition and creativity correspond more directly with the broad concerns of Italian feminism in this period.[11] Arguably, many of the problems that had been prompted by the work under scrutiny in this thesis would be formalised in feminist politics of the 1970s. As I hope I have made clear, although these issues are well-documented and are central to existing histories of feminist art practice, I explored the 1960s not only as pre-history of such later developments but to ask how ideas about the domestic were challenged through art.

Many of the works I have examined over the course of the thesis have addressed the core problem of what it could mean to engage with the spaces and activities associated with home at a time when this site was being called into question both politically and materially. When interrogated by Carla Accardi, the home is situated in the imaginary as a space in which to envisage an alternative existence; as it was negotiated by Marisa Merz through her 'primarily domestic' practice, it suggested a challenge to the gendering of home through the very activities associated with it; for Piero Gilardi it served a rhetorical function as an ideal space in which to view his *Nature Carpets*, at the same time as it served as an imaginary setting for interrogating how the objects that belonged in the home could mediate social relations. Finally, in the case of Carla Lonzi, the domestic offered a

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[10] Maria Luisa Boccia, *L'io in Rivolta Vissuto E Pensiero Di Carla Lonzi* (Milan: La Tartaruga edizioni, 1990), p.80.

[11] Paolo Sorcinelli and Daniela Calanca, *Identikit del Novecento: conflitti, trasformazioni sociali, stili di vita* (Rome: Donzelli, 2004), sec. 2; Boccia, *op. cit.*, (note 4), ch. 3.

way of reimagining the spaces and relations associated with the realm of artistic production.

I have argued for an expanded use of the term 'domestic' to refer not simply to the spaces, activities and relations associated with home but also to the lived experience of art. Understood in this way, the idea of remaking home offers a conceptual framework through which I have been able to bring together a body of works as diverse as Carla Accardi's *Tenda* (1965), Marisa Merz's *Untitled* (*Living Sculpture)*, Piero Gilardi's *Nature Carpets* and Carla Lonzi's *Autoritratto* (1969). In this way I have wanted to insist that the home is no lesser site for art than the public sphere, and that these artists were tapping into the transgressive potential of the notion of the domestic at just the point when it was reaching its apogee as design.

It has been my contention that the art of living comes to be redefined by a 1960s generation as a point of view that opened up what it could mean to live differently with art—which takes the domestic into an expanded field of lived experience over and above the home as a fixed place or even point of reference. If the work of the artists and the critic have not necessarily borne the same vocabulary as that of later developments in feminist art practice, I have tried to show how the terrain of the domestic was lived differently, which is also to say inevitably less systematically and tidily, but no less vividly for all that.

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