

# Title Page

A Theoretical Analysis of Arte Povera

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## Abstract

Arte Povera was an Italian avant-garde movement in the 1960s and was revolutionary in its theories and techniques. The research explores the historical, theoretical and political background of post-World War II Italy that influenced the Poverist artists. This Italian movement is relatively unknown and yet has influenced the artworld greatly. Relatively few scholars have studied Arte Povera and the importance of this movement has been overlooked giving voice more readily to US and French avant-garde artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The study recognises similarities between the capitalism of 1960s Europe and the high-consumer societies of 2022. Such parallels between these two eras encourage an analysis of a movement that resisted commodification. Such an accomplishment, regarding the criticism and resistance of commodification is rare and worth further investigation. An example of art that polarises this Poveristi political aesthetic is needed, to recognise explicit and implicit explanations considering distinctive relationships to commodification. The Young British Artists of the 1980s are an example the research explores as a movement who were absorbed into the processes of commodification. Furthermore, the research gives a fresh perspective to the analysis of Poveristi artworks. In addition to exploring pertinent literature, the study uses a phenomenological lens to view Arte Povera. The method of analysis has been chosen regarding its relevance to the theories of and surrounding the movement. The phenomenological analyses realise a democratic and subjective interpretation of Poveristi artworks with the aim of reevaluating such art within a contemporary context.

#ArtePovera #Commodification #Phenomenology #Materiality #Avant-Garde #Poveristi

#GermanoCelant #CarlaLonzi #Art

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Aims and Objectives

### 1.1.1 Aims

The aim of this thesis is to research how the artists of Arte Povera were able to resist the processes of commodification (Lista, 2006). This resistance is a remarkable endeavour worthy of further exploration. According to some of the Poveristi and associate critic and curator Germano Celant, art movements such as Pop Art, Arte Programmata, Op Art and Minimalism (which were contemporary to Arte Povera) aligned with industrialisation and facilitated the institutions of the artworld and market (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, pp. 28-29; Lista, 2006, p. 18-20). Art historian and curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (1999, p. 35) discerns that “[r]ather than adding ever more objects to a consumerist society based on the process of production and consumption, as Pistoletto claimed the Pop artists were doing,” the Poveristi would reject such ways of making art. The ambition of this research is to discover how the Poveristi accomplished this resistance and understand if there are lessons to learn from their methods, for a more current “intensified” consumer society (Nealon, 2012, pp. 25-42).

The research intends to take a fresh look at the work of the Poveristi, re-evaluating Arte Povera for a contemporary audience, through a phenomenological lens. Christov-Bakargiev argues that “Arte Povera’s impact on artists across Western Europe and America was both immediate and profound, and its influence is still felt around the world” (1999, p. 16). Several commentators on the subject, (for example, Cullinan, 2008; Galimberti, 2013) feel that political and cultural opportunities were missed after the art movement fragmented in the early 1970s, into more individual practices. However, although Christov-Bakargiev recognised the “impact” of Arte Povera, it is surprisingly unknown, even within the artworld; this research aims to help fill a gap in cultural awareness.

### 1.1.2 Objectives

- To explore the cultural and historical environment that gave rise to *Arte Povera*. A post-World War II Europe, a resurgence of capitalism, industrialisation and US investment in northern Italy, were the catalysts for a group of artists to take a considered stance (Lista, 2006). Through reading pertinent literature on the subject by critics, curators, and artists, the current research explores the Poveristi work practices and how these artists responded to this particular time and place in Italian history.
- To write a contextual overview of *Arte Povera*. This will be explored theoretically, through a phenomenological lens, taking things as they appear to the observer. Bernet (2012, p. 567) points out “[...] artists and phenomenologists wish to overcome their personal opinions, presuppositions, and preferences in order to open themselves up as much as possible to the beauty and lessons of the phenomena as mere phenomena.” Motivated by selected work by philosophers Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger, the research seeks to construct a flexible working model of phenomenological analysis, through-which examples of *Arte Povera* can be reframed.
- To create sensory analyses of relevant artworks by artists Marcel Duchamp, Carl Andre and Jannis Kounellis through a phenomenological lens.
- To examine the meaning of commodification in the artworld and how artworks are made into products that are of exchange value. This will be explored through case studies of artists who have embraced or been absorbed by the processes of commodification.
- To study the cultural context of *Arte Povera*, *and* to explore the phenomenological “innocent eye” of ‘bare’ (Brough, 2012, p. 561) subjective perceiving of Poverist artworks. As Brough (2012, p. 561) states: “It is true that bare perceiving, the so called ‘innocent eye’ will not suffice to open up such philosophical or metaphysical content”.



This being the case, parallel investigations will be studied for a greater depth of understanding, working towards fresh, yet informed conclusions. By combining these methods as complementary tools, the intention is to resituate Arte Povera within a new context of ‘intensified’ commodification (Nealon, 2011, 10:45; Nealon, 2012).

## 1.2 Introduction

Arte Povera was a revolutionary art movement in the late 1960s and continues to inspire artists, galleries, curators, and critics today, especially within western culture (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999). This was an Italian avant-garde movement with its roots in five major centres: Turin, Rome, Milan, Bologna, and Genoa. Arte Povera translated from Italian literally means ‘Poor Art’. These avant-garde Poverist artists, briefly explained, often worked with mundane materials, while using simple and sometimes traditional methods, to communicate their ideas. These mundane materials and traditional and sometimes agrarian techniques were named ‘*poor*’ by the artists and critics of the day. This was not a derogatory term, but one to help explain some foundations in Arte Povera practice and perspective (Lista, 2006). Arte Povera questioned the power of the art institutions, and all facets of making art, including materiality, exhibition, documentation, and commodification of the work. The Poverist artists considered the art market, ‘high’ art materials such as marble, bronze, and oil paints, and art institutions to be from the ‘*rich*’ artworld, as they encouraged the idea of art as a consumer product (Galimberti, 2013). In turn, the critics and artists involved in the movement directed the theories behind their practice to question the political, economic, and theoretical hierarchies. Ultimately, the intention was to blur the lines between art and life; where aesthetics, creativity and play could be experienced within the realities of life (Celant, 1969). The Poveristi will be the focus of this research, relating their creative methods and political resistance, to our present, high consumerist western society.

Tendencies in the artworld today have changed from when the Poveristi were exhibiting as a group of artists. This is how it should be, art commenting on and reflecting the culture it develops from. However, if associations can be found between the past and the present, regarding the effect of commodification upon the artworld, such findings will help reevaluate

Arte Povera. This in turn, will question the possibilities of freedom in creativity for an intensified consumerist culture.

### 1.3 Rationale

Art historian Giovanni Aloi shares Christov-Bakargievs' understanding that Arte Povera had a most significant impact on the artworld. However, only when he arrived in London from Milan did he realise the contribution made by Arte Povera, was surprisingly unknown. Aloi states that "we tend to sort of gloss over the contribution of Arte Povera" (Aloi, 2020, 1:00). In fact, Arte Povera is not as well-known as other movements such as Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. In general, this gap in cultural awareness is illustrated in the 'gloss over' demonstrated historically, by the lack of chapters, pages and text devoted to Arte Povera, as compared to the movements mentioned above (Lynton, 1980). Where text is given to Arte Povera the Italian contribution is diluted with more renowned international (non-Italian) artists who were associated with the Poveristi, such as Joseph Beuys and Richard Serra (Livingstone, 1990). This work will attempt to find a rationale for this relative obscurity, in order to provide a base for the aims of this dissertation.

This research explores the Poverist resistance to the powerful forces of capitalism and commodification. They were relatively successful in this task, however, important questions surface. Jencks argues that avant-garde experimentation and conflict against the system, equates to consumerist strategy; "indeed these systems thrive on dissent" (1987, p. 220). These ruptures break new ground for business to flourish and feed the voracious appetite of commodification. For example, the great perennial shows such as the Venice Biennale and Documenta, and art markets may have gained insight into the exhibition of eclectic and experimental artists from the techniques used by the Italian avant-garde artists, critics, and

curators. Is it possible that Arte Povera is yet another avant-garde movement that has become part of the institutional artworld, and indirectly, and unbeknownst to them, the Poveristi have been absorbed into a consumerist business model? Ricardo Cuomo (2018, pp. 96-98) recognised that the young critic Germano Celant and Arte Povera *were* sensitive to these issues, as he explores the theory of *Repressive Tolerance* by Herbert Marcuse and the relevance it had for the Povera movement. Marcuse argues that freedom-fighting activism which recognises the laws and ideals of tolerance put in place by an oppressive state (or a state that is unbalanced in its power from ideology to ideology), tolerates the present regime. Moreover, rather than disrupting the status quo, such activism can stabilise it (Marcuse, 1965/1969). As commodification and communication technologies intensify and the tools to absorb any form of authentic creativity (Nealon, 2012) or avant-garde rebellion (Re, 2004) grow more sophisticated and powerful: Are there any lessons we can learn from the 60s Poverist resistance?

## 2 Background Context

### 2.1 Overview

The background context will introduce the period of Italian history prior to the Arte Povera movement, giving context to the work they produced. Politically and socially, post-World War II was a complex environment for a nation to gain stability and will explain some of the ambitions and ideals of the Poveristi. Furthermore, the study will bring to the fore those artists associated with Arte Povera and the industrial and cultural centres in Italy that became the catalyst for them to gather and practice their art. Lastly, the research of this section will focus on the materiality, techniques and questions that inspired or provoked the Poveristi to make art, which in turn will introduce the artists themselves and the foundations of Arte Povera.

### 2.2 A Brief History

The *Risorgimento* or resurgence of the Italian people post-World War II signifies an economic regeneration, with industrial modernisation and economic growth (Lista, 2006). The powerful rallying call of *Risorgimento* resounded in the 1960s, as it did in the 1860s, when the Italian people emerged from international and civil war, destruction, oppression, and markedly, foreign interventions. The pinnacle of the modern Italian *Risorgimento* was in 1961 (Lista, 2006) the centenary of the 1861 unification of Italy. To celebrate Italy as a modern industrial power, the car manufacturer Fiat led the way in organising exhibitions of trade and industry in Turin (Lista, 2006; Cullinan, 2008). The economic progress and industrial modernisation in post-World War II Italy known as *miracolo economico Italiano*, which translated means Italian economic miracle, took place between the 1950s and early 60s had been aided by the huge investment by the USA (Cullinan, 2008). To encourage this growth, industries based in the north of Italy, such as Fiat, Olivetti, and Zanussi, attracted cheap labour from the south. Mostly, Italians desired prosperity and security synonymous with being part of a wealthy western

consumer society. The US government wanted Italy as an ally encouraging capitalism to take root in Europe and after the turmoil and uncertainty of war, the Italians, in most cases, embraced the US example (Lista, 2006; Cullinan, 2008; Gamble, 2018). My family were part of the southern Italian diaspora moving in 1972 from a peasant, agrarian life, to work in the north, for the Fiat company. The promises of the American-Italian capitalist dream were real: work hard and a *peasant* can change their destiny.

In addition to the industrial regeneration encapsulated in the term *economic miracle*, the political, social, and cultural infrastructure needed repair, and for some this was the time to break from old institutions and build anew. Those living in post-World War II Italy, still had to depose of a fascist regime in a civil war, compounding the complexity and pain entrenched in rebuilding a nation and its culture. As Re argues (2004, p. 141), “what united the members of the neo-avant-garde, beside the call for a radical type of innovation, was the need to unmask the falsifications of language.” Additionally, beyond Italian boundaries, civil unrest could be felt in Europe and the USA as freedom and equality were being fought for globally. The effect of the US 1960s Civil Rights movement and the war in Vietnam had far-reaching repercussions and are discussed in greater detail later in the dissertation. Such vast human unrest and trauma increased the necessity to ask essential and existential questions. Questions as fundamental as: What does it mean to be human? What relationship does a human have to another human and to the earth? What is our place in the Universe? How can art have a meaning when such human atrocities have been perpetrated? Can inherited language and traditional art express notions of rebirth, reparation, and peace? Finally, must there be another revolution, one of language and culture that might express utopian ideals? Such post-war existential demands, and a distrust of US capitalism invading Italy, were issues felt by left-wing theorists, and were the catalyst for several Italian artists to gather and exhibit together.

### 2.3 The Poverist Artists

Curator and art historian Christov-Bakargiev (1999, p. 17) declares: Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Marissa Merz, Pino Pascali, Giulio Paolini, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini, Gilberto Zorio, to be the Poverist artists, and associated with the movement were Italian artists such as Piero Gilardi, Eliseo Mattiacci, Mario Ceroli, Aldo Mondini, Giani Piacentino and Paolo Icaro. Internationally, there were many other artists who had practices closely related to the poor materiality and conceptuality of *Arte Povera*; artists such as: Richard Long, Sol LeWitt, Lawrence Weiner, Josef Beuys, Richard Serra, Walter De Maria, Ger Van Elk, Jan Dibbets. However, to state one artist is and one artist is not *Arte Povera*, needs further research and exploration (Lista, 2006).

### 2.4 The Name: *Arte Povera*

Many critics and curators tried to define the work that would soon be termed *Arte Povera*. Art in the early 1960s with a focus on process and subjective experience would be named by many. Curator Harald Szeemann (1969/2018, p. 29) states in the text of his exhibition *Live in Your Head. When Attitudes become Form* (1969): “Names suggested so far – “AntiForm,” “MicroEmotive Art,” “Possible Art,” “Impossible Art,” “Concept Art,” “*Arte Povera*,” “Earth Art,” – each describe only one aspect of the style”, but it *was* the provocative and truculent term *Arte Povera* coined by Celant for the exhibition that he curated *Arte Povera - Im Spazio* (1967), that endured. He followed this with his culturally incendiary text *Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War* (1967) which was published in *Flash Art* magazine (Celant, 1967/2020). This article and other texts on the subject by Celant and art critics such as Carla Lonzi, aided the public in comprehending the manifold themes and techniques behind *Arte Povera* (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, p. 28). This effort to understand *Arte Povera* as a movement also

played a part in giving voice to European art, especially from Italy, when much of the artworld at this time, was being dominated by work from the USA. However, even though Arte Povera was being described as a movement with common methods and materiality, artists and critics alike, encouraged freedom and autonomy of the artist, and no manifesto was drawn up (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999; Celant, 1967/2020). Furthermore, to have had a manifesto would have contradicted the eclectic and liberal ideals of the artists, curators and critics involved.

## 2.5 Locations and Exhibitions

### 2.5.1 Turin

The Poveristi lived, worked and exhibited from three main centres: Turin, Rome and Genoa. Bologna, Milan and Amalfi were also home to Povera artists and exhibitions. Each location has a part to play in the gathering of the artists and in the issues that inspired them to make their work. Turin was the industrial centre of Italy, as stated above, and with good international communications and a thirst for cutting-edge culture, galleries began to exhibit contemporary art. Galleries in Turin such as Galleria Notizie, Galleria Sperone and Galleria Il Punti were instrumental in the exhibition and promotion of the avant-garde work of the Poveristi (Lista, 2006). The work being produced in the early to mid-1960s, by Poveristi in Turin, such as Paolini, Marissa Merz, Mario Merz and Boetti had a conceptual or analytic focus, sometimes with themes of anti-industrialisation, while using industrial materials. Alighiero Boetti exhibited a pile of asbestos square tubes in *Arte Povera - Im Spazio* (1967) (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, p. 51) in a manner that suggested infinite playful and creative uses of the material outside of the practical uses of industrial construction. Marissa Merz would make art that highlighted undervalued domestic industries, activities, and roles such as knitting, cooking, and motherhood. Often working from her home, Merz would use such domestic mundane materials as foil (Kittler, 2018, pp. 229-234), clay bowls, and salt in a deeply poetic and



metaphorical way. Paolo Paolini would take the ingredients of painting as his materials, such as a brush, a frame, canvas and show the observer these tools as the tools they were, Paolini invites the observer to conceptualise what they would do, to dream up their own visions, in the place of the artist (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, p. 133). Paolini would use such materials in a way that reduces them to a model of a concept rather than something practical. Inadvertently, the rhetoric of industry in Turin regarding the *economic miracle*, and the processes of commodification, stimulated the artists to empower the observer and encourage subjective realisation within a creative realm, for everyone.

### 2.5.2 Rome

In the 1960s, Rome was an exciting hub of multimedia culture as well as being the *eternal city* synonymous with ancient classical Italian history. Home to RAI TV, Cinecitta Film Studios, and such internationally renowned filmmakers: Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni and Pier Paolo Pasolini, popular culture flourished while attracting great international talent. The vibrant multimedia culture, (on and off screen), blending with the ancient drama of the city, posed the Poveristi of Rome, many questions. The juxtaposition of real life and artifice was to be a main theme in the early works of Jannis Kounellis and Pino Pascali, who lived and worked in Rome at this time. For example, *1m<sup>3</sup> di Terra* (1m<sup>3</sup> of earth) *2m<sup>3</sup> di Terra* (2m<sup>3</sup> of earth) (1967) shown in the exhibition *Fuoco, Immagine, Aqua, Terra* (*Fire, Image, water, earth*) (1967), at L'Attico Galleria, Rome, Pascali built plywood cuboids, covering them in earth and mounting them on the wall, questioning real materials, artifice, institutional exhibition of work, and the hidden structures behind a work of art or prop, among other issues. These artists exhibited in group and solo shows at Roman galleries such as La Tartaruga, Galleria La Salita and Galleria L'Attico which were instrumental in the promotion of Kounellis and Pascali

(Lista, 2006). Furthermore, these galleries were to support many of the Poverist artists outside of Rome, in the years to come.

Early group exhibitions that took place in Bologna, Turin and Rome helped form the themes of Arte Povera. Such notable exhibitions *Lo spazio degli elementi. Fuoco, Immagine, Aqua, Terra* (1967) took place at L'Attico Galleria, Rome (Lista, 2006) and in July the exhibition *Lo Spazio dell'immagine* (1967) at Foligno, Palazzo Trinci work by Pascali, Pistoletto and Fabro was shown, with catalogue texts by Germano Celant and Maurizio Calvesi. Several artists and thinkers behind Arte Povera attempted to understand and name the movement. However, it would take the clear thinking and highly strategic mind of young Genoese critic and curator Celant to gather the larger group of artists from Turin, Rome, Genoa, Bologna and Milan and use the now-accepted term *Arte Povera* within the exhibition title.

### 2.5.3 Genoa

Celant studied at the University of Genoa and worked as an art critic in the city where he was exposed to influential thinkers such as Eugenio Battista, lecturer and editor of cultural magazine *Marcatré*, Umberto Eco the noted scholar and semiologist, and writer Edoardo Sanguinetti. Genoa had a vibrant intellectual community where current ideas and artworks were being questioned and evaluated (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999). Celant curated the first exhibition, under the term *Arte Povera*, *Arte Povera – Im spazio* (October, 1967) held at La Bertesca Galleria, Genoa. The show hosted many of the Poverist artists mentioned above. A month after the exhibition held at La Bertesca Galleria, Celant wrote the article: *Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War* (1967) which was published in *Flash Art*, November Issue, number 5. This article was very important in promoting an understanding of Arte Povera as an Italian avant-garde movement and explaining the cultural and political ramifications of working with *poor*

materials and using *poor* techniques. Further important group shows using the term Arte Povera, curated primarily by Celant, were held between 1968 and 1970: *Arte Povera* (February, 1968) at Galleria De Foscherari in Bologna, *Arte Povera + Azione Povera* (October, 1968) was held in Amalfi at the request of curator and collector Marcello Rumma, *Conceptual Art - Arte Povera - Land Art* (1970) was to take place in Turin at the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna. However, when Eve Madelung brought the Poveristi together in Munich, Germany in the exhibition: *Arte Povera 13 Italienische Kunstverein* (1971), Celant asked the curator to take the name 'Arte Povera' out of the exhibition title. When Madelung would not rename the show, Celant wrote his infamous text "*Untitled*" describing the failed experiment that was Arte Povera. Incidentally, this text was still included in the catalogue of the same exhibition (Lista, 2006, pp. 35-36).

Though this cohesive movement of artists, working under the banner of Arte Povera, was relatively short-lived, the artists involved have gone on to work long and illustrious individual careers. Many of the Poverist artists continued to use *poor* materials, themes and techniques in group shows and within solo projects, nationally and internationally. The Poveristi have participated in seminal exhibitions such as *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* (1969), curated by Harald Szeemann, *Op losse schroeven: situaties en cryptostructuren* (1969), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, curated by Wim Beeren, and various Venice Biennales and Documenta survey shows. The Poveristi adapted to and commented on, the ever-changing cultures they lived through and for those artists who are still alive and still working, continue to make an impact on the artworld. The revolutionary methods of art making, exhibition, and documentation, practised by the Poveristi, curators, and critics in the 1960s, involved in Arte Povera, is an important subject for this research, to understand and confer upon the present culture.

#### 2.5.4 Poverist Community and Curatorial Decisions

Art institution conventions were being broken by the avant-garde Poveristi and related artists. Curatorial decisions in the exhibition of Arte Povera are a case in point. Curator Harold Szeemann explains (1969/2018, p. 29): “Evident at the same time is the desire to break down the “triangle in which art operates” - the studio, gallery and museum”. When questioned by Catherine Millet upon the diverse genres in *Documenta 7* (1982), Szeemann deliberates on the curious ways the Poveristi, land artists and conceptual artists exhibited as a group (1984/2018, p. 283). Szeemann recollects that in the *Documenta 6* (1977) exhibition, artists such as non-Poveristi Georg Baselitz and Marcus Lüpertz withdrew paintings because they wanted their work to be seen in its own space with no incongruent proximal information. However, the Poveristi were content and promoted this kind of interaction and osmosis within their exhibition. As Christov-Bakargiev explains:

A sense of community and shared concerns, as well as the importance of a diffused and de-centred subjectivity, are reflected in the variety and heterogeneity of Arte Povera, as well as in the distinctive nature of each individual artist's practice. (1999, p. 74)

Additionally, this sense of community within curatorial decision making of the Poveristi can be seen, in the exhibition *Arte Povera + Azione Povera*, in Amalfi. The artists were invited by curator and collector Marcello Rumma to have freedom to work, exhibit and commune with the local environment and people (Lista, 2006, p. 26). Lista explores the Poveristi methods of exhibition:

Given free rein to manage the entire event according to their Poverist ideas, the artists installed their works in a community spirit, which allowed them to set up the conditions of an alternative culture, thus subtracting art from the market circuit. (2006, p. 26)

The communal phenomenological and humanist perspective of Arte Povera methods of exhibition break conventions of the traditional artworld, turning galleries inside out, upside

down while giving a participatory role to the audience, through methods of exhibition and theatrical performances. Art performances by Lo Zoo (the performance group established by Michelangelo Pistoletto) and games took place to include the local community outside gallery walls, introducing the ideas of fun and inclusion to an often austere and exclusive industry. An egalitarian perspective was in progress: artists were equal to the curator and critic, each observer was equal to the artist and a participatory and creative utopia was the ideal, while rejecting the power of the market and the product.



Figure 1. *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* (1969). (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, p. 64). Installation view of the exhibition, Kunsthalle, Bern. Photo: Claudio Abate, 1969.

The curatorial decisions made by the Poveristi can be seen to be as creative and apposite to the ideas of Arte Povera, as the works themselves. In this photograph taken by Claudio Abate in

figure 1, Poveristi artists assemble their own works for the *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) show, while seemingly in discussion about the installation. The exhibition space resembles a building-site and the studio-like energy seems palpable. The wall and the floor are being used as walls and floors that interact with the materials of the artwork. The artworks are allowed to interact with neighbouring contributions and the energies of the artists potentially blend with the audience members as well as each other. When the dust clears, work by individual artists will sit alongside other as though a syntax of a communal language is being displayed for an audience. The materials mean something to everyone and as much of the work will lay on the floor or protrude from walls industrially or organically a horizontality and informality can be perceived. This is contrary to conventional gallery exhibitions where the work shown is hung vertically or placed on a plinth to be circumvented reverently. This informality and uncanny familiarity with the materials of the Poveristi fostered subjective interpretations from an audience. Moreover, Arte Povera would endeavour to bring life and art together, elaborating on the various ongoing processes of the art objects and materials used, rather than a finished product ready for the conventional journey of an art piece (Szeemann, 1969/2018, pp. 29-31). The process of life and art are in proximity, and communication amongst a community is being nurtured, even when part of prodigious exhibitions such as *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) or later still in *Documenta 7* (1982).

## 2.6 Themes and Examples of Arte Povera

### 2.6.1 Mundane Materials

The most explicit theme relating to Arte Povera is the use of mundane materials. *Poor* materials, as they were known, will be an important topic of this dissertation and will be explored in greater depth in the Thematic Analysis and the Phenomenological Lens chapters. The fundamental ingredients of life were to be investigated. Poor materials such as earth, trees,

hessian, coffee, aluminium, iron, lead, steel, fresh water, seawater, snow, frost, ice, wood, clay, salt, fire, are just some of the materials explored by the Arte Povera movement. Furthermore, implicit connections within Arte Povera can be comprehended by the avant-garde techniques that confronted established practices within the artworld. Techniques that can be perceived as simple, were in effect incredibly sophisticated. The interventions the Poveristi made upon an object might be limited or simple, but the techniques are hugely intellectual and complex and were intended to confront and challenge an audience. The Poveristi often used quotidian materials in a way that asked the observer to find new meanings and points of view from the familiar. For example, Poverist artist Guiseppe Penone (2012, p. 70) discusses the concept of time regarding various mundane subjects such as insects, flora and fauna and elements in nature: “If one of the functions of art is the continuous reinterpretation of reality, changing the concept of time puts us in a position to revise and recreate the conventions of reality and allows us to imagine new forms with new values.” This revision of conventions regarding how we view and value the world can be seen in the life’s work of Penone and his exploration of trees as they live and breathe, but also in the industrial use of wood. In the artwork *Alpi maritime (Maritime alps)* (1968) Penone took a cast of his hand in the position of gripping a tree. He then hammered this cast into a young living tree, in a forest close to his hometown of Garessio, near Turin. As the tree grew, it adapted its shape to accommodate the cast of Penone’s hand. Deliberating upon his relationship with a tree, Penone states: “Another ‘force,’ my own, has joined to its ‘force’” (Penone as cited in Ammann, et al., 2000, p. 232). A new way of experiencing the materials has been impressed upon the world, the tree itself and the observer. The observer or artist must visit the forest where the work is situated to see the ever-changing piece of art, as the tree grows and cultures change, the meaning of the work will also change. The use of this mundane natural material has created an eternally transforming work of art, with infinite connotations for the observer. *Alpi maritime* by Penone is an example of one

mundane material by one of the Poveristi. The materials can be expanded upon dramatically when we think of them as fundamental ingredients to be researched within the eclectic techniques and varied questions that interested the Poveristi. Below I would like to introduce *some* major topics and techniques the Poveristi were interested in.

### 2.6.2 Primary Forces and the Physical Universe

Primary forces, energy, chemical reactions, and laws of the physical universe interested some of the Poverist artists, such as Giovanni Anselmo, Pier Paolo Calzadori, Luciano Fabro and Gilberto Zorio. In *Torsione (Torsion)* (1968), Anselmo attached tough fustian cloth to the wall and twists it from the other end with an iron bar. The material is turned around until it became so tight that the fustian bent under the pressure. Anselmo then rested the bar on the wall while the torsion of the cloth caused one side of the bar to press into the wall. The artist argued that the energy he transmitted into the work created a real force, using the laws of torque, that will remain after the artist is gone (Ammann, et al., 2000). Calzadori had an interest in the absolute nature of ice or frost and the sublime white that occurred when he created it within the processes of his artworks, using very simple materials such as a refrigerator motor, wires and lead sheets. This fascination with the white carried by ice on sheets of lead can be seen in *Il mio venticinquesimo anno d'età (My Twenty-fifth Year)* (1969) and *Senza Titolo (Omaggio a Fontana) (Untitled / Homage to Fontana)* (1989). Using lead as the canvas to transmit the ice-white colour is both practical and relates to the chemical laws of nature. In addition, historically, lead has been used to make white pigment in paint and cosmetics. Calzadori states his interest in the human control and creation of an untranslatable colour, using mundane materials and techniques to communicate sublime ideas through a real chemical reaction rather than by painting a translation of an impression of a colour (Ammann, et al., 2000).



### 2.6.3 Primary Human Energy and Presence

Primary human energy was to be explored by Poverist Artists such as Marissa Merz, Mario Merz, Emilio Prini, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Giulio Paolini, Kounellis, Penone. They did this by fostering subjective experience, illuminating the internal faculties of memory, human emotions, sensitivity, and mindful presence. The investigations advocated by Arte Povera regarding primary human energy were in part existential in nature and pertinent to learning more about the human condition; but they were also made in response to the 1960s western artworld, especially with regard to Pop art (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999).

1960s Pop art was a western art movement that was contemporary to Arte Povera. Pop artists such as Andy Warhol, Richard Hamilton, Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg illuminated popular culture, using the signs and iconography of capitalist society. Meaning was to be found in what was once thought to be low culture or in the imagery and ideas behind advertising and entertainment such as those found in comics, magazines, on television and in film. This in itself was a revolutionary idea and like the Poveristi, they took subjects that were unseen by the artworld and yet common to the public. However, critic Germano Celant and some of the Poveristi were sceptical of Pop art and felt that the work promoted capitalism and art as a consumer product. Moreover, meaning could be found in every sign and was being elevated to the fine artworld, making a cultural experience the interpretation of capitalist symbols. Arte Povera both criticised Pop art and US culture overtly in texts by Celant in magazines such as *Flash Art*, *Bit* and *Marcatré* but also in work by Emilio Prini and Mario Merz which directly criticised the US capitalist society. However, more subtle resistance to the dominance of signs in the artworld was the promotion of primary human energy within the artwork. In the work *Perimetro d'aria (Perimeter of air)* (1967), Emilio Prini placed neon lights in the corners of a room that turned on and off in sequence, encouraging the

audience to be mindful of themselves, in themselves and where they were in the space (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999). This work was to bring the attention of the audience to their place in space while inadvertently taking the artist and all consumer signs away from the artworld, promoting human existential experience. Another Poverist example of art exploring primary human energy is in *Untitled* (1969) by Kounellis where he hung 10 metal weighing scales from a single metal bracket which was attached to a wall. He placed a small mound of coffee on each scale which emitted the evocative smell of coffee but also the mound of a product on a scale evoked the notion of travel by suggesting the archetypal measuring of those goods, namely coffee or spices. The quotidian materials in this work were used simply but gave the audience a profound subjective empirical experience relating to the individual facing the work. As Kounellis explains (Kounellis et al., 2002, p. 60): “Clay is matter, iron is matter, paper is matter. Everything is matter. The concept of matter needs to be extended; matter to be molded [*sic*], matter which acquires meaning, matter that becomes poignant.” The phenomenological and sensory inferences to these evocative materials, as they appear to an audience, encourage the rethinking of preconceived notions of the familiar, in order to germinate new ideas and meaning.

#### 2.6.4 Living Matter

Arte Povera challenged most facets of the art institution and another example of breaking with convention was by bringing the energy of live subjects into a gallery space. The use of live animals, human performance and vegetation permeated some of the work by Poverist artists such as Marissa Merz, Mario Merz, Emilio Prini, Jannis Kounellis, Giovanni Anselmo, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Giuseppe Penone, Luciano Zorio and Pier Paolo Calzolari. In *Untitled* (1969) Kounellis famously exhibited 12 horses in the newly opened L'Attico Galleria in Rome. Bringing a chaotic element into the hallowed space of a gallery questioned the possibilities of

exhibition in what was traditionally a pristine white space that accommodated the artists' paintings and sculptures. Works of art that were traditionally framed and hung on a wall or shown on plinths. Moreover, Kounellis expressed his interest in the juxtaposition of sensitivity and structure; live energy and the confines of geometry, edifice, and systems (Kounellis et al., 2002). On 28<sup>th</sup> February 1970, Marissa Merz took a small plane to Urbe Airport on the opening day of her exhibition at L'Attico Galleria, Rome. Merz made a live commentary of her journey to Sargentini, the gallery owner. The conversation was transcribed and used within the installation of her exhibition. This experiment conveyed the personal experience of the wonderful yet mundane activity of flying on a plane. Many connotations can be read into Merz's action piece, such as the modern convenience of travel and intercommunication, temporality and the subjective observing of one's situation, the poetic expression of the moment we live in, spoken live and disseminated to an audience (Butler, 2017b, pp. 13-14). Ultimately, by using herself as the living subject and blurring her private and public persona (as she did in many of her other works), Merz researches the great Povera question that confronts the divide between art and life.

## 2.7 Arte Povera Research into Life, Art and Freedom

In 1971 Celant described Arte Povera as a failed experiment (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999). The experiment that asked the question: Can Arte Povera dissolve the boundaries between life and art? Arguably, this question touches on wider-ranging issues of resistance. A fight to reclaim much of the power institutions have over most aspects of human life. Empowerment for the individual, freeing them from the oppression of political systems and bureaucracy, designed by those of cultural and political privilege. Arte Povera supported eclectic, ever-changing creativity that steered away from the artist finding a niche, particular style (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999) or what would today be described as finding a personal brand, as an example of free

expression. This free expression, in turn, would be a political act of freedom that resists the institution of art and philosophically speaking, institutions and privilege, in general. A question to consider within this study will be to ask: Did the Poverist experiment really fail, as Celant claimed in 1971?

### 3 Dissertation Structure

What follows is an overview of the dissertation. In the Background Context section, there will be a brief description of post-World War II Italy which was the most fundamental historical influence in the birth of Arte Povera. The artists associated with Arte Povera will be introduced: who they were, where in Italy they came from, and what parallel themes could be aligned within the art movement of Arte Povera.

Following on from this will be a theoretical analysis of Arte Povera, looking at key literature on the subject to reveal some of the fundamental topics behind the meaning of Arte Povera. Literature that was pertinent at the time the Poveristi were practising their art and recent commentary will be researched with regard, theoretical and political context. This will reveal the wider culture Arte Povera germinated from. The third topic the explored literature will reveal is materiality. Moreover, an examination of the artists' own words, secondary source analysis and commentary on the materiality used by the Poveristi, will be undertaken.

A significant idea that will be discussed in the thematic analysis concerning Poveristi practice will be the defamiliarisation of mundane materials. The familiar becomes unfamiliar. Within the Phenomenological Lens section, questions of materiality are asked and researched, theoretically, using primary and secondary sources. The research will propose that some of the Poveristi were interested in theories of phenomenology that were circulating in the 1960s.

Poverist investigations were often seen as *bracketing off* the world of preconceived ideas and propositions, which is akin to phenomenological analysis and theory. (These phenomenological methods will be discussed and demonstrated later in this chapter.) It seems pertinent to research phenomenology, and then to use phenomenological sensory analysis back upon Poverist artworks. Parallel to the background and cultural context learnt so far, phenomenological sensory analysis of selected artworks relevant to Arte Povera will gain a textural and liberated insight, aiding the research aim. The aim of revaluating and resituating Arte Povera for a contemporary artworld. What might be revealed after bringing together the historical, theoretical, and political context, and bracketed off phenomenological enquiries? Learning lessons from an art movement that resisted, relatively successfully, consumerism and the processes of commodification.

The Commodification section briefly explains what commodification is and how it relates to the artworld. The Young British Artists (YBA) of the 1980s and 1990s will be taken as a case study of artists who both embraced and were absorbed by the machinations of commodification. Wider notions of commodification will be explored moving beyond Charles Saatchi marketing and selling YBA art for high returns, into the ways a government can exploit pop culture to strengthen national identity, tourist economies and promote a cutting-edge, free-thinking Britain.

## 4 Thematic Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

The research will identify and explore themes pertinent to the different ideas and values in Arte Povera. The key literature that tackles these subjects will be the basis for the discussion on Arte Povera. The most explicit ideas within the 1960s Arte Povera movement, were the use of ‘impoverished’ materials, avant-garde practices, the use of pre-industrial methods of creating work over fabrication or manufacture of commodities and the merging of art and life (Lista, 2006). In addition, themes such as the theory and politics of and surrounding Arte Povera in the mid-1960s will be important issues to study. This thematic analysis discreetly clarifies the pertinent factors of Arte Povera to strengthen the aims of the research, which is to re-evaluate this movement and place it in a contemporary context.

The research has identified scholars and literature that explore the key themes important to understanding Arte Povera as a movement. Monographs written by art historians Giovanni Lista and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev on Arte Povera, commence explaining the background context of the Poveristi while introducing the theoretical and political environment that ignited a group of artists to show together. The theoretical environment of post-World War II is explored in the study. The essay *Open Work* (1962) by influential semiologist Umberto Eco is an important work to examine when trying to understand how avant-garde artists in the 1960s would think about creating artworks. The themes surrounding post-war Italian intelligentsia and avant-gardists are further discussed by Lucia Re. Re and cultural theorist Charles Jencks illuminate some of the problems in being an avant-garde movement and they in turn point the research to the seminal work by Peter Bürger and his study of the avant-garde in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974/1984). The research will look at explicit themes of Arte Povera such as the

materiality used by the Poveristi, and the political environment of 1960s Italy. However, the study explores primary accounts of materiality in notebooks, catalogues and texts by Poveristi artist Pino Pascali and curator and critic Germano Celant, disclosing more implicit and personal notions of materiality. The essential literature reviewed in this study, describing the political context of Arte Povera, is by Jacopo Galimberti, Nicholas Cullinan and Raffaele Bedarida. These scholars investigate the national and international political environment of the 1960s and relate it to Arte Povera. Additionally, the theme of commodification is examined with regard to art. The idea of *authentic* artwork and its relationship with the processes of commodification are confronted in the books *Refiguring the Spiritual* (2012) by cultural theorist Mark C. Taylor and *Post-Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Just-In-Time Capitalism* (2012) by Jeffrey T. Nealon. Finally, the research recognises key works investigating the relevance of a digital economy and the strong presence of technology today, such as *The Black Box Society The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information* (2016) by Frank Pascale and *The Digital Economy* (2020) by Tim Jordan. Today's digital economy is important to acknowledge when attempting to understand Arte Povera in the context of present consumer society, however, this study cannot deviate into such a vast subject, here.

The literature to be analysed will build a picture of a time and place in history where the Arte Povera movement was born. Materiality and human artistic autonomy are key to understanding Arte Povera, but all theories and practices occur within the political, theoretical, cultural and economic environment of the day and gaining insight, through this literature, will help recognise parallel concerns between the 1960s and the 2020s.

The Commodification section of the theoretical analysis differs slightly from the earlier sections as it will bridge the gap between the ages. Selling one's art while staying true to self-

expression has always been a dichotomy for the artist to deliberate upon. The patron, investor, collector, and curator wield a certain power that the artist has more recently gained access to. New systems of financialisation, communications and digital technologies have allowed some artists to take the commodification and corporatisation of their art into their own hands (Taylor, 2012). The literature at hand explores the consequences of such artistic *expression* and brings forward questions regarding the re-evaluation of Arte Povera, which was an art form that questioned all consumerism.

## 4.2 Theoretical Context

Shifting an artist's focus away from a technological emphasis leads the artist to simple materials, simple techniques and ideas rather than pristine consumable art objects. In one of the conversations between Poverist artist, Giulio Paolini and critic, Carla Lonzi, the conscious impoverishment of materials and in many respects the art process itself, were discussed (Lonzi, 1969/2017, p. 19). According to an interpretation by Giovanni Lista, in April 1967 "Paolini defined the choice of "poverty" in art as the denial "of the means technology offers us today"." Furthermore, Lista suggests that Paolini could have been the first to have read and related Grotowski's recently translated manifesto: *Towards a Poor Theatre* to the art practice of the Italian avant-garde (Grotowski, 1968/1969, Lista, 2006, p. 18). Paolini explains that a *humble* approach to art practice that denies technological processes is more pertinent as art. This is a significant account in piecing together the theories behind Arte Povera and we are privy to it thanks to the verbatim account and transcriptions in *Autoritratto* (1969/2017; 1969/2021).

The method of recording conversations of the most influential avant-garde artists of the 1960s allowed the communication and dissemination of current cultural ideas. As well as introducing the reader, to the thoughts of the artists, Lonzi was instrumental in gathering artists from Turin



and Rome, Bologna and Genoa and influential artists from outside Italy together. Christov-Bakargiev (1999) describes this process as aiding in a “cross pollination of ideas”. In the postscript by Laura Iamurri (2017, p. 289), *Autoritrato* was termed a ‘montaggio di conversazioni’ (montage of conversations). A process that created a non-interpretive document while encouraging artists of the Arte Povera movement and other prominent artists of the avant-garde in Italy, the US and Europe, to freely explore theories of interest. Such themes as impoverished materials, the use of mystification and myth over technological reality and purpose, the concerns with industrialisation and the consumerist invasion from the USA are discussed within the text (Lonzi, 1969/2017; 1969/2021).

Lucia Re gives an analysis of the theoretical concerns of the neo-avantgarde in 1960s Italy. Dates, times and accounts of the varied and far-reaching cultural events causing theoretical shifts are discussed. Re (2004, pp. 137-138) explains that “[a]vant-garde intellectuals and artists [...] in Italy felt the need to question and critique the models, images and values imposed by traditional academic and literary culture, on the one hand, and by the logic of the new consumer capitalism, on the other hand”. A largely Marxist group of European intellectuals and art practitioners had a war to rebuild from. Moreover, the institutions of the 1950s and 1960s had absorbed ideologies from the far right and were now being infiltrated by a push towards capitalism and consumerism. The neo-avant-garde needed to react in a way that would reflect their revolutionary standpoint in a politically turbulent culture. Delusions of being a romantic art practitioner had crumbled and could no longer be justified as pure or detached from politics and the processes of commodification (2004, p. 139). In response to the post-war culture of the 1950s and 1960s, the neo-avant-garde began to infiltrate the institutions with a will to question, sabotage and reform from within (2004, p. 142).

There are many issues to consider regarding an avant-garde movement post-World War II. Sociologist Peter Bürger's investigation into avant-garde theory, questions a proposed breaking from past systems of communication and institutions of art, which have been established by and for a bourgeois society (Bürger, 1974/1984). Bürger explains that the bourgeoisie have designated an autonomous space for artists to practise outside the norms of everyday life. This autonomy gives art the appearance of a certain freedom from everyday reality and from its oblique standpoint to society, can be both useful as cultural pioneer, and critic. However, Bürger continues to explain Herbert Marcuse's view of a significant avant-garde predicament. If the bourgeoisie have predesignated the avant-garde with these tasks, such avant-gardist criticism is hollow and in keeping with the wants of the status quo (Bürger, 1974/1984). Conversely, avant-garde artists such as the Poveristi wanted to dissolve the boundaries between art and life, as have other avant-garde movements. Bürger continues to argue that if this boundary is dissolved, art would lose its autonomy becoming one with life, and losing its unique ability to question society. Art would be absorbed into the current institutions or politics of the day which would counter any attempts of radical change by an avant-garde movement (1974/1984, pp. 49-51). Furthermore, when art loses its autonomy from life, as with a political regime such as the one in fascist Italy under Benito Mussolini, art is used as propaganda or aesthetic currency (1974/1984, p. 25).

In addition to the problems above, Bürger investigates Adorno's ideas on the *new* regarding commodification (1974/1984, p. 61). This issue is also identified by cultural thinker Charles Jencks when he argues that avant-garde experimentation and conflict against the system, equates to consumerist strategy; "indeed these systems thrive on dissent" (Jencks, 1987, p. 220). These ruptures break new ground for business to flourish and feed the voracious appetite of commodification. Such questions pose serious problems for those taking on avant-garde

ideals in art. However, Lucia Re explains that neo-avant-garde practices were still possible in the post-war years in Italy because of the recent fascist history and the new capitalist invasion. These major political manifestations could mask over many of these theoretical issues of the *new* (Re, 2004). Re acknowledges the idea that there are many contradictions inherent in a true avant-garde movement, argued by Bürger. However, Re goes on to explain that the problems of post-war Italy gave a unique opening for a neo-avant-garde movement to establish itself, while also missing the oncoming advancement of technological communications and a digital economy that would absorb any form of cultural dissent or attempts to break with past institutions. In the minds of the Italian 1960s neo-avant-garde, the *new* was necessary, valid, and still relevant in this culture (2004, p. 139).

Politics and theory are joined in Umberto Eco's ideas on form. Re shows the importance of *Open Work* (1962) by Umberto Eco, a leading theorist of semiotics and member of *Gruppo 63* who pushed the avant-garde experiment forward. In *Open Work*, Eco proposes that language has been created by the powers for the powers that be and to fracture this language is in itself, a political statement (Eco, 1962/1989). Eco understands that experimenting with language, breaking it up and allowing infinite readings could be conceived as intellectualism which goes against the more democratic theories of interpretation behind an *open work*. However, Re explains Eco's perspective. In dismantling traditional cultural languages, the reader must think about the text or work, to gain a subjective understanding, equalizing the possibility of gaining meaning. If the energy to commune with the work is present, each participant can assimilate meaning and each meaning is valid. This way of interpreting a work of art opposes hierarchical and pedagogic systems that are used traditionally to explain academic art and literature. How the theory of the *Open Work* might have affected Arte Povera exhibitions, and its audience, is

most pertinent to this research. Moreover, how audiences of the 2020s react to *open works* of art, media and literature, would give an insight into the relevance of Arte Povera, today.

### 4.3 Materiality

The Poveristi chose an individually autonomous approach to their practice and used impoverished materials, to confront the priorities of the artworld that preferred signature artworks that were easy to understand, place and sell. From the perspective of an artist, process and materiality are readable factors in contemporary works of art. By using specific materials, Arte Povera artists made a statement against the institutions of the artworld with artworks that were often ephemeral, fragile, and not easily exhibited, documented or sold in customary ways (Celant, 1967/2020; 1969).

Several definitions of materiality regarding Arte Povera have been proposed by numerous scholars and critics with varying depths of sensitivity to the work and artists. The most common theme is the use of natural, cheap, found, throw-away poor materials, that can be transformed into art, into the communication of ideas with no need for technology, expensive fabrication or exhibition. For the most part, this is true, however, at a deeper level, the more complex it seems to be. This section will focus on primary sources by two key figures from the movement, Poveristi Pino Pascali and curator and critic Germano Celant, to gain a more intimate notion of materiality regarding Arte Povera. From interviews and journals with Pino Pascali, the research would suggest that the processes and materials used by the Poveristi artist are a human's expression freed from established or institutional restrictions that might be placed on an artist (Holman, et al., 2011). From the catalogue accompanying Pascali's retrospective show at Camden Arts (2011) and in the seminal book by the young critic Germano Celant, *Art Povera*

(1969), we see that most important to the Poveristi is artistic autonomy and the freedom to use any material.

Champion of Arte Povera Celant commences his six-page section with the words “Animals, vegetables, minerals,” and proceeds to list the ‘impoverished’ materials used by the Arte Povera artists: ‘...the simplest material and natural elements (copper, zinc, earth, water, rivers, land, snow, fire, grass, air, stone, electricity, uranium, sky, weight, gravity, height, growth, etc.) for a description or representation of nature” (Celant, 1969, p. 225). The artist described by Celant uses primary materials or substances found in nature and chemical elements that make up the material or transform by conditions in nature. Chemical elements and forces of nature themselves, are materials for a Poveristi. The “[a]nimals, vegetables and minerals take part in the world of art” (1969, p. 225). Animals including humans performed their roles in Arte Povera, vegetation and actual vegetables, and of course, minerals are the materials. This common phrase: “Animals, vegetables, minerals” perfectly describes the materiality of Arte Povera. The materials above can be used, and everyone can use them if done in a direct experiential way.

Amongst living things he discovers also himself, his body, his memory, his gestures – [...] the sense of life and nature, a sense that implies, according to Dewey, numerous subjects: the sensory, sensational, sensitive and sensuous.

He has chosen to live within direct experience, no longer the representative - the source of the pop artists - he aspires to live, not to see. He immerses himself in individuality because he feels the necessity of leaving intact the value of the existence of things, of plants or animals; he wants to take part in the oneness of every minute in order to

possess above all the <<autonomy>> both of his own identity and the individuality of things. He wants to feel his vitality in order not to feel that he is a solitary vital individual. (1969, p. 225)

This small section is crammed with ideas, as are the six pages hereon-after, but it clearly shows that the human involved is a part of the artwork. One might say that the human is a key material in Arte Povera. Moreover, the subjective point of view, the experience of a human responding to the objects and materials of the world, as they are; as they are conveyed, translated, and articulated into a communication between the things inside and outside the subject to another subject, are key aspects in the transformation of materials into a Poverist artwork. This inter-subjective and embodied subjective phenomenological standpoint will inform the lens I hope to analyse Arte Povera below.

*Back to the Artists themselves!*<sup>1</sup> As Pino Pascali is the subject of a catalogue text: “*Pino Pascali and primary materials in 1967*” (Holman, et al., 2011) we can derive great insights into the materiality of his work as an artist of the Arte Povera movement. “Pascali had no interest in being taken over by a material. He likened the universe to a huge Meccano set of available materials, the value of which lay in the combinations he chose to make” (2011, p. 6). Additionally, his friend and colleague Eliseo Mattiacci states: “If I had to say what I liked most about Pino, [...] his capacity to use his hands, those big tough dirty hands, to transform ideas [...] In other words, his capacity to articulate any material whatsoever, and always in relation to the inventive idea” (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, p. 264). This fragmented description of a friend describes Arte Povera and the materiality of the movement most eloquently. Any

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<sup>1</sup> A note and a nod to Husserl’s phenomenological famous cry: “back to the ‘things themselves’” (Husserl, 1913/2001, p. 168).

material was important to Pascali, and in an interview with Marisa Volpi (Holman, et al., 2011, p. 47) Pascali argues: “*everything can be used, transformed.*” From the research at hand, it would be pertinent to state that most, if not all the Poveristi thought in these terms. They were free to use any material, and transform it, articulate it in a space to communicate their ideas. We hear this apparent freedom expressed once more, in a note from Pascali concerning his piece *32mq di Mare Circa 32m of Sea Approximately* (1967) and expanded upon by Holman: “... [the synthetically aniline dyed water] which refers to ‘the colour of the sea treated as a plastic liquid element’, that is, as a material for the artist to model and transform.” (2011, p. 7)

Each Poverist artist found everyday materials and objects they wanted to work with. For example: Marissa Merz used kitchen foil, blankets, knitting needles, copper wires and clay; Mario Merz used sticks, newspapers, mud and neon lights; Kounellis used horses, cacti, hats, hessian cloth, over coats and piles of coal; Paulini used objects normally utilised for making art such as brushes, paint pots, frames; Pino Pascali used earth, farm tools, water (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, pp. 106-145). The world was a toolbox of materials and objects, and everything could be used in the practices of Arte Povera. Moreover, every quotidian material used by the Poveristi was relatable to the audience viewing the work, which, in theory, permitted artist and observer to communicate through this language of materiality.

The text for the Camden Arts Catalogue supports the idea that all materials are as important as the next to Pascali. Pascali sees himself as a human inventing his life, putting a stamp on the world by using the materials of the world, often “primary materials” earth, water, metal, wind, human movement, but sometimes he will use consumer products such as plastic scouring brushes as seen in his *Bristleworms* (1968) (2011, p. 19). Furthermore, such notions of freedom regarding materiality and practice grow more solid when conveyed upon other Poverist artists.

For example, when Lucio Fabro uses materials that are considered *rich art* such as marble, glass and silk, he questions the restrictions that can be posed upon Arte Povera by the very term *povera* or *poor art* and the common definitions of materiality inferred upon the Poveristi (Lista, 2006, p. 46). This study would suggest that the freedom of materiality and the political drive to work outside prescribed institutional norms outweigh any restricted use of materiality that merely adheres to a manifesto. As was mentioned above, there was no formal manifesto written and signed by the artists, describing the rules of Arte Povera. This freedom fought for in Arte Povera underlies the problems inherent in trying to define the Poveristi practices. The team who worked on the Pascali catalogue at Camden Arts, understood that it is the impoverishment and primacy of the human, communicating outside the system of the commercial needs of the traditional artworld, and making the work, transforming the materials, delving into a human experience and researching the freedom of articulating primary, secondary and consumer materials and giving them new life, that make a Poverist artwork. Earth and materials, consumerism and human needs of 2020s have many similarities to those experienced in the 1960s, but how does our attitude towards freedom and of expression differ in our current politico-cultural climates?

#### 4.4 Politics, Activism and Artistic Autonomy

In their essays on Arte Povera, critics and art historians Sergio Galimberti and Nicholas Cullinan confront political issues of the late 1960s, such as: US capitalist imperialism, civil unrest, student clashes with police, sit-ins and demonstrations against a bourgeois capitalist system. These political factors affected the formation and expression of the Arte Povera movement (Cullinan, 2008; Galimberti, 2013) and would be a key area of discussion and consternation for the avant-garde artists, their critics and the activists of this period in Italian history.



In the first half of the essay Galimberti (2013) describes the interplay between critic Germano Celant, activists and the Poveristi. This interplay demonstrates a circularity and complexity that confuses the boundaries of art and politics regarding Arte Povera. Initially, the Poveristi established aesthetic ideas that questioned the political and art institutions. The critic Celant made various incendiary comments in his article *Notes for a Guerrilla Warfare* (1967) and in a text he wrote for the far-left magazine *Bit*. Such comments as: “we are in favour of guerrilla warfare!” (Galimberti, 2013, p. 423) and “[w]orkers striking, students setting cars on fire and building barricades, and intellectuals cooperating with both” (2013, p. 419), demonstrated that Celant’s interpretation of Arte Povera encouraged direct political activism. Galimberti clearly demonstrates Celant’s wish to fight against the capitalist bourgeois status quo. This movement helped inspire and give voice to the student demonstrations of the mid 1960s in Europe. However, the more radical activists claimed that the artists expressed empty words and inaction regarding the political fight. The response by artists such as Paolini, Fabro, Pascali with the critical backing of Carla Lonzi, was to demand the right to be free from the bonds of political activism in their artistic practices (Cullinan, 2008, p. 19). Otherwise, their work would be incorporated into political propaganda, which would be another form of subjugation to a political power. Celant responds later, in a manner that was more in line with the ideas of Pistoletto, hoping for a deeper politics to be addressed by art and the Poveristi. A politics that tackled more subtle social, creative and spiritual issues, breaking bonds from the institutions of politics and art (Galimberti, 2013, pp. 428-432). A certain compromise is made by the left-wing organisation *Lotta Continua* and artists such as Zorio and Pistoletto who collaborated in exhibitions where both parties recognised the positive possibilities of cooperation and a dialogue began between activists, “bourgeois intelligentsia and left-wing artists” (2013, p. 438).

In the second half of the article Galimberti explores the art and political activism of Piero Gilardi. Gilardi was once a key figure as a Poveristi and organiser of exhibitions promoting the collaboration of international artists and left-wing activism through art. His political activism had similar tones to the initial statements by Celant, including the guerrilla warfare tactics where a populace works with those fighting. This style of warfare makes it very difficult for greater invading powers to be unequivocally victorious as seen in the Vietnam war of 1955-1975. The Capitalist invasion was repelled and with public opinion on the validity of such a war turning globally, the USA withdrew their forces (Cullinan 2008; Galimberti, 2013). This communing of artists, the people and activists was part of what Galimberti calls a ‘third world’ activism and art movement. An activism that was inspired and based on the structure of guerrilla resistance fighting a great power. A lesser power such as a group of artists and students fighting for the proletariat could possibly repel the US consumer capitalist invasion of Europe.

The support given to artists, and the networks that evolve through various key figures can shape how art is made and how it is received by a critical audience. These responses occur at the time the artists are practicing, and within the historicisation of a movement. Galimberti poses an important question in his conclusion: “What would have become of *arte povera* if Gilardi’s radicalism and Celant’s caution had found a dialectical synthesis in late 1968?” Gilardi’s radicalism had been a move away from art practice and a move towards full time activism and human relations, whereas Celant’s caution erred away from physical activism, and moved towards expressing his views in art magazines (Galimberti, 2013, p. 438). Furthermore, the question arises: Why is Lonzi once again complimentary to the names of importance here (Re, 2017, p.38)? Lonzi’s understanding of the artists’ voices was second to none and her explanations of the Poveristi need for autonomy and freedom of expression to a hostile crowd,

was undoubtedly courageous and in keeping with the soul of Arte Povera practice. The research will explore further ideas regarding supporters and patrons of an art movement in the section on commodification.

Within the title of his 2008 article: *From Vietnam to Fiat-nam: The Politics of Arte Povera*, Nicholas Cullinan uses an economy of language within the essay title, that alludes to two major political issues connecting Arte Povera to US imperialism (Cullinan, 2008). 2008 was the year US president George Bush announced the withdrawal of US troops from the main centres of Iraq by June 2009 and to have evacuated completely by 2011. Cullinan (2008, p. 30) argues that: “Perhaps it is only now, given the revival of interest in art from the era of the Vietnam war, and the uneasy (too easy?) parallels this provides to our own age, that Arte Povera’s legacy of politicizing aesthetics or aestheticizing politics can be recuperated.” Secondly, the term *Fiat-nam* is used to highlight political and ethical problems that US investment posed for post-war Italy.

In this article title ‘Vietnam’ denotes the political aggression perpetrated by the USA, in the fight against communism in Vietnam. Partnered with the term ‘Fiat-nam’, Cullinan explores the US economical *invasion* of Italy. In 1948-49, the USA invested \$555 million into the Italian economy, to help with economical and industrial growth, while nurturing a capitalist ally, in Europe, post-World War II<sup>2</sup> (Gamble, 2018, p. 157). This was a politically volatile time and

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<sup>2</sup> The figures here are taken from the essay: Gamble, A.K. (2018). ‘Buying Marino Marini: The American Market for Italian Art after World War II’. In: Hecker, S. Sullivan. M.R. Ed.s. *Postwar Italian Art History Today, Untying the Knot. New York, USA: Bloomsbury*. pp. 155-171. Gamble has a footnote 12 citing that the statistics are found in “*Italy, country study*,

the USA wanted to break open new markets and allied stability in Europe. The term ‘Fiat-nam’, accompanies this analogy as the symbol of an *economic miracle* supported by the USA, taking place in the north of Italy between the 1950s to the mid 1960s. Cullinan (2008, p. 13) argues that this created “an economic schism of mass migration from the poor south to the rich north. This diaspora” was and still is a real issue in Italian minds (especially southern Italian minds) as a moment in history where capitalism made a certain element of society rich while leaving the majority poor, over-worked and under paid in comparison. Cullinan chose a work of art by Poveristi Emilio Prini called *L’USA usa* (1969) “a play on words that translates “the USA uses.” The work consisted of a tape machine that continuously recorded the sound of its own mechanism until this incessant usage caused it to self-destruct, echoing the cannibalistic aspect of capitalism” (Cullinan, 2008, p. 13). My uncle was part of this diaspora in 1972 moving from southern Calabria to work on the Fiat assembly line in Turin. Later, more uncles and aunts left their homes for the for the north and to live the American dream: working hard to step away from their ancestral history of peasant life.

In addition to the US military aggression in Vietnam and investment in the Italian economy, Cullinan (2008) describes the cultural invasion from the US. Cullinan explains the effects upon the Italian artworld, when in 1964 Robert Rauschenberg won the Venice Biennale Prize. Furthermore, European artists were troubled by negative comments towards European art

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*Europeam recovery program*, Economic Cooperation Administration (Washington, DC: United States Government Print Office, 1949), 5. Also see *Country Data Book: All Participating Countries*, Economic Cooperation Administration. Washington, DC: United States, 1950. These numbers are in the original, listed 1948-9 currency rates” (Gamble, 2018, p.166).

expressed by US artist Donald Judd, in conversation with Bruce Glaser and Frank Stella (Judd, 1964, as cited in Battock, 1968, p. 154; Cullinan, 2008). Cullinan shows works by Pascali, Prini and Mario Merz that address the USA and its apparent cultural assault upon Europe, be that playfully (Pascali), allegorically (Prini) or with activist overtones (Merz, Celant). The confrontation with the USA strengthened the Poveristi resolve regarding the importance of creating relevant Italian avant-garde art. Moreover, Raffaele Bedarida (2018) explains how Celant made strategic plans for taking Arte Povera to the USA with the hope of gaining an international significance for the movement. Celant's counter offensive upon the USA will be explored further in the Commodification section of the thesis.

In summary, Cullinan and Galimberti describe the circularities and apparent stale mates of aestheticizing politics and politicising aesthetics. Celant and his incendiary texts accompanied by a relative caution caused a friction with Gilardi and his more Marxist radical ideals. The violent activism of left-wing students was far from how the free thinking Poveristi wanted to protest against the institutions. Both, Galimberti and Cullinan's essays show that most of the artists wanted autonomy and freedom to express whatever they wanted to, within their own research, holding to no strict political code. As is noted above, when the avant-garde artist loses autonomy from the establishment, and freedom of expression, the right to be an authentic critic of society is lost. Additionally, if the avant-gardist is subsumed by a political agenda, then the work becomes mere propaganda for another regime (Bürger, 1974/1984). Unfortunately, it seems an impossible situation for an artist to be avant-garde and free to work and live, while fighting the institutions, that initially created the space for such autonomy. It is Pistoletto who urged the artist to free themselves from the institutions of politics and art more sensitively, as he argued: "The superstructures exist... Be more artistic in your politics and more political in your art. But don't get me wrong again, I'm not talking about party politics, guerrilla warfare,

power or protest, I'm talking about politics in the deep sense" (Galimberti, 2013, p. 429). Pistoletto understood the many paradoxes inherent in trying to make work that is free, new and still political and socially minded, but for an artist of his calibre, such abstract thoughts were not beyond the boundaries of possibilities.

#### 4.5 Art and Commodity

The literature reviewed regarding the association of art and commodity, will help the research present the uncomfortable relationship between art and the art market. Furthermore, the relationship between avant-garde art (such as Poverist art) and commodity grows more complicated. Initially avant-garde art attempts to break from institutions and consumer societies but often when the art has grown in stature, it will be absorbed into the art market. Moreover, such art can be engaged in the deeper processes of commodification, such as tourism, financialisation and digital technologies. These issues are introduced here and will be a main focus of the Commodification chapter, later in the dissertation.

In the essay *Buying Marino Marini*, (2018), Antje Gamble describes the rise and fall of Italian modernist art in the US. Artwork from Italy in the 1940s and 50s was considered exotic in the USA, coming from a centre of a rarefied and comparatively ancient culture. Marini's sculptures were noted as fashionable pieces of taste that could be seen in the background of films and were considered a great investment at this time (Gamble, 2018). This is an example of an artist who fulfilled the dream of many artists. The dream of growing wealthy, famous and renowned in the fashionable circles of society, through making ones art. However, Gamble explains how Marini changed his work and artistic persona depending on critics' analyses and sales. Questions of integrity occur when artists change their message determined by external factors.

What the artist is trying to communicate grows confused when commodification becomes an issue behind the artwork.

Pop Artists would be some of the first to openly question and embrace the business of Art as an issue to be confronted head on in the artworld, by the artist themselves. Cultural critic Mark C. Taylor quotes pop artist Andy Warhol: “Business art is the step that comes after art” (Warhol, 1975; Taylor, 2012, p. 12) and proceeds to augment the situation with a sequence of high capitalism:

“Commodification of art

Corporatization of art

Financialization of art” (Taylor, 2012, p. 1).

Increasingly, market forces grow in important regarding who can exhibit and more importantly who will sell. Taylor researches the changing economies as they transform from the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Ford premiss of making a product and selling it, to the 1980s fractured investments of hedge funds, to the present where high capitalism and signs and branding have been echoed in the artworld. The theories that make hedge funds and financialisation possible have *become* the theories behind making art. Artists such as Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami and Damien Hirst, Taylor explains, are themselves the *sign* of investibility without the need for singular talent, self-expression or an artist’s physical input. Taylor argues that using present economic models and using media techniques as a comment on our present society does not excuse artists such as Hirst from diminishing art as something sacred (Taylor, 2012, pp. 12-13). Hirst is another force pushing art towards a practice with no soul or meaning. As Taylor states (2012, p. 13): “The commodification, corporatization, and financialization of art represent the betrayal of principles and values that have guided artists for more than two centuries.” Is the value of art to be set by stockbrokers rather than by the depth of human

research and communication? A question at the heart of Arte Povera in the 1960s and I would argue for the 2020s.

A criticism could be posed with regards Taylor's rhetoric towards Hirst's cynicism as he quotes from a New York Times article from 2007 stating that Hirst has become "the manager of the hedge fund of Damien Hirst's art" (2012, p. 12).<sup>3</sup> Firstly, how does an artist break into the artworld and leave a significant stamp on it? Secondly, how does that artist gain the financial recompense that they deserve? Or, is it only the wealthy, the corporations and hedge fund investors that have the right to invest and gain great rewards from art? Thirdly, as an artist surely Hirst has the right to comment on the intensification and escalation of consumerism that he experienced growing up in 1980s Leeds, England. Hirst drained some money back into his own pocket and the artistic community, from those who had destabilised the world economy for the gain of a very few cynical bankers and stockbrokers.

Charles Jencks (1987) discusses the problems involving avant-garde movements when they are absorbed into the processes of commodification. He states: "Almost all serious critics think the avant-garde is dead as a result of absorption into the establishment and consumer society [...] if its ultimate goal is, when all is said and done, to be accepted into the mainstream" (Jencks, 1987, p. 215). Jencks argues that for 160 years the avant-garde have fought to stamp their mark on the world, exploring the possibilities of the new, only to have the work of artists such as Vincent Van Gogh, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock, sold posthumously, for many millions of dollars.

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor is quoting from: "Damien Hirst and the Sharks," New York Times, July 24, 2007.



Jencks explores four different categories of avant-garde ending with a theory of the post-avant-garde. He argues that the avant-garde artist's will to break new ground and fight against the bourgeois institutions and consumer society, paradoxically, are exactly what feeds free market economies. This avant-garde effort opens new directions that can be exploited for economic growth (Jencks, 1987). Commerce needs new ideas and trends to spark the consumer's desire to purchase. In fact, new trends are an important element needed for exchange value augmentation. The fourth avant-garde category Jencks theorises, is the post-avant-garde. The post avant-garde has many characteristics but two of them are most relevant to this research. Firstly, post avant-gardist encourages pluralist interpretations of the works of art. Secondly, the post avant-garde do not intend to break new ground. It is unlikely that Jencks was relating his post-modern theories of the 1980s to 1960s Arte Povera or the theories of Umberto Eco's *Open Work* (1962). However, Jencks' theories of pluralist interpretations relate strongly to the subjective experiential relationships between the art and audience of the Italian practitioners. Furthermore, Jencks notions of delving into the past within post-avant-garde art relates to the Poveristi who were deeply involved in learning from the past in the hope of asking fundamental existential questions (Lista, 2006). Jencks' post-modern theories and 1960s Italian theory, have many fundamental differences. For example, the two moments in history allude to very different attitudes towards making art and how an artist could defy the institution, such as the irony in 1980s post-avant-garde post-modernism, conflicts with the existential phenomenological rigor of the 1960s avant-garde practitioners. However, both ways of working try, in theory, to change the relationship between art and commodity, resisting the bourgeois institutional powers that be, for a more democratic outcome.

## 4.6 Conclusion

Simple materials, pre-industrial techniques and a merging of art and life are at the heart of Arte Povera. The literature above describes such topics, while fulfilling the authors' rationales working within their chosen fields of research. The materials of the Poveristi were chosen and used as the materials they are, without embellishment, creating a visual spatial and tactile language that can be interpreted subjectively, if read in this tautological way. Materials could be found objects, simple, elemental and relating to a human's experience as a human, on a human scale. In theory, all humans were encouraged to express themselves using these methods and materials as seen by community interaction encouraged by the group *Lo Zoo*, created by Michelangelo Pistoletto (Lista, 2006).

Celant as critic and curator argued in his many texts on Arte Povera that the Poveristi made and exhibited art in a way that questioned the institutions of the artworld and shift, disrupt or destroy the status quo of a consumerist society, using materials, scale, locations, interventions and installations that made art hard to commodify. How absolute this political resistance was in reality for the artists in question, is uncertain. However, the artists were most uncomfortable with the institutions of the artworld and the art market as shown in the many conversations between the Poveristi and Carla Lonzi (Lonzi, 1969/2021). The discussions around Arte Povera consider it the last avant-garde movement of note of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gorvy, 2017, 0:03:29). The movement was named Arte Povera by Celant in 1967 and he described it as a failed experiment in 1971 (Christov-Bakargiev, 1999). Henceforth, the artists continued to practice unattached, yet still associated by the umbrella term *Arte Povera*, coined by Celant. Today, the Poveristi are known as international artists of great repute and their work is still vital and ironically sold for great prices. Noted, explicitly by Jeffrey T. Nealon in a chapter called "Commodity", is how all "authentic" anti-establishment work can be, and inevitably *is*,

absorbed into the consumerist machine (Re, 2004; Nealon, 2012). It would seem that making *new* or avant-garde work is virtually impossible in the 2020s. I would like to investigate the various perspectives of this phenomenon further, recognising the insights gained from the literature above and alluding to possible outcomes that may answer some of the aims and objectives of this study.

## 5 The Phenomenological Lens

### 5.1 Introduction

Central to the methodology, is the analysis of Poveristi artwork, as it is perceived and experienced by a subject. The simple recounting of a perceived experience of an artwork may appear ephemeral, innocent and even throw-away in its subjectivity, when pitted against scholarly criticism and cultural contextualisation. The same can be said of Arte Povera itself, as it places quotidian and sometimes ready-made materials in front of an audience. Work that seems to have been easily assembled with basic materials can appear too simple, too easy and sometimes superficial to an audience. To analyse Arte Povera through a phenomenological lens will be shown to address some of these issues.

The research will give a brief explanation of phenomenology and identify key philosophers who explored the different avenues of enquiry pertinent to this study. It is important to explain the relationship between phenomenology and Arte Povera and how using a phenomenological approach will aid in accomplishing the aims and objectives of the dissertation. Additionally, examples of sensory analyses of a Poveristi artwork (or work pertinent to Arte Povera,) made from a phenomenological standpoint, will give an example of the method of bracketing off the world of preconceived ideas and knowledge. From the various observations made in these subjective visual analyses, a form of *open work* (inspired by Umberto Eco's theories) has taken place (Eco, 1962/1989). These examples of subjective interpretations will coexist, in parallel to the knowledge gained from primary and secondary analysis.

To observe art from a phenomenological lens, ideally, the researcher would be in sense-proximity to the subject matter, in the present. The research period of this dissertation coincided with the most intense years of the Covid Pandemic of 2020 through until 2022 (World Health

Organisation, 2022; Government Digital Service, 2022). The seriousness of this global tragedy cannot be underestimated. Not only did the Covid Virus take the lives of my mother, and uncle, but it restricted my research greatly, through lockdowns, travel restrictions and cancellations of events. These effects were local and global. Physical observations of work by Poveristi or related artists in exhibition, during this period of restrictions and personal bereavement, was incredibly difficult. Adaptations, under such abnormal conditions had to be taken, and so photographs and memories of exhibitions were used, in as transparent a way as possible. The study endeavoured to describe works of art, promoting a phenomenological methodology that could be pursued, when viewing art first-hand.

## 5.2 What is Phenomenology?

Phenomenology is the study of how and what a subject perceives from the given appearance of an object, subject or event, without preconceived ideas tainting that perception. Edmund Husserl is thought to be the father of phenomenology and his cry: “back to the things themselves” (Husserl, 1913/2001, p. 168) introduces the spirit of trying to see a thing simply, innocently and without preconceived notions. Husserl devised, in his opinion, concrete methodologies attempting to make detailed descriptions or determinations of the phenomena under question. When a phenomenon was given very detailed determinations, on the many layers of enquiry, he would call it an adequate description. If there were holes in the description it would be called inadequate. The phenomenon at hand was not simply the object being viewed, but more pertinently, it was the *intentions* and *structures* used by the consciousness *doing* the observing that was under analysis (Husserl, 1913/2017). A practitioner might ask: What am I observing? How do I observe it? How does a consciousness transcend the divide between the object at hand and make a perception of that object so that we sense it? Finally, if

I can bracket off the world of preconceived ideas, knowledge and culture from the phenomena under question, what experience will I gather from this *innocent* perspective?

This chapter attempts to show the value of viewing art through a phenomenological lens. Furthermore, the Poveristi attempted to erode the boundaries between art and life, hoping that the mundane materials they used would be appreciated by an interested audience. With infinite interpretations and creative expressions being possible from the simplest of materials, Arte Povera promoted the democratic freedom and conscious experiential living that creativity can bring.

### 5.3 Why Use a Phenomenological Lens When Studying Arte Povera?

The use of mundane materials and ready-to-hand objects by more conceptually based avant-garde artists of the 1960s, has been criticised by some audiences and critics. In a reading of historical and neo-avant-gardes, art critic Hal Foster (1996) quotes Clement Greenberg in his criticism of 1960s Minimalism: ““Minimalist works are readable as art, as almost anything is today – including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper.” Greenberg intended this remark as a scourge, but to the likes of John Cage it was an avant-gardist challenge” (1996, p. 38). The tone Clement Greenberg gives to the use of mundane materials is indicative of a glib understanding or in this case a rhetorical dissent, that attempts to undermine the complexities behind conceptually based avant-garde practices. Practices that often use ready-made objects as material. Arte Povera is not mentioned explicitly in this book (yet again) but Duchamp’s Conceptualism, the 1960s Minimalism and Greenberg’s criticism is contextually relatable and transferable. The Poverist artists *would* use doors, a table, and paper as materials if they conveyed the message they wanted to communicate. Additionally, Francis Ponge the highly acclaimed phenomenologically inspired essayist, poet and friend of phenomenologist

philosopher Merleau-Ponty wrote an entire book about his perceptions of a table; taking several years to do so, called *The Table* (Ponge, 1973/2017). The depth of meaning within simple objects used by these avant-garde artists (and writers), when put through a phenomenological lens, can be interpreted profoundly, texturally, essentially, existentially, experientially and conceptually, in the world we have been *thrown* (Heidegger, 1927/1967; 1960/2008).

The phenomenological lens can alter the way we interpret and value an artwork, giving a credibility to the human ability to sense and attempt an understanding of what we perceive when in proximity to objects and events. Instead of a rational, critical, or commodified valuation of a work of art, the observer prioritises sensory interpretation and is mindful of the experience and its internal and external effects, whatever they may be. Furthermore, any prior knowledge of the work of art and the artist is bracketed away, and so the materiality, exhibition and location of the art communicates in a more visceral and subjective way, to the observer.

Arte Povera encouraged the use of human sensory faculties when making and interpreting Poverist art. The observer's sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste is given a validity to rival rational interpretations of a work of art. It is admissible to conclude that a phenomenological interpretation of an artwork can introduce art to those who may hitherto have felt ostracised from more cerebral discussions on the subject. Depending on a commitment to commune with the artwork, each observer feels what they feel and each interpretation is democratic and equally valid as any other. This perceptual validity, "it is what it is" and "I feel what I feel" for each subject, cannot and should not be explained away in intellectualised rhetoric when regarding Arte Povera.

The research argues that Arte Povera, like phenomenology, encouraged a human to bracket off the world from prescribed ideas and knowledge. This process was used so that a subject might see the world from an innocent fresh perspective gaining a more essential understanding of human existence. Inspired by such revolutionary practitioners and scholars such as Marcel Duchamp, Jerzy Grotowski and Umberto Eco (as noted earlier in the dissertation), the Poveristi used *poor* materiality and a conceptual approach to art making, with the aim of stripping away the superfluous from an artwork. The subjective experience was to be important and a democracy of interpretation, that needed an audience to work for meaning, proclaimed that subjective enquiry was valid for all. The *Open Work* by Umberto Eco explored earlier in the thematic analysis, argues that an artwork remains the artist's own, but still allows for infinite valid interpretations by an audience (1962/1989, p. 19).

### 5.3.1 Examples of the Methodology: Viewing an Art Piece through a Phenomenological Lens

A brief example of an artwork pertinent to Arte Povera, experienced through a phenomenological lens, entailing a visit to the Ludwig Museum, Cologne: *I stumbled upon Roue de Bicyclette* (1913/1964) by Marcel Duchamp. *Reading the description of the work, I found out that this was a replica of Duchamp's original piece that had been destroyed. I was not sure how this made me feel. Another thing that made me feel somewhat uneasy was the light. On this particular day, the lighting of the museum was darker, yellower, than I thought it would be and gave a warmth to the works on display. The space was small, and the piece was on a white plinth. This whiteness was contrasted by the creamy colour of the stool and the darkness of the wheel. The cream-coloured stool had four legs and a round seat. Attached to the seat was an upside-down fork and wheel from a bicycle. There were more forks spreading out from the centre of the wheel than on modern wheels. The stool and the roundness of its components made me feel that Duchamp (or the person who made the replica) had chosen the*



*perfect stool dimensionally regarding the wheel on top of it. The cream and darkness of the wheel and the whiteness of the plinth and the walls, while bathed in a warm light gave me a smooth sensation. I felt like the dimensions were perfect and that they related to my body. It reminded me of my window at home that seemed to relate to bodily dimensions rather than metric precision.*

This vignette of a perceptual account allows for a kind of experiential honesty to be expressed without concern for context. An audience member has analysed a piece of work and conveyed a detailed experience. The replica status of Duchamp's artwork viewed phenomenologically, loses little gravitas to the value of a conceptually based artwork and whoever put this ready-made together in 1964, created a profound depth of sensory feeling in an audience member. Putting two ready-made objects together, which themselves relate to a body's ergonomics, may have been the reason for such a physical reaction.

Duchamp is an important artist to introduce regarding the *ready-made* within the artworld, as he was able to reframe what art could be about. No longer must art be based on skill, but ideas could be the focus of an artwork. Duchamp (1879-1968) was born in Normandy, France and began his artistic career as a painter. Even though he had some success in this field, art historian Jennifer Mundy (2008, p. 9) explains that "he quickly turned his back on traditional painting, which he saw as simply 'retinal' and incapable of expressing the ideas that interested him." In 1942 Duchamp moved to New York, USA to escape World War II (Mundy, 2008, p. 49). As Duchamp moved away from traditional art processes, he became increasingly motivated conceptually, finding meaning in mundane objects and materiality. Duchamp appropriated and signed factory-made objects and exhibited them as artworks. In conversation with art historian Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp explained that this process 'created a new thought for that object'

(Ades & Jeffet, 2017, p. 16). *Roue de Bicyclette* as described above, exemplifies the 'readymade' ('*tout fait*') which was a term coined by Duchamp (Ades & Jeffet, 2017, p. 16) to describe such artworks. William Jeffett (2017, p. 28) explains that Duchamp questioned all prescribed ideas of materiality in art, freeing artists and an audience from the constraints within the institutions of the artworld. Conceptual art and the revolutionary attitudes towards materiality were to be expanded upon by the Poveristi half a century later.

A second brief phenomenological description regarding a visit to Tate Modern Gallery: *I was confronted by 120 bricks that had been placed on a pale wooden floor. Equivalent VIII (1966) is an artwork by Carl Andre. These 120 bricks were laid on the floor to create a rectangle. The rectangle consisted of 10 x 6 bricks, two planes deep, per plane. The bricks were a similar pale brown colour to the wooden floor. The brick felt low and they were low. I looked down at them and felt mischievous that I had touched them with my shoe. I had a bodily desire to walk on them. I looked around but feared repercussions if I did so, and so I refrained. I had little knowledge of who Carl Andre was but I felt like this was a sculpture made of bricks and should be walked on. I also recognised the fact that this was an infamous work of art. I wondered why, but then it became evident in my own thoughts: What makes these bricks special? I could have done this. I felt guilty that I had even thought this question but it seemed relevant. If anyone could do this, why was it in the Tate Gallery? The dimensions of the work were exhibited at a human scale. There was no plinth, no markings to articulate the space or cordon off the audience. This seemed to confront me with the question: Why shouldn't I walk on it? There were many questions raised. The title *Equivalent VIII* probably meant that there were more brick sculptures and I imagine they are equally minimal. I did not know. There were sibling brick sculptures, elsewhere in the world. As an artist, this felt like the artist was a parent letting his babies leave the nest and fend for themselves.*

At first glance, this minimal artwork seemed to be overly simple and superficial. However, when using a phenomenological lens, many layers of interpretation became apparent. A standpoint or perspective of enquiry can aid in the analysis, be that the contemplation of internal structures of consciousness when confronted with a subject or event, or if one concentrates on the external form or presence of a subject (in this case an artwork). Sensations gathered when confronted with a work of mundane materiality allowing the audience member to step outside normal notions of normal materials. Carl Andre presents us with very minimal materiality to analyse which directs a subject towards a reduced point of reference to perceive phenomenologically, with little distraction (Chave, 2000, p. 149). This encourages an audience member to look within and note one's perceptions and thought processes.

Andre was working with materials in a fundamental way and wanted the chosen material itself to speak for itself as itself. Art Historian Anna C. Chave (2000, p. 149) states that "'Matter matters" was the maxim Andre used to encapsulate work that evidently, taciturnly insists on its strict facticity or sheer materiality." Chave explains that she used the word "evidently" because Andre would add meaning to the use of bricks as he would often tell audiences that his grandfather was a bricklayer. This contradiction outlined by Chave can be noted as a criticism or a playful characterisation of Andre and his knowing contrariness to being pinned down by theory. Such contradictions may hinder a phenomenological account of materials when they were "evidently" and fundamentally thought to be tautological in nature. However, the juxtaposition between the purity of concept and contradicting contextual meaning has something in common with Arte Povera. Human complexities are often embraced in Arte Povera and such contradictions add to the friction needed for an artwork to have multi-layered interpretations of substance.

Although there was a rivalry between some of the US Minimalist artists and the Poveristi, as noted earlier in the dissertation, these movements have much in common. Both movements used mundane stripped-back materials, that can appear, at first glance, to be shallow, reductionist and insubstantial. Both movements were avant-garde in nature and both movements were criticised for their use of everyday materiality. However, when the work of these artists is viewed through a phenomenological lens, the conceptual sophistication and experiential depth can begin to be disclosed.

A secondary yet satisfying consideration for using phenomenology as the basis of my methodology, is the initial marriage between phenomenology and the Poveristi. Arte Povera and the works of Merleau-Ponty were prevalent in the turbulent 1960s when human civil rights were being fought for and capitalism was being questioned and rebelled against. The Poveristi were reading phenomenological texts at the time they were making art in the 1960s. Arguably, the phenomenological approach inspired many of the Poveristi (Lista, 2006; Christov-Bakargiev, 1999). As Christov-Bakargiev tells us while discussing Penone and Arte Povera: “[...] [O]f course we are talking about a period when everyone is reading Merleau Ponty, all the time; he had just died. ‘61 [...] Touching. What is touching? I[t]s an important subject. Touching myself, touching the world.” (Christov-Bakargiev, 2014, 31:20).

#### 5.4 Which Phenomenology?

After reading Husserl, more texts became relevant to this study and the understanding of phenomenology and the richness of existential phenomenology. The philosophies by thinkers such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the research would argue is related to the process and analysis needed of Arte Povera. Heidegger studied at the most rigorous levels, subjects such as the existential ontico-ontological essences of *Being human* and of *Being*, of

what it is for a human to *be there*, *Dasein* (Heidegger, 1927/1967). Whereas Merleau-Ponty developed his thoughts of pure phenomenology into a more sensory and poetic embodied intersubjectivity with constant queries and discussions regarding empiricism and idealism (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012; 1964/1968). This is a very involved interplay of great philosophers from whom the research will take relatable methods of phenomenological enquiry into the practices of Arte Povera.

The method of analysis and revaluation of Arte Povera here is inspired by the embodied intersubjectivity of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the existential-phenomenological enquiries of Martin Heidegger. They were inspired by the father of pure phenomenology Edmund Husserl, but their focus was less reductionist, less mathematical and far more mundane, as they endeavoured to reveal the essences of everyday human existence. Merleau-Ponty references Husserl and Heidegger often gleaning knowledge from them respectfully, but he puts forth new ideas that criticise or expand on their theories and methods.

Breaking away from Husserl's phenomenological analysis using *epochē* and *bracketing* off the world, Merleau-Ponty believed that we have been *thrown* into this world and how we perceive it cannot and should not be *bracketed* away, (or not in the way Husserl advocates). Merleau-Ponty argues: "The sensible gives back to me what I had lent to it, but I received it from the sensible in the first place" (1945/2012, p. 222). A practitioner working in this manner would understand the subject matter as being imbued with her ability to sense it. His life experiences affect how the subject matter appears to him. Furthermore, how that subject matter presents itself to her, affects how she perceives it, for example, how far away it is from her, how fast she moves towards it, the brightness of the environment she sees it in, how much of the subject matter is visible to her, how normally that subject matter is presented to her, is the subject

something she is accustomed to sensing or is it something foreign to her? These are but a few factors that will affect the experience of this subject. The subject changes his bodily response to the sensible. Exterior conditions and her interior conditions, thoughts and sensory abilities change the meanings and perceptions of the sensible, the subject matter at hand.

Although inspired by the philosophers above, the research will *not* be using *their* methods of investigation, faithfully. The philosophers have different interests and perspectives to this research and work towards different ends. The study comes from an artist and research perspective and will take an existential-phenomenological outlook as a starting point to examine and relate to Arte Povera. The aim is to make a fresh and relevant investigation, from the time and place that this research has been *thrown*<sup>4</sup>.

### 5.5 A Phenomenological Sensory Analysis: *Untitled* (1991) Jannis Kounellis.

#### New Works Made in the Henry Moore Studio 19 March - 18 May 1991.

I viewed this work by Jannis Kounellis in 1991. I was an 18-year-old art student focussing on being a painter. I was thirsty for new artworks and experiences, whereupon I visited Dean Clough and was confronted by installations by Jannis Kounellis. I must admit I didn't know

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<sup>4</sup> The term *Thrown* is used in the dissertation with reference to Heidegger and his notion concerning the existential situation humans find themselves in (Heidegger, 1927/1967, pp. 219-224). A human's Being in the tumultuous 'throws' of life. 'Thrown' is associated with the word 'Fallen' which for Heidegger means the environment a human 'falls' into. 'Throwness' and 'Falling' have deep connections concerning how a human reacts to the world; these ideas are important regarding phenomenology and yet too complex to elaborate upon here.

who he was, and I was not accustomed to viewing installations, especially installations by famous Poverist artists. I shall analyse this experience as honestly as I can through a phenomenological lens, with the help of an image to remind me of my experience, in the re-telling of my perceptions of this installation.

Space – The first thing I remember was the feeling that this was all the work, of one artist. That the two studios or rooms were large spaces and that the space *was* the work. (As a painter I was thinking: What a magnificent space this would be to hang my paintings.) My initial impression when I entered the enormous room, was elegance, simplicity and drama. There was something correct, a feeling of correctness, about dimensions in the space. At the time, I could only relate such a presence to my notions of painting; to the enormous works by the abstract expressionists, such as Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock or Barnett Newman. There was so much space and so few gestures. The same thing done fourteen times and then in the rectangular gaps between the rooms, there were three containers full of coal. Heaps of matt light-absorbing black lumps, poked out over the tops of the three grey rectangles or boxes. The white space from behind these heaps of black moved, as I moved around. A feeling of perspective augmented as I moved around. Fourteen repetitions of this gesture, in a line and three similar gestures on what seemed like windowsills dividing the two rooms or studio spaces. Grand gestures. The cast iron pillars, vertical, and ornate, connected the floor to the ceiling. The floor was stone paving slabs, rectangular, mopped yet still a little dusty, the roof was white. There was a long arch between each pillar. The pillars had a function, seemingly holding the ceiling up. They also had the function of holding the horizontal discs up at the height of my stomach. I remember feeling the solid cold seep through my shirt when pressing my hip and lower ribs against the cast iron of one of the discs. They look like they have an industrial purpose, but they do not, or not anymore. The function of the pillars that hold the discs at this chosen height is a formal one. The discs

have no other function but to communicate something. This is art. These pillars support a ceiling and these incredibly heavy cast iron discs, horizontally. The pillars are nearly black, scuffed, with elements of rusty red patches. They are in a line and spaced equally, or I feel that they are. The distancing between the pillars and the discs is always distorted by my own place in the room and shows them in a row, getting smaller as they grow more distant from my point of view. Unless I were to use a tape measure, perspective does not allow for any surety on this preconceived notion that the pillars would be spaced equally. Why do I automatically place these pillars equally? Why do I imagine that the discs are the same size? They are fourteen vertical lynchpins in the holding-together of this room and building, or there seem to be. A line; that of vertical lines, gestures, commandeered by the artist as though he is making a grand architect's model, or demonstrating the theory of perspective for us. The pillars and the discs make dark H shapes, but without the discs, one envisages rectangular spaces which are echoed by the rectangular windows between the studios. The stones on the floor are rectangular and if you bob your head down to the height of the discs, the discs show you a horizontal rectangle. Only when you stand above or below the height of the discs can I see that these are discs at all. The rims of the discs are a similar colour to the pillars. The area of the discs, if I speak geometrically, is rusty red. If you feel this rusty red, it is cold and feels dusty and taints one's fingers with the same colour. It is rust made from the damp air and the cast iron of the disc.

If the pillars are a part of the structure, they are a functioning element of the work. The coal and the discs have had uses but they are now un-ready-to-hand. The coal is not to be used for anything but artifice, as too the heavy cast iron discs. Outside of the artwork, they have use, inside the artwork their value is conceptual.



As I walk up and down the room touching the cold cast iron discs with my fingertips, I feel that I am doing something wrong in touching such a monumental work. There is no one in the space but me. The sound echoes as I clap. The echo vanishes and I can hear the trickle of water. I notice the smell of water. At this point, where I feel conspicuously alone, and the resounding quiet after the clap sound, that I want to smell things. I go up to the discs and smell the rusty reds and smell the cast iron smells of old frying pans, I walk towards the containers of coal and smell the coal, that sits in the grey rectangular boxes on the windowsills. At this point in my life, I have memories of stories about coal, rather than a use of coal. (I have open fires now but in those days the stories of a coal shed and my great-grandfather come to mind.) My grandfather is now here, in my mind. The stories of coal sheds, and ghost stories of my great grandfather are present in a warehouse in Halifax, because of an old Italian artist bringing about materials that remind me of stories. These stories and ghosts feel right. They feel like something the artist has attempted to manifest when using these monumental yet simple gestures, these materials of industry that are growing more and more obsolete, useless. As useless as these discs on their sides are. They do not function here, but they have a feeling that this artist has taken a functioning object and made it useless, to bring me ghosts. The ghosts stop at the coal for me, or for my personal history. My family did not work in such places as this, but the sense of history grows as I remain in the space.

The notion of history and story make the pillars, as vertical presences, resemble humans, people standing. I walk away and look again from a distance. The pillars and the disc are crucifixes in shape and dimension. St Peter. The crucifixes are upside down. There are fourteen of them. I think to myself 'I bet Kounellis would have wanted 13.' I left and went for coffee.



Figure 2. *Untitled*. Kounellis J. 1991. (Installation view of the exhibition HCWW) *The Henry Moore Sculpture Trust at Dean Clough 1989-1993*, p. 35. HMST. Photo: Claudio Abate, 1991.

### 5.6 How the Phenomenological Lens informs Arte Povera and the resistance to Commodification.

The method of analysing a work of art through a phenomenological lens has been seen to be sympathetic to the practices of Arte Povera. Poverist art that used mundane materials and ready-made objects that can be seen as superficial, analysed phenomenologically shows how sophisticated these artworks can be. This can be understood by the infinite possibilities of subjective interpretation by an audience and in the creativity inherent in the method itself which is in line with Arte Povera notions of audience participation. Additionally, using a method to view Poveristi work by methods being studied by Arte Povera would seem highly appropriate. However, the research also enquires about the Poveristi resistance to commodification and uses a phenomenological lens as a tool to highlight this issue.

To resituate Arte Povera in today's highly consumerist society we need to note how art is valued today. The research tackles this subject in the next chapter and argues that the price, fame and the processes of augmenting the market value of an artist or artwork are major elements inherent in the art market institutions (Taylor, 2012). These are the same art institutions that Arte Povera resisted (Celant, 1967/2020; Lista, 2006; Cullinan, 2008; Galimberti, 2013). The research argues that if prior knowledge of fame, commercial value, and cultural value might taint one's view of a Poveristi work of art, then to gain insight into Poveristi work, bracketing away these institutional ideals (that are part of the processes of commodification) would be a strong method of analysis. Moreover, analysis using a phenomenological approach attempts to view, review and resituate artworks in a manner that communicates, ideally, what the artwork means to the researcher in a moment of sensory and mindful presence. This momentary bubble protects the researcher from notions of fame, price or cultural importance, democratising both the audience and the artist at the level of a human communicating to another human in the freedom of perception, while always acknowledging that such freedom is dependent on the world that the researcher has been *thrown* (Heidegger, 1927/1967).

## 6 Commodification

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research looks at what commodification is and the impact it has on the way we value art, taking various artists and movements into consideration. The focus of the study within the context of commodification is the late 60s Italian avant-garde movement of Arte Povera. To give a historicised context it is important to show how commodification emerged more readily in the UK with the Young British Artists of the late 80s. In our world of high capitalism and consumerism, especially in parts of the west, most objects in the process of commodification are seen in terms of their value. How much something is worth financially, especially when valued by a legitimate authority, affects how we see that object. This continuing process of commodification affects how we value objects and in most everything we perceive. The motives behind the human activity of creativity and making objects within art practice are under question here. Although art has always been associated with economics and business within western culture, it was thought of as a human activity that could resist the notion that everything was up for sale and that all ideas and practices could be somehow modified through the processes of commodification.

### 6.2 What is Commodification?

Commodification is a Marxist practice, determining the monetary value of an object. According to Marx, there are two main values for an object: *use value* and *exchange value*. We reconstrue the use value of an object and determine an exchange value. The use value is what the object is for and the exchange value is what one will pay for that object. Take for example a car which has a use value of transporting a person from a-b, and yet, the exchange value changes from car to car. Closely related to the more definable *use value* of the object are the materials used and the labour it takes to make this object (Marx, 1867/2013). The exchange

value changes according to many factors, such as the quality of workmanship, design, trend, and the desirability of that object, which in this case is a car. A Mercedes car has a higher exchange value than a Lada, although the use value is very similar. Additionally, while discussing the commodification of 1960s-70s rock music in 2012, Nealon (2012, p. 50) describes the current capitalist marketplace, where *anything* can and has been transformed into a commodity, be they cultural products, ideas, sweets, or cars. How the value of each commodity is converted from the more quantifiable use value to its abstract associate, the exchange value is a fascinating subject. Under investigation here, is the commodification of art by the Poveristi in the late 1960s, the YBA art of the late 1980s and mapping the values of such art, in the era of 2020s high capitalism. In footnote 7 from *Capital*, (Marx, 1867/2013, p. 1008) Marx quotes Samuel Butler: “The value of a thing is just as much as it will bring.” This quote taken by Marx is important when discussing more abstract notions of an object’s intrinsic human usefulness and its exchange value.

### 6.3 Arte Povera and its Resistance to Capitalism

Within the context of commodification, Arte Povera stood against the objectives of commodification and capitalist ideals. The Poveristi had very different politics and attempted to resist the onset of consumer values and US capitalism in post-war Italy. In the essay *From Vietnam to Fiat-nam* Cullinan introduces us to Celant’s incendiary manifesto with regards to Arte Povera, published in the magazine *Flash Art* in 1967: “Celant’s overtly politicized tract proclaimed Arte Povera’s radical dimension, invoking revolutionary rhetoric as an attack on consumerism. Critiquing the superstructure of capitalism, invoking class struggle, and questioning the “use value” of art,…” (Cullinan, 2008, p. 9). The Poveristi made art a few years post-World War II, and some of them had lived through the fascist regime of Mussolini. The 1960s civil rights movements in the USA reverberated in Europe amongst the highly politicised

intelligentsia. The relationship Poveristi had with commodities was governed greatly by their socialist principles which naturally repelled the capitalist-driven ideals of the USA. With the influx of US money into post-war Italy, the issues surrounding commodity and commerce became of great concern to Italians (Cullinan, 2008, pp. 13-14; Gamble, 2018, p. 157). Be those Italians who needed the work to survive and rebuild a nation or be they Italians who saw this as another invasive ideology put upon them, these issues affected all. The Poveristi may or may not have wanted to fight in the 1960s civil rights riots, but they felt uncomfortable, to say the least, as US capitalism gained more and more purchase in Europe and further afield. In an interview with Robin White, Kounellis states: "... Arte Povera was engendered by an extremely different social and historical context... The interpretation of the political events of 1968 was the contact of Arte Povera after its emergence" (Kounellis et al., 2002, p. 173). Resistance to any regime that encroached on hard-fought for freedom seemed vital to artists of this era. The art made by the Poveristi and the YBA may look similar and have as much genius as each other, but the intent behind such works came from a very different place with very different ambitions. Arte Povera worked for creative freedom and freedom *from* commodification. As Celant (1967/2020) argues: "It is forbidden to be free. Once you create an object, you always have to remain by its side. That's what the system commands. This expectation is never frustrated, and once an individual has assumed a role, he has to continue to perform it until death". Celant urged the Poveristi to defy being tied down by making themselves a brand to sell and to be free to create whatever they wanted. Celant continues (1967/2020): "Mass production mentality forces him to produce a single object that satisfies the market to the point of saturation. He is not allowed simply to create the object and then to abandon it to its destiny." In contrast, Damien Hirst of the YBA creates a single art object, and for purposes of augmenting its price, must saturate the image of that object, for the market. The Poveristi did not court the media in a way that would increase financial value, and this did

allow a freedom in their creativity, and a freedom that eluded and resisted the commodification of their work and commodification itself.

The conventional artworld (the *rich artworld*) was a perfect example of capitalism to many of the Poveristi in the 1960s. Arte Povera rebelled against a *rich artworld* and the practice of making art that pleased the market (Gamble, 2018). The tradition of working from a studio, showing in a gallery, and selling to a rich patron was not how the Poveristi valued themselves as artists. This kind of art practice stunted freedom of self-expression for an artist and essentially, as a human, reducing their research to commodity. Arte Povera rebelled, hoping to turn the artworld on its head. A democracy of materials was encouraged (Celant, 1969, Holman et al., 2011), ready-made objects or found materials were used, elemental materials, energy, conceptuality, and human-scale sculpture all promoted subjective research of a human. In the tradition of Duchamp, the crafting of new thoughts and discussions about mundane subjects was of greatest value within the Arte Povera movement. Selling work was still a factor, but it was not the reason to make work. However, some major protagonists in the movement, such as Gilardi and the critic Lonzi, would distance themselves further from the institutions of the artworld, finding that the *rich artworld* was beyond help and real social interaction was needed (Re, 2004, pp. 152-153; Galimberti, 2013, pp. 435-438).

#### 6.4 The Young British Artists: A Case Study of Commodification

This study has been looking into commodification and how such a process affects art with the aim of understanding what Arte Povera were about and what they were trying to resist. In order to do this, the research will examine the Young British Artists movement looking into how their art has been commodified. The 1980s Young British Artists outline various points of interest to this research of the 1960s Arte Povera in Italy. Arguably, the similarities of art

produced and the democracy of materials used by both movements are of great significance. Where the YBA paid technicians to produce highly professional looking art objects as compared to the Poveristi consciously navigating away from technical skill, makes for two highly distinct attitudes towards art practice and the artworld. The Poveristi used a form of mystification to encourage the conceptual participation of an audience, whereas the YBA although highly conceptual and witty work is exhibited, sales were high on the list of priorities. A Poveristi pile of leaves left on the ground would be far harder to sell at a high price, than a professionally constructed and presented tank of cyan formaldehyde with a shark floating within. Arte Povera influenced the YBA (Shone, 1997, p. 13) and both movements held an irreverence for the institutions of art. However, the YBA and their work were absorbed into the process of commodification quite profoundly compared with the Poveristi and their work, demonstrating a faculty of commodification and capitalism while indicating, to a certain extent, how some art could repel its advances. Commodification has such robust skills of adaptation that ideas antithetical to the market, can be absorbed into those same markets. However, there are a few who have resisted, and this resistance is of great significance. Finally, many of the questions being asked by these art movements can be posed regarding the high consumer culture of the 2020s.

*Freeze* (1988) exhibition introduces us to the Young British Artists, with an example of their work and early career professionalism. Contra to the protocols of the artworld, this irreverent group of artists felt ready to attract the attention of dealers, curators, and critics while still undergraduate students. The infamous 3-part exhibition *Freeze*, held in the London Docklands, was curated by Damien Hirst in his second year as a Goldsmiths Art College student. This exhibition tapped into the zeitgeist of the late 80s and is a clear point of reference in the birth of the *Young British Artists* and a change in artists' attitudes thereon-after, towards making and



exhibiting work but also concerning the commodification of art. A London-centric cluster of young artists, the majority of whom, either studied at Goldsmiths or had recently graduated from the college, participated in Freeze and became the nucleus of an art movement. The Goldsmiths students were astute and well educated in their field of art and culture. In the catalogue essay by artist Martin Maloney, he describes the Goldsmiths “non-hierarchical teaching programme under the guidance of the artist Michael Craig-Martin”, and that it “stressed the democracy of material and meaning. The school asked students to make art that had something to say, to make it in a new way, and to engage with the contemporary world.” (Maloney, 1997, p. 26). The YBA often came from working-class backgrounds away from London and had what could be described as British sensibilities within their art. Such characteristics as: a dry humour, a cynical edge, a cutting awareness of pop culture, while demonstrating a healthy contempt for bourgeois sensibilities were often incorporated into their work. The biography of Glen Brown from the Sensation Catalogue describes succinctly, the direction of these artists: “Brown’s manner of working is typical of the generations of artists coming out of colleges, particularly Goldsmiths, at that time: visually direct, professionally constructed, and theoretically adept” (Royal Academy of Arts, 1997, p. 194).

Hirst and many of the Goldsmiths artists regarded the business of art as a sign of the times and so adopted a commercial professionalism hitherto unseen in Europe. It is in this adherence to consumerism that the process of commodification could easily take root in the Young British Artist’s art, their movement, and with their desire for attracting art dealers. Making money to survive is both a fact of life and a comment about omnipresent consumerism. Could it be that gaining wealth and fame has always been in the heart of artists and those who embrace the financial branch of art business are just being honest? Charles Saatchi responds to journalists’ (unspecified by name) questions on art, business and life: “... Art only flourished in the

Renaissance because it was subsidized by the rich, and the Church. Even sacred art relied on patronage and successful artists who were in demand became wealthy.

Perhaps, even in those days, people were more fascinated by how much art fetched, than the art itself” (Saatchi, 2012, p. 134). When asked the question: “Your practice of buying emerging artists’ work has proved highly contagious and is arguably the single greatest influence on the current market [...]. Do you accept that you are responsible for much of the speculative nature of the contemporary art market?” Saatchi replies: “I hope so. Artists need a lot of collectors, all kinds of collectors, buying their art” (Saatchi, 2012, p. 8). The research suggests that Charles Saatchi and Damien Hirst were honest in their advocacy and creativity with regard art and the artworld and believe that money is a necessary fact of life, that can be made, augmented and enjoyed while still making the world a more interesting place through the medium of art (and commodification). The example set by *Freeze* (1988) and the successful commodification of art by the YBA filters through to artists thereon after. The “vying to snap up the work of young relatively unknown artists” (Saatchi, 2012, p. 8) by collectors and dealers copying the example set by Saatchi, is a sign of art as commodity. The question arises: How does this kind of success change how and why art is made? No matter how cynical or earnest or cynically earnest the activities of Saatchi and Hirst, they were key figures in recent shifts of value in art; and of the artworld. This is the same *rich artworld* that the Poveristi had tried to dismantle.

## 6.5 Charles Saatchi

The YBA attracted the attention of a powerful patron, advertising mogul Charles Saatchi. Charles Saatchi became a key figure in the management of the YBA and in drawing them deeper into the processes of commodification. The first Damien Hirst work of art bought by Charles Saatchi was *A Thousand Years* (1990) for £4000 (Shone, 1997, p. 21; Muir, 2009, p.

36). Hereon in, Saatchi bought many of the works by young talented British artists and proceeded to curate shows at his own gallery in London and on the international stage. His marketing skills, financial power, and eye for impressive works of art helped some of the YBA flourish financially and exhibit internationally. As Saatchi packaged and presented the YBA internationally, he was able to sell YBA at dramatically high profits. Work that was arresting, irreverent, and culturally and historically pertinent was being seen on the world stage. YBA artwork was noticed outside the artworld and found to have transferable applicability within the political world and broader processes of commodification. Interestingly, in the same year the *Sensation* (1997) exhibition toured internationally, the YBA would be incorporated into the *Cool Britannia* flagship and soundbite used by the media and politicians from 1997 onwards. In addition to the fundamental notions of commodification, the research will briefly identify those using this agenda, building an international profile that would go towards making Britain an attractive, progressive, cutting edge, place to visit. These powerful ancillary branches of the commodification of art, may highlight other reasons why Arte Povera could resist the typical capitalist appetite to consume.

## 6.6 The Wider Processes in the Commodification of Art

Although the Young British Artists were professional in their approach to exhibition, marketing and selling of their work, the commodification of art, goes far beyond this process. The name of the movement itself, Young British Artists, includes national identity and attributes that can be deciphered when thinking about notions of young British, youth culture and popular culture. The economic value of art to a society comes from many and varied places. When an art movement is in some way highly visible and can be seen and described as quintessentially distinct to a nation's character, it can be used to market a country, encouraging various lucrative industries such as tourism, advertising, design, fashion, higher education, media and

communications. Impressionist art in France, the Italian Renaissance, Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art in the USA all go towards national identity and how other cultures view that society. Putting a country on the map by putting an art movement on the map is not a new endeavour. The Medici family, for example, who were a rich banking family in Renaissance Florence, patronised one of the greatest movements in art history, by use of their great wealth. Not only did this increase the Medici cultural kudos, but it has attracted much industry and tourism to Florence and Italy thereon after and added to the nation's identity, on the international stage. Art and culture being used to bolster a nation's identity and visibility which in turn is used in various ways to add to the nation's economy and this process is the larger more unstoppable dynamic in the commodification of art.

As with many of the artists and art movements in history, the YBA we're not only notable artists but their work and perceived attitudes stood for a national identity and in this case, captured the zeitgeist of late 80s and 90s Britain. They were a bold art movement that the media and politicians would spin many stories around, gaining much exposure, to put Britain on the cultural map. "High art" was an erroneous term, and YBA art were being talked about, for better or worse, in the tabloids. Their work and personas were being discussed in the same conversations as those involving the Britpop bands such as Oasis, Blur, the Stone Roses etc.. The sound bite "Cool Britannia" which had been used in the 60s, was reintroduced by Vanity Fair in 1997 after journalist Stryker Macguire wrote an article for Newsweek in 1996 entitled "London Rules" stating "that the British capital was now the coolest, most interesting city on earth" (Newsweek.com, 2009). The pun on "Rule Britannia" indicated the fresh economic power of Britain in the early 1990s and the re-emergence of cutting-edge music, fashion and art under the young newly elected Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

In 1998 the “newly elected Labour government [...] decided to attempt a definition and assess their [Cultural Industries] direct impact on the British economy” (Newbigin, 2016, p. 6). Newbigin describes how from an initial survey, the government began to appreciate the economic worth of the cultural industries. This ‘mapping’ was repeated in 2001 and “researchers not only discovered that the creative industries were growing faster than most sectors of the economy, but that they were also generating new jobs twice as fast. Two years after that, in 2003, the Financial Times newspaper announced that the creative industries contributed more to the UK economy than all the financial services of the City of London, which at that time were held up as the most important driving force in the economy” (Newbigin, 2010, p. 23). The commodification of art and cultural industries was found to be a real asset to the country and the YBA were a part of the identity Tony Blair and his government were selling to the world. In 1997, Blair had noticed how important the commodification of cultural industries was to the wealth of a nation and in 2019 (pre-covid) calculations state that Cultural Industries contribute and generate nearly £34billion for the UK economy (ArtsCouncil.org.uk, 2019).

### 6.7 *For the Love of God* (Hirst, 2007): One step beyond the Processes of Commodification into Finance Capitalism

In 2007, Hirst made the work *For the Love of God* which was a platinum cast of a skull encrusted with diamonds. This piece cost \$28 million to make and was sold by Hirst for a price that is shrouded in here say, but Taylor concludes that the work was sold to an anonymous consortium for between \$72 and \$100 million. “Hirst retains a 24 percent stake in the diamond skull. Like ancient alchemists, he makes something out of nothing by turning base material into virtual gold” (Taylor, 2012, p. 184). Hirst decided long ago that artists should not have to die poor (2012, p. 183), and his capability to embrace the processes of commodification and in this case, into finance capitalism, are second to none, as artists go. The argument can be made, for

and against, his art being a comment on capitalism, while simultaneously playing the art-business game. This considered gamble beckoned the market to invest in his artwork. An artwork that was very likely to increase in value. A hedge fund style investment was organised to pay for this expensive work. Furthermore, those with invested interests in the artwork hope to increase the value of the piece through various methods of marketing and exhibition, for as long as possible, to keep those investors and shareholders happy (2012, pp. 9-14; pp. 183-184). The work needs to keep an air of being a major artwork, Hirst needs to be thought of as an important artist, and the *exchange value* will continue to increase for as long as the market believes it can make a profit on the piece. Those who own the work need no consideration for the work as a great piece of art, but they can include a relatively secure investment in their financial portfolio. The commodification process of art has reached its zenith. Hirst committed early to the idea of selling work as a professional artist while being a second-year student at Goldsmiths, curating the Freeze exhibition with his friends, and has grown in to being a hedge fund artist 19 years later.

## 6.8 Arte Povera through the Lens of Commodification

Arte Povera was able to resist the processes of commodification relatively successfully even when, post-1960s, art critic Robert Hughes argues that "...[art] became admired, not through any critical perspective, but for its price tag", in his documentary on the commodification of art (Hughes, 2008, 31:30). Arte Povera was able to value art separate to its price tag. After research into the YBA and how they could be absorbed into the consumerist world, the research aims to view Arte Povera through the lens of commodification. It is evident that the Poveristi were motivated to resist consumerism, however, when cultural endeavours begin in an anti-consumerist way, they do *not* usually remain safe from commodification. Nealon gives the example of 1960s rock and roll music as being a commodity today when its roots began as anti-

authoritarian (Nealon, 2012). Decades later, rock and roll has been commodified relentlessly by the advertisement industry directing it towards a particular consumer profile. Even the image of Marxist revolutionary, Che Guevara has been used to sell goods such as t-shirts, bags, and posters, sold to consumers who consider themselves somewhat radical in nature. Arte Povera has evaded what many have not: commodification. Beyond the defiant intentions of the Poveristi, there are key factors of commodification that could absorb the YBA but remained disrupted by Arte Povera.

Saatchi bought the work of Young British Artists cheaply, repackaged it, and exhibited the art in major galleries internationally, increasing the works profile and his profits, when the art was resold. Celant who championed the Poveristi work in Italy and at times internationally had not purchased the work to augment its price. Generally, Celant wrote critical texts, curated shows and archived documentation of the art and artists for future generations to research (Conte, 2020). If strategies *were* employed by Celant and the Poveristi they were not concerned, primarily, with financial gain, they aimed their efforts at resisting US and capitalist dominance; economic, cultural, and political. The strategies used by the Italian movement, with regard the US, was to establish cultural credibility and relevance for their work spurred on by those who discounted European art as unimportant, “uninteresting and “over with” (Judd, 1964, as cited in Battock, 1968, p. 154). In the book *Art Povera* (1969), Celant used strategies that would promote Italian Povera art in the USA while simultaneously criticising their capitalist political beliefs. Like the “Trojan horse”, the Poveristi subtly introduced their work to the USA, alongside culturally sympathetic conceptual US and European artists and thinkers (Bedarida, 2018, p. 277). Celant created an iconic book that depicted Povera artwork to the world, and yet they remained below the radar of commodification while announcing on the first page of text that “The book ... is a consumer item” (Celant, 1969, p. 5). Celant was an art critic and curator,

with a strongly left-wing art movement holding his motivations accountable. Saatchi is an advertising entrepreneur making money from a mostly working-class group of artists who had lived through the Thatcher years. The YBA wanted to make a career out of being artists in the way that a right-wing culture had nurtured in them. Like it or not, they would do this through capitalist means and Saatchi was happy to be part of this process (Muir, 2009, pp. 4-40).

The second and most powerful factor absorbing a movement into commodification is national identity. In the book, *Britishness, Popular Music, and National Identity* (2013) Irene Morra discusses the importance of popular music with regard to English and British identity. Morra begins her book considering the 2012 Olympic ceremonies directed by Danny Boyle: “[...] for Boyle himself, popular music represents an inclusive, progressive nation[...].” (Morra, 2013, p. 19) and “For Empire, Bragg, and many others, the Olympics opening ceremony voiced a self-consciously alternative narrative of English (and, by implication, London and British) national pride, celebrating Brunel, the NHS, and popular culture with an irreverent wit that eschewed Beefeaters and coerced the Queen into a skit with Daniel Craig’s James Bond” (2013, p. 19). The attitudes and works of the 1990s YBA were to connect with as many people as possible, in an irreverent, cutting edge and popularist way and can be seen as *pop culture*. The Young British Artists have various similarities to the 1990s Britpop bands and both groups of artists meld into the *Cool Britannia* national identity, carrying on a tradition of anti-authoritarian pop-culture musicians, writers, fashion designers and artists. Many of these pop culture musicians, especially, were featured in this recent grand example of national identity and pride, in Danny Boyle’s 2012 Olympic ceremonies (2013, p. 17).

The YBA fit the criteria of Tony Blair’s cutting-edge *Cool Britannia* soundbite of the late 1990s, perfectly. Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art were marketed internationally by the US



cultural machine, to show that the greatest power on earth was also experimental, big, contemporary, bright and culturally dominant. Impressionism identifies the romance, colour, and beauty of France; the High Renaissance shows Italy's golden period of enlightenment and humanist achievement. These great art movements give an erudite sophistication to a nation's identity, which can then be used to increase the economic income of their multi-billion pound cultural and tourist industries. The story and history of a company or nation is vital in the successful selling of a product. These art movements are the most lyrical element of a nation's consumer story. Public and Private sector marketing strategies absorb such well-known art into one of the greatest machines of commodification and that is in a nation selling itself.

Arte Povera misses out on being the nation's selling point. Italy has the High Renaissance to tell the story of Italy at its best. It is a story that lends itself to when humanity pushed passed known limits. The package of art, architecture, science and philosophy alongside the history of the Medici family and feudal warring Italy are present in the streets of all major cities. The marketing is self-evident and visible, beautiful, intricate and skilled beyond comprehension. How does an Italian artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries compete with the High Renaissance? The Poveristi embraced the challenge by using the most mundane materials, a critique of the art institutions and a focus on conceptualism. Their research into what it was to be human relates to Renaissance Humanism, and I would argue is a perfect complement to the mannerism, skills and investigations of the Renaissance Artists and thinkers. However, for a governmental marketing machine, Arte Povera is much harder to sell to the public, when most people haven't heard of them, and their art is difficult to categorise.

Much Poveristi artwork was made in a way that would make it difficult for an artworld to deal with. The work was intended to be seen outside of traditional gallery environments and would

be hard to sell by conventional means, disrupting the consumerist art institution that lives off sales. Enduring Poveristi work indeed has great value today but, the defiance of these artists stopped the final word of commodification: Time. Time often blurs the intentions of an artist and in most cases gives way to financial gain and investment. The finite number of works an artist can make will affect the price of a respected artist the older they get, and more so on their deaths. Usually, when an artist dies, work can be sold for greater prices than when they were alive, and the price can increase as time goes on. The artist can no longer resist the commodification of their work and investors in art want to make money and use all consumerist devices at hand to push prices upwards. However, the Poveristi set a few defiant techniques in motion that might trip up the process of commodification. Ephemeral and mundane materials were used, often designed to degrade, decompose or be dismantled post-exhibition, many shown outside of gallery environments. What *can* be sold, if anything remained, might be seen as memorabilia, or fragments of a piece of creative research, rather than a more quantifiable asset, such as a gilt-framed Van Gogh Painting.

## 7 Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to research Arte Povera and understand if the Poveristi resisted the processes of commodification. Moreover, if the Poverist artists did resist commodification, how did they accomplish such an achievement? As Nealon argues (2012), almost all *authentic* artworks can be absorbed into being a commodity. Furthermore, the rhetoric that surrounds realistic outlooks regarding acquiescing to the art market is equally impenetrable. These quasi-absolute capitalist declarations embedded in the current economic climate of the western world are not far from the mark, however, the research has argued that if a movement or artist *has* been able to resist commodification, even partially or momentarily successfully, then such an example should be noted seriously.

The study presented the main protagonists from the Arte Povera movement including the Poveristi themselves, artists with related practices and critics, curators and galleries that supported Arte Povera. The study identified the main centres where the artists gathered and exhibited their artwork and why these locations were instrumental in the growth of the movement. Additionally, examples of Poverist artwork were explored thematically to show the eclectic interests of a movement that worked in many and varied ways, although the study identified key themes that the Poveristi agreed upon. Themes such as the focus on avant-garde practices, creative freedom from a human perspective and scale, and a political aesthetic that explored materials hitherto relegated from the institutions of the artworld. The historical background gave an insight into who the Poveristi were, where they came from and how they practised their art, introducing the themes that needed further study.

The research analysed four major themes through the study of pertinent literature on the subjects: theoretical, and political context, the materiality of Arte Povera, and commodification of art. The theoretical and political context of Arte Povera focussed the research on the culture and theory, of and surrounding the avant-garde in Italy post-World War II. Notably, the US capitalist invasion of post-war Europe was criticised by a largely left-wing Arte Povera. This transatlantic confrontation, both politically and culturally, influenced much of the Poveristi attitude to making art. Additionally, the theoretical environment in Italy in the 1960s was vibrant and experimental, creating an atmosphere that fostered an avant-garde movement.

The relationship between Arte Povera and materiality was investigated through the journals and interviews of Poveristi Pino Pascali and the writings of Germano Celant, the critic and curator closest to Arte Povera. The research was focused on these integral sources, in order to learn the meaning of Poveristi materiality from those closest to the movement. The study concluded that the artists became interested in materials and wanted to create freely without hindrance from the institutions of the artworld, the political demands of others or capitalist gains. All materials, in theory, could be used, but mundane materiality, materials found in nature and processes that occurred in nature, were fundamental to much of the work exhibited by Arte Povera. This encouraged new ways of seeing the quotidian in life. Such Poveristi use of materials related to the world around us in a new way, from a subjective human perspective and scale and directs the research towards phenomenology.

The last part of the thematic analysis was to investigate the avant-gardist resistance of the Poveristi regarding commodification. Peter Bürger (1974/1984) and Charles Jencks (1987) suggested that the practices of breaking new ground and the anti-establishment ethos of the avant-garde help the processes of commodification by creating new markets. However, the

historical circumstances and cultural environment of post-war Italy prepared the ground for an avant-garde that could question the institutions, existentially and politically, challenging the mistakes of the past and hoping to build a future that connected positively to the earth and humanity.

The utopian ideals of 1960s Arte Povera were followed by shifts in the artworld that both embraced and criticised commodification. Mark Taylor (2012) described such artists as Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami and Damien Hirst as forcing art away from its place as a sacred human pursuit, towards yet another activity subsumed by corporatisation and financialisation.

The Phenomenological Lens chapter considered Arte Povera and its relationship to phenomenology. Phenomenology was the chosen lens through which to analyse art pertinent to Arte Povera. The research briefly defined what phenomenology is and drew upon the founding philosophers Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Marcel Merleau-Ponty as a standpoint to view artwork from. The chapter adopted a perspective that employed an existential and embodied inter-subjectivity when reflecting upon examples of artwork. Brief, but insightful, analyses were made of Duchamp's *Roue Du Bicyclette* (1913/1964) and Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII* (1966). A much more comprehensive account was then made of a work by Poverist artist Jannis Kounellis *Untitled* (1989). Using the phenomenological lens, entailed bracketing off earlier knowledge of the artists and customary cultural criticism of the art, and then writing an account as it appeared to the researcher, externally and internally. This practice encouraged various positions to surface that would otherwise lay dormant, hidden under the layers of historical and cultural context that gives a different position within a critique. The subjective human experience recounted as honestly as possible, showing the

phenomena as they appear rather than interpreting contextual meaning, discloses a fresh innocent possibility, and stimulates an existential resonance with the artwork. This method can be used for any phenomenon placed in front of a subject; however, the research described why Arte Povera resonates with this process of analysis.

The research investigated the Young British Artists as a case study of an art movement that was absorbed into the many processes of commodification. A professional outlook was taken early in the careers of these artists, with Damien Hirst leading the way by curating the *Freeze* (1988) exhibition. If an artist was to survive in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, it was requisite to learn how to market and sell their work and lose the self-important ideals that reject notions of art as commodity. Although Andy Warhol (1975) had identified the idea of art as business and business as art in the 1970s, the art practices of Koons, Murakami and later the Young British Artists solidified the notion that art was business and a commodity to embrace (Taylor, 2012). The notion of the career artist was to become normal and the model was taken as rudimentary within art institutions, from university courses combining fine art with business and marketing studies and the professionalism necessary when making forays into the artworld of galleries, art markets, and private or publicly funded art projects. The outcome of such deep-rooted commodification within the institutions of the artworld change how artists from a young age feel about making art.

## 7.1 Implicit Findings

The research will expand upon the *implicit* findings gained through investigating Arte Povera. Materiality has been identified to be the most *explicit* vehicle the Poveristi employed in their attempt to resist the institutions and systems of commodification in the artworld. The most *implicit* factor that denied the commodification of Arte Povera and resisted many of the

machinations of the artworld institutions was the *intent* behind the movement. An intent that was solidified by a socially strong group of artists, all working towards the autonomy and freedom to create.

The study finds that the principle taken by the Poveristi, in response to political activism, helps understand the authentic beliefs of the movement that allowed the resistance to commodification. The Poveristi would argue that art made with a political agenda would negate the depth of meaning within Arte Povera. The research argues that the Poveristi *intended* and practised this way of thinking when resisting commodification, consumerism and capitalism, as expressed earlier in the work of Emilio Prini. This Poverist standpoint recognises that art made as a commodity would also taint the layers of meaning of Arte Povera. Arte Povera did not and would not make work that helped the *rich* artworld or the art market sell their work. They would not brand themselves by using a particular material, style, or technique that initiated the commodification of their work.

The Poveristi worked in the 1960s and their practice was revolutionary. Their intent was to resist the institutions that would prioritise the commodification of their work. Later, the YBA, who were inspired artistically by the Poveristi, understood how to capitalise financially while using similar art practices. The YBA worked using similar themes employed by the Poveristi, but their *intent* did not resist commodification; it embraced it, as seen in the Commodification chapter. These initial polarising intentions between the Poveristi and the YBA directs the process and change how an audience interprets the work. Artistic *intent* changes the way work communicates to an audience. Actions that are deemed authentic, help solidify the message. The message behind a Poveristi work may feel stronger in its resistance to commodification when the initial intent had not been swayed by ideas of commercial success or by another's

political agenda. The way the Poveristi conducted themselves throughout their careers, staying true to their ideals of human freedom, and creative freedom, while encouraging their audience to live freer creative lives, aids the communication of resistance while allowing other themes to stay alive. The intent is free and the interpretations by an audience are free. Free from the notion that these works were made only to make money, or to deal with someone else's pre-ordained politics. This does not mean that the work was not political, or sellable, it is that the initial intent was individually subjective and not created as a means to make money or do another's political bidding.

## 7.2 The Phenomenological Bubble and Bridge

The research has demonstrated the value of a phenomenological lens alongside traditional historical and theoretical frameworks. The phenomenological lens sets aside those theories that effectively negate the possibility of work that resists anything or attempts to say anything *new* or *authentic*. As well as being an appropriate method of analysis that allies its methods to practices and theories of the Poveristi, the epochē creates a conceptual bubble. A bubble that protects both the researcher and artists from the theories that argue avant-garde movements are not even possible. Furthermore, the bubble shields the viewer from the argument that commodification will catch up on any *authentic* artwork. The bubble protects art and artists from theory and rhetoric, which attempts to stunt, stall and stop creativity altogether under the conceptual armour of cultural criticism, financial realism and negation of the privileged perspective. This bubble allows a revaluation of the work in its own right as opposed to the more linear historicisation of art, that can in principle, negate many layers of meaning and communication. A mindful, bracketed-off analysis of Arte Povera allows a resituating of work for a contemporary culture. How this work is relatable and re-evaluated for its merits (and failings), may then be applied subjectively by anyone who wishes to do so.



The bridge occurs intrinsically when the strata of contextualisation are combined with the experiences found when confronting and analysing Arte Povera through the phenomenological lens. This bridge can occur when we investigate into the shared knowledge and criticism of a work or movement and enrich the enquiry, by engraining what we know with the existential information learned by the bubble of phenomenological analysis. The process that has been described gives a fresh and innocent perspective to a chosen field of enquiry. Bridging the bubble to the context allows the researcher to then revalue and resituate a work or movement, in this case Arte Povera, into another context, such as the highly capitalist society of 2022.

The study finds that combining traditional methods of research with the fresh subjective standpoint of a phenomenological analysis gives the audience a rich interpretation of Arte Povera. Moreover, these techniques can continue to be undertaken until the art under analysis has many layers of meaning and because of the intrinsic nature of internal and external phenomenological enquiry, empathy and high quality of listening develop. The existential and humanistic concerns of the Poveristi when considered historically, culturally and phenomenologically, relate to many of the issues contemporary society is dealing with, such as: globalisation, global warming, environmental catastrophes, political and cultural imperialism. Arte Povera communicates as insightfully then as it does now when their work is viewed afresh.

The research attempted to reevaluate Arte Povera for a contemporary audience using a phenomenological lens and the question arises: Has this been achieved? The motivation behind the dissertation was to respect the Poveristi and use methods that related to the movement when exploring and reevaluating the work. The researcher, therefore, should not merely categorise or

translate such artworks for a contemporary audience or reader. Indeed, the theoretical environment surrounding Arte Povera has enlightened the research as to *showing* work rather than attempting a pedagogical interpretation. An interpretation that is translatory by a critic or researcher to a reader would contradict the philosophies and methods of Arte Povera and the critics who supported the avant-garde at the time, such as Carla Lonzi (1969/2017; 1969/2021), Germano Celant (Conte, 2020; Celant; 1969; 1971) and Susan Sontag (1965/2009). Essentially, this study has not transposed or resituated Arte Povera into a contemporary world overtly, but it *has* described a method for a researcher or audience member to subjectively interpret Arte Povera for themselves. This method will hold for a contemporary audience of Umberto Eco's 1962, of today's 2022 or for the future. The phenomenological bubble is democratic in nature and gives hope for anyone to reevaluate cultural artworks, for themselves. The research has achieved a combination of traditional methods of interpretation, phenomenological analysis and inter-subjective communication, encouraging deeper understanding between the audience and artist.

Further research of Arte Povera through the lens of phenomenology would be enlightening as to the understanding of Poveristi art itself, but more importantly, it would shed light onto a reevaluation of subjective interpretations of artworks entirely. Future research into fresh subjective phenomenological analyses by many and varied members of society, crossing cultural, economic and political boundaries would give insight into the value of such methods of interpretation. A vital human form of communication that the Poveristi intended and worked towards.

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