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TOWARDS A POOR THEATER

Giulio Paolini's Scenographies in the 1970s

Prior to his involvement as a set designer for both television and theater—which arguably resulted in informing works such as his gathering together of an ensemble of thirty-two music stands displaying images of famous actors playing historical characters in *Apoteosi di Omero* (Apotheosis of Homer) of 1970–71 [ill. p. 665]—Giulio Paolini's interest in the phenomenology that foregrounds much of his later work began in the 1960s.[1] These include a series of investigations on

1. Giulio Paolini worked with Rai on several occasions, the first being the sets for *La fantastica storia di Don Chisciotte della Mancia e del suo scudiero Sancio Panza, inventata da Cervantes, ricostruita e rappresentata in uno studio televisivo da una compagnia di attori e musici con Ronzinante e l'Asino, animali veri* (The Fantastic Story of Don Quixote of La Mancha and his groom Sancho Panza, invented by Cervantes, reconstructed and performed in a television studio by a company of actors and musicians with Rocinante and the Donkey, as real animals) by Roberto Lerici, 1970.

paintings by artists such as Lorenzo Lotto, Diego Velázquez, Nicolas Poussin and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres that use photographic reproductions to establish a *mise en abyme* of the viewer's gaze, and, by extension, that of theartist. For example, in 1967, Paolini made *Giovane che guarda Lorenzo Lotto* (Young Man Looking at Lorenzo Lotto), a 1:1 scale photographic inversion of Lotto's painting *Portrait of a Youth* of 1505, now in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, in which the spatial, temporal and relational aspects of the original portrait painting are reversed simply by the title Paolini gives to his work. Now, in Paolini's version, the gaze no longer belongs to the artist (Lotto) painting the anonymous sitter (the youth), but vice versa. Paolini, who was twenty-seven when he made this work, was perhaps also invoking himself as the young man regarding Lotto in the new title ascribed to the image, and in the process collapsing time between when this exchange of gazes first produced the painting (1505), when Paolini's scrutiny of it produced a new work (1967), and of course, when the viewer looks at the work now. As Paolini commented on this work: "I wanted to restore the moment in which Lotto executed the painting, and transform, for a

moment, everyone who looks at the photographic reproduction into Lorenzo Lotto."[2] Furthermore, Paolini commented on this collapse of the roles: "I change my identity: from being a person in the guise of a painter, I become an author in the guise of a viewer."[3] This reversal of gazes recalls the work of Paolini's fellow Arte Povera artist Giuseppe Penone, and his photographic documentation of his action *To Reverse One's Eyes* of 1970, consisting of wearing mirrored contact lenses to invert the scopic relationship by rendering himself blind and offering the viewer his sight instead, effectively turning his own eyes—of which a commonplace description is the "windows of the soul"—into mirrors instead. This consideration of spectatorship is completed by Paolini's pendant to *Giovane che guarda Lorenzo Lotto*, titled *Controfigura (critica del punto di vista)* (Stand-in: A Critique of the Viewpoint) of 1981, which uses photomontage to replace the eyes of the sitter in Lotto's portrait with the artist's own, so that the author of the artwork is now scrutinizing himself.

Even prior to *Giovane che guarda Lorenzo Lotto*, which I would argue is something of a breakthrough in Paolini's practice, he had already produced a series of works in the first half of the 1960s that examined both the obverse and reverse, recto and verso of a given painting or tableau, as part of a continuing examination of the relationship be-

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It was directed by Carlo Quartucci, with music by Giorgio Gaslini. Rai aired the first of five episodes on April 10, 1970, and in 1971 Paolini was awarded the Telecamera d'oro (Golden Camera) for the set designs for this play. In 1970 he also collaborated on *Alessandro nelle Indie* (Alexander in the Indies) by Pietro Metastasio, directed by Vittorio Sermonti, produced by Rai, while further collaborations on Rai productions with Carlo Quartucci were the sets and costumes for *Finestra* (Window) by Massimo Bontempelli, 1971, and *L'ultimo spettacolo di Nora Helmer in "Casa di bambola" di Ibsen* (Nora Helmer's Last Show in "A Doll's House" by Ibsen) by Roberto Lerici and Carlo Quartucci, 1977–78 (broadcast in 1980), with music by Giovanna Marini.

2. Giulio Paolini in *Idem* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1975), p. 29, quoted in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera* (London/New York: Phaidon, 1999), p. 133.

3. See *Giulio Paolini: To Be or Not to Be*, exh. cat., Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, July 19–September 14, 2014 (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2014), p. 110.

tween painting and photographic reproductions, and of the support and stretcher of a painting as the subject of the work itself. This was part of a broader questioning of painting that was taking place in Italy and elsewhere in the early 1960s, not unlike Lucio Fontana's series of slashed canvases that opened up the picture plane and imparted a sculptural depth to an otherwise flat, planar surface or image.[4] These include *E* of 1963, which consists of a photographic color reproduction of Bronzino's portrait of Eleanor of Toledo (1556) mounted on a Masonite panel with a collage on the reverse of a grid with the letter "E" drawn in.

Around 1967–68, however, Paolini began a series of works based on black and white photographic reproductions of old master paintings, of which *Young Man Looking at Lorenzo Lotto* was the first to question spectatorship and phenomenology, as well of course as the idea of "authorship," a concept that was then being questioned from a literary and post-structuralist perspective by Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author," first published in *Aspen 5+6* in 1967, and continued and challenged by Michel Foucault in his text of 1969, "What Is an Author?".[5] While there isn't scope in this essay to rehearse their two well-known respective arguments and positions, their concurrence with Paolini's grappling with similar philosophical questions and issues in the realm of the visual arts, both old and new, is noteworthy. For example, here we should mention Paolini's *L'ultimo quadro di Diego Velázquez* (The Last Painting by Diego Velázquez) of 1968, which examines a detail (now reversed and enlarged) of the reflection of King Philip IV and Queen Mariana of Spain in the mirror in the background of the painting of Velázquez' *Las Meninas* of 1656 as they sit for the painter, so we see them from his point of view. Paolini made this work the year after Michel Foucault's book *Les mots and les choses* (*The Order of Things*) of 1966 was published in Italian in 1967, which analyzed taxonomies and classifications of knowledge and contained an essay on Velázquez' *Las Meninas*.[6]

Paolini's *L'invenzione di Ingres* (The Invention of Ingres) of 1968 conflates and superimposes Raphael's *Self-Portrait* of 1504–06 with Ingres's *Self-Portrait* of Raphael of 1824, a visual and historical palimpsest which foregrounds (quite literally) the idea of copying and reproduction: here, the conflation of a copy (by Ingres) of an original (by Raphael) creates a third, and entirely original work (by Paolini). In terms of Paolini's analysis and dissection of the auratic presence of the original through photographic reproduction, we should remember that Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Era of its Mechanical Reproducibility* was translated into Italian and published in 1966.

Paolini's *Lo Studio* of 1968, like his *Last Painting by Diego Velázquez* from the same year, reproduces the detail of the painter (probably a self-portrait) in the center of Johannes

4. For more on this subject, see *Recto/Verso*, exh. cat., Fondazione Prada, Milan, December 3, 2015–February 14, 2016 (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2015).

5. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," trans. Richard Howard, in *Aspen 5+6*, Brian O'Doherty (ed.), special issue on Minimalism, 1967. "What Is an Author?" was a lecture on literary theory given by Michel Foucault at the Collège de France on February 22, 1969.

6. Originally published as *Les Mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

Vermeer's *The Art of Painting* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) of 1665–68—also known variously as *The Allegory of Painting* or *Painter in his Studio*—doing just that, beginning to paint the female figure we see in the background of the studio in the painting, thus creating another *mise en abyme*, one that now analyses the relationship between painting and photography. A similar comparison to the one in Vermeer's painting was provided by Italo Calvino's perceptive and eloquent text on Paolini written in 1975, called *La Squadratura*, or "The Framing Up." As Calvino comments: "The works exhibited by the painter are not strictly paintings: they are moments in the relationship between whoever makes the painting, whoever looks at the painting and that material object which is the painting."[7]

Paolini's *Autoritratto* (Self-Portrait) of 1968 superimposes a 1:1 photographic reproduction of Poussin's self-portrait of 1650 onto another reproduction of the same self-portrait. As Paolini commented on this work: "It is futile and vain to invent something of one's own [...] if it can be discovered in the past." Compare this point of view to Donald Judd, who in a 1966 interview, published in 1968 (the same year as Paolini's work), declared that he was "totally uninterested in European art" and that it was "over": "We recognize that the world is ninety percent chance and accident. Earlier painting was saying that there's more order in the scheme of things than we admit now, like Poussin saying order underlines nature. Poussin's order is anthropomorphic. Now there are no preconceived notions."[8]

Ingres's *Apotheosis of Homer* of 1827, now in the Louvre, is the reference for Paolini's installation of 1970–71, whose main components are a typescript with a list of forty-five characters from the news and history played by theatrical or film actors, with a commentary by the artist written in Italian, French and English, and thirty-two photographs (two of which in color) of some of the figures/actors cited.[9] As Paolini puts it, "*Apotheosis of Homer* is a tribute to Ingres's painting, but it overturns the work's substance. Ingres depicted an assembly of historical figures in an allegorical scene. Here, according to the same screenplay, I have chosen every historical period, with characters interpreted by modern actors: Socrates, Leonardo, Alexander the Great, Rimbaud, in their theatrical or cinematographic representations. In order to underscore the discordance between the times, places and stories, the music stands (which invite us to become further interpreters) are neither univocal nor unidirectional: they are arranged without a center, without a particular point of reference."[10]

All of these works by Paolini must be set into the broader artistic and cultural context and developments in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s. Arte Povera, the group with which

7. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, cit., p. 260.

8. *Ivi*, p. 156.

9. A full description of the work is available on the artist's website (www.fondazionepaolini.org), which includes the fact that until the spring of 1972 the work was presented with its elements collected in an album and/or arranged on a table, whereas from May 1972 Paolini invested the installation with a theatrical nature that has remained the usual set-up for the work (the number of music stands and the use of the recording both depend on the exhibition itself).

10. Paolini interviewed by Arianna Di Genova, "Citazioni d'artista," in *Il Manifesto*, March 10, 1996.

he was affiliated, arose from the lively relationship between both collaborative and competing cities whose rivalry stretches back to the Renaissance and beyond. These urban centers were not those of the Papal States of Rome, the Republic of Venice or the princely city-state of Florence, but the automobile capital of the country—Turin (or "Fiat-ville" and "Fiat-nam" as it was variously know in the 1960s and 1970s), Milan, the epicenter of the *miracolo italiano*, and "Hollywood on the Tiber," as Rome was often referred to in this period. Whereas the less cinematic city of Milan remained, along with Turin, the main artistic center in Italy with strong links to Paris, Rome on the other hand attracted American émigré artists, amongst them Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson and Cy Twombly, perhaps lured by lurid images of Cinecittà, such as those in Federico Fellini's film *La Dolce Vita* of 1960 (deconstructed posters for which would subsequently be lacerated by Mimmo Rotella).[11] This was also very much a two-way dialogue—

for example, 1964 also saw the release of Sergio Leone's "spaghetti Western" *Per un pugno di dollari* (*A Fistful of Dollars*). Hijacking this innately American genre, which had been banned under Mussolini but which flooded into Italy after the end of the Second World War, Leone turned his experience making "sword and sandals" films for American directors at Cinecittà in Rome into a guerrilla tactic of filmmaking, which appropriated and then exported back a distinctly Italian take on a very central strand of American identity.[12]

If the northern cities of Milan and Turin exemplified the industry propelling the Italian economic miracle, Rome was a city of spectacle.[13] The 1950s in Rome drew international figures like Twombly, Rauschenberg and the curator James Johnson Sweeney, who would go on to promote Burri in America.[14] Twombly's arrival in the Eternal City was soon followed by visits from figures such as the Sonnabends, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline and Mark Rothko. The burgeoning American expatriate community in Rome during the 1950s was perhaps enticed by Hollywood romances such as *Roman Holiday* (1953), which immortalized the Eternal City for an international audience.[15]

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11. For more on the Rome–New York axis, see Germano Celant (ed.), *Roma–New York, 1948–1964* (New York: Murray and Isabella Rayburn Foundation, 1993). Mimmo Rotella's collages of Cinecittà posters were featured in "The Art of Assemblage" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1961, which attempted to reconcile American artists with their European contemporaries under the unifying theme of the utilization of everyday materials, and again at the "New Realists" exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York in 1962. See *Mimmo Rotella: Rétrospective* (Nice: Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, 1999), p. 137. See also William Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961). Lastly, the lure of cinematic images of Rome is nodded to in Jean-Luc Godard's seminal Nouvelle Vague film of 1960, *A Bout de Souffle* (*Breathless*), in which Jean-Paul Belmondo tries to entice Jean Seberg away to Rome, simply referred to as "Cinecittà."

12. Christopher Frayling, *Once Upon A Time in Italy: The Westerns of Sergio Leone* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005).

13. See Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, Claudia Terenzi (eds.), *Roma 1948–1959: Arte, cronaca e cultura dal neorealismo alla dolce vita* (Rome: Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 2002).

14. See Germano Celant (ed.), *op. cit.*

15. *Roman Holiday* was filmed on location and at the Cinecittà studios in Rome and released in August 1953. The film starred Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn, who won the Academy Award in 1954 for Best Actress.

The Piazza del Popolo group, active in Rome during the 1960s, was also a crucial precursor to Arte Povera, which explored the implications of a return to figuration after the Informale.[16] The presence of the Rai television studios, which had been broadcasting since 1955, and Cinecittà, where both Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini created modern parables of life in the capital and where American studios came to "Hollywood on the Tiber" to recreate ancient Rome, cast a shadow on painting in Rome during the 1960s, giving the art scene a closer link to this "society of the spectacle." Based around the twin focuses of Plinio De Martiis's Galleria La Tartaruga, and the traditional meeting point for left-wing intellectuals, Caffè Rosati, both situated in Piazza del Popolo, those affiliated with the Piazza del Popolo group included Franco Angeli, Tano Festa, Giosetta Fioroni, Jannis Kounellis, Sergio Lombardi, Francesco Lo Savio, Renato Mambor, Fabio Mauri, Mimmo Rotella, Pino Pascali, Mario Schifano, Cesare Tacchi and Giuseppe Uncini. Although marked by a new optimism engendered by the *miracolo italiano* of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the escalating anti-American-ism caused by such events as the Vietnam War can also be detected in the works of the group. As Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev observes: "Parallel to the rise of an ideology of austere morality and interest in collectivism, supported by the political left, Italy had decisively entered into the Western sphere, with rapid growth in consumerism and,

by the end of the 1950s, television, glossy magazines, Hollywood, and other media shaping public consciousness."[17]

As Arte Povera emerged as the dominant tendency in the late 1960s, allusions to impoverishment and asceticism, which were so critical to Germano Celant's characterizing of the emerging tendency in 1967, were echoed by Paolini's comments in an interview with Carla Lonzi published in the periodical *Collage* in May 1967, in which he sought to pursue a "thought-out and manifest impoverishing" through his work and called for the necessity of "poverty" in art.[18] Earlier that year, in February 1967, Ludwik Flaszen, co-founder of the Teatr Laboratorium of Wroclaw, delivered the lecture "After the Avant-Garde" at the Congress of Young Writers in Paris, which illustrated the ideological principles of Jerzy Grotowski's manifesto *Towards a Poor Theater*.[19] Grotowski's manifesto was translated into Italian and published as "Verso un teatro povero" in the first issue of the journal *Teatro* in September 1967, one month before Celant would draw upon the term for his exhibition at Genoa's Galleria La Bertesca, "Arte Povera e Im-spazio."[20]

This theatrical element present in Arte Povera was therefore derived from developments in contemporary theater,

16. See Andrea Tugnoli, *La Scuola di Piazza del Popolo* (Florence: Maschietto Editore, 2004).

17. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Thrust into the Whirlwind: Italian Art before Arte Povera," in *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972*, exh. cat., Tate Modern, London, May 31–August 19, 2001 (London/Minneapolis: Tate Modern/Walker Art Center 2001) pp. 21–39: 33.

18. Carla Lonzi, "Giulio Paolini," in *Collage*, no. 7, May 1967, pp. 47–49.

19. See Giovanni Lista, *Arte Povera* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2006), p. 106.

20. Jerzy Grotowski, "Verso un teatro povero," trans. Giulia Fadini, with comments and testimonies by Ludwik Flaszen, Michael Kustov and Roger Planchon in *Teatro*, no. 1, spring/summer 1967, pp. 16–24.

stemming from Antonin Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty," made manifest by Judith Malina and Julian Beck's "Living Theater" (who were active in Italy during this time and whom Celant recalls seeing in Genoa in 1963; they were also influential on Pasolini) and of course, Grotowsky's "Poor Theater."[21] Celant's adoption of the term Arte Povera drew explicitly on Grotowsky's concept, who staged many of his early performances in Italy in the 1960s, and settled permanently there in 1970. Grotowsky sought to impoverish theater by returning it to its original role as a cathartic and collective experience. As he said in 1965, "Theater must admit its limits. If it cannot be richer than film, then let it be poorer. If it cannot be as lavish as television, than let it be ascetic. If it cannot create an attraction on a technical level, then let it give up all artificial technique. All that is then left is a 'holy' actor in a poor theater."[22] Celant's essay for the exhibition "Arte Povera–Im spazio" in September 1967 showed his debt to Grotowsky's aesthetic in his conceptualization of Arte Povera: "What has happened [...] the commonplace has entered the sphere of art. The insignificant has begun to exist—indeed, it has imposed itself. Physical presence and behavior have become art [...] Cinema, theater and the visual arts assert their authority as anti-presence [...] They eliminate from their inquiry all which may seem

mimetic reflection and representation or linguistic custom in order to attain a new kind of art, which, to borrow from the theater of Grotowsky, one may call 'poor.'"[23]

Parallel to this were the films of Pier Paolo Pasolini, which provided a supposedly sacrilegious reinterpretation of Il vangelo secondo Matteo (The Gospel According to Matthew) in 1964, a contemporary take on the life of Saint Francis in Uccellacci e uccellini (The Hawks and the Sparrows) of 1966, a parody of bourgeois religious values in Teorema (Theorem) in 1968, and finally Marxist retellings of medieval tales, like Boccaccio's Il Decameron (The Decameron) of 1971, I racconti di Canterbury (The Canterbury Tales) from 1972, and lastly, Il fiore delle Mille e una notte (Arabian Nights) from 1974. Add to this the satirical mystery plays of Dario Fo, such as Mistero buffo (The Comic Mysteries) of 1969, which used this medieval form to deliver a harsh and very contemporary social critique of Italy, and the renunciation of capitalism for an idealized and ascetic medieval purity manifested itself both within and without Arte Povera.[24]

21. See Germano Celant, Arte Povera (Milan: Electa, [1969] 1985), p. 22.

22. Jerzy Grotowsky, "The Theater's New Testament," in Towards a Poor Theater (Holstebro: Grotowsky and Odin Theatrets Forlag, 1968), pp. 32–33, 41–42. First published in Italian in Eugenio Barba, Alla ricerca del teatro perduto (Padua: Marsilio, 1965). See also Jerzy Grotowsky, Per un teatro povero (Rome: Bulzoni, 1970), cited in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Arte Povera, cit., p. 25.

23. Germano Celant, Arte povera Im spazio (Genoa: La Bertesca, 1967), cited in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Arte Povera, cit., pp. 220–221.

24. At the same time as Arte Povera's engagement with medieval themes, the political playwright Dario Fo was adopting characters from the Commedia dell'Arte tradition, such as Arlecchino and the giullare, to find figures from the past with which to engage with the political present. For more on this see Joseph Farrell, "Dario Fo: Zanni and Giullare," in Christopher Cairns (ed.), The Commedia dell'arte: From the Renaissance to Dario Fo (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), pp. 315–28, esp. p. 317. As Tony Mitchell writes: "A common misconception is that the theatrical traditions of farce and comedy in Fo's theater stem from the commedia dell'arte, but the giullari are essentially precommedia, the

Parallel to this were initiatives like the Deposito d'Arte Presente (Deposit of Current Art, or DDP), founded in Turin in 1967 by the collector Marcello Levi along with Piero Gilardi, Michelangelo Pistoletto and the gallerist Gian Enzo Sperone.[25] Located in an old factory, the DDP became an important place for many of the Arte Povera artists to meet and exhibit and was a lively venue for discussions and performances. It was here, in November 1968, that Pasolini was invited by the Teatro Stabile to premier his new play *Orgia* (*Orgy*), with a stage set designed by the artist Mario Ceroli, testifying to the interdisciplinary and reciprocal relationship between art, cinema and theater during this time.[26] And again it was Teatro Stabile that produced plays with set designs and costumes by Paolini, such as *Bruto II* by Vittorio Alfieri (1969) and *Atene Anno Zero* by Francesco Della Corte (1970).[27]

Some of these interdisciplinary discussions can be traced back to the early 1950s, and the then dominant Italian cinematic style of *neo-realismo*, as developed in Roberto Rossellini's desolate *Roma, Città Aperta* (*Rome: Open City*) of 1945, Vittorio De Sica's harsh *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*) of 1948, and Luchino Visconti's *La terra trema* (*The Earth Trembles*), from the same year, which used a cast of villagers and fishermen from a Sicilian costal town, speaking in native dialect with a distinctly Marxian overtone, was beginning to feel untrendy.[28] As Italy gradually emerged from the devastation of World War II, filmmakers like Roberto Rossellini instead turned their attention to questions of the psychology of modern life in postwar Italy and questions of history. As Rossellini commented in 1954, "You can't go on making films about heroism among the rubble forever."[29]

Despite its engagement with the natural world, Arte Povera often had similar degrees of remove and artificiality as cinema from the 1960s and 1970s and had a dialectical relationship with the sort of Realism (with an emphatic capital "R") sponsored by the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, or PCI) and exemplified by

popular, unofficial mouthpieces of the peasant population, while the performers of the *commedia* are regarded by Fo as the professional 'court jesters' officially recognized by the ruling class." Tony Mitchell, *Dario Fo, People's Court Jester* (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 11–12.

25. See Robert Lumley's enlightening essay, "Arte Povera in Turin: The Intriguing Case of the Deposito d'Arte Presente," in *Marcello Levi: Portrait of a Collector. From Futurism to Arte Povera* (London: Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 2005), pp. 89–107.

26. However, the artists of the DDP, feeling they had not been consulted about this event and practically evicted for it, retaliated by locking Pasolini in a room. After this event, many of them decided not to reinstall their works and the DDP closed shortly afterwards. *Ivi*, p. 100.

27. *Bruto II* (Brutus II) was directed by Gualtiero Rizzi and produced by the Teatro Stabile, Turin; the first performances took place in Turin, Teatro Gobetti, March 13, 14 and 16, 1969. *Atene Anno Zero* (Athens Year Zero), two acts adapted from Attic texts from the 4th century BC, directed by Renzo Giovampietro, music by Mikis Theodorakis, costumes by Giulio Paolini in collaboration with Angelo

Delle Piane, produced by the Teatro Stabile, Turin. In the same years, Paolini also collaborated with the Teatro Regio in Turin and Teatro Comunale dell'Opera in Genoa. For a complete list of Paolini's set designs, see Fondazione Giulio and Anna Paolini's website.

28. For more on this, see Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1983).

29. Maurice Scherer and Francois Truffaut, "Interview with Roberto Rossellini," in *Film Culture* 1 (1955), p. 12; originally published in *Cahiers du Cinema*, no. 37, 1954.

the paintings of Renato Guttuso.[30] Piero Gilardi may have made works aping riverbeds and plant forms, but they are always made of polystyrene; while Pino Pascali's irrigation channels were made from steel containers replete with artificially dyed water. A similar aesthetic is felt in Felllini's *Casanova* (1976), with its deliberate mannerism, where the water in the Venetian lagoon is substituted by a shaken plastic sheet as a riposte to the real landscapes of the Neo-Realists. The important exhibition held at L'Attico gallery in Rome in 1967, "Fuoco, Immagine, Acqua, Terra" (Fire, Image, Water, Earth), included works by Pascali and Kounellis that focused on materiality and the theatrical potential of the object.[31] Kounellis exhibited *Senza titolo (Margherita di fuoco)* (Untitled [Daisy of Fire]), which saw a propane flame bellowing dramatically from a metal flower, while Pascali showed his *Pozzanghere* (Puddles) which employed water in shallow plastic containers and *Un metro cubo di terra* and *Due metri cubo di terra* (One Cubic Meter of Earth, and Two Cubic Meters of Earth), all of 1967, exploring the overlap between nature and artifice.

Michael Fried's dismissal of Minimalism's manipulative "stage presence" in his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood" is well-known, but the inherently performative aspect of some post-minimalist sculpture such as Arte Povera is

30. Agnès van der Plaesten, *La Politique culturelle et artistique du PCI. Les arts plastiques, 1956–1973* (Florence: Doctorat de l'Institut Universitaire Européen, 1992). See also Lara Pucci, *Picturing the Worker: Guttuso, Visconti, De Santis and the Partito Comunista Italiano, c. 1944–1953*, Ph.D. thesis (London: Courtauld Insitute of Art, 2007).

31. This was discussed in conversation with Fabio Sargentini, Rome, December 22, 2005. See also *Fuoco, Immagine, Acqua, Terra* (Rome: Galleria L'Attico, 1967).

less discussed.[32] Consider the careful staging of Richard Serra's precarious *Props* series of iron slabs (1968–) and Giovanni Anselmo's *Torsione*, also of 1968, where a length of material is wrapped around an iron bar repeatedly, its folds so compressed and violent that it threatens to unravel at any moment. These works represent a battle against opposing forces, such as gravity and weight, movement and stasis.[33] Much post-minimalist sculpture gains agency and its potentive power through its static yet implicit threat to uncoil or fall apart before the viewer. This radical rethinking of the *tableau vivant*, with work that accrues significance through the promise of being reanimated in a perpetual theater of deferred possibility, could fruitfully be related to Giorgio Agamben's formulation of potentiality.[34] Arte Povera's theatricality of impoverishment is manifested by the fact that both Pascali and Kounellis

32. See Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," republished in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), pp. 116–147. Originally published in *Artforum*, vol. V, no. 10, June 1967, pp. 12–23.

33. However, as Benjamin Buchloh has observed, "What distinguishes Anselmo's work from that of his American peers [...] is first of all the choice of materials that articulate an extreme opposition of texture and tactility (i.e. fabric and steel). But it is also an opposition of temporalities, since the display of the fabric's intense torsion inevitably reminds the viewer of the history of Italian Baroque sculpture. At the same time the foregrounding of these forces makes the viewer recognize the conditions and materials that actually govern sculptural production in an age of industrial technology and scientific knowledge." Buchloh, in Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism: 1945 To The Present* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), pp. 512–513.

34. See Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, edited and translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 1999.

were taught by the artist and stage designer Toti Scialoja as evidenced by works such as Pascali's *Teatrino* (*Little Theater*) of 1964, Kounellis' subsequent work as a stage designer, along with Fabro and Paolini, and Pistoletto's radical street theater collective Lo Zoo. All of these artists sought to present, rather than represent, reality instead of realism, with the heavy freight of ideological and political baggage those concepts carried in postwar Italy. Not everyone sought to subscribe to this pauperist position, however. In 1960, the landmark first Italian industrial documentary was released. Directed by the emphatically communist filmmaker Joris Ivens, and assisted by Paolo Taviani, Valentino Orsini, and Tinto Brass, *L'Italia non è un paese povero* (*Italy Is Not a Poor Country*), was commissioned by ENI (the Italian State Oil and Gas Company) and featured striking juxtapositions of images of modern and industrialized Italy emblematized by an oil refinery, Venetian children playing in the streets, and Lucanian peasants working in the fields.

Celant's framing of Arte Povera drew its political references not from the rhetoric of General Giáp and the ideas of Marshall McLuhan and Herbert Marcuse.[35] Contemporaneous with Celant's *Notes for a Guerrilla War* was Umberto Eco's essay *Per una guerriglia semiologica* ("Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare"), given as a conference paper in 1967 and published the following year, which also invoked the theories recently popularized by the

translation and publication the previous year of Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* in Italy as *La comunicazione di massa*.[36] Like Celant, Eco also explored the revolutionary potential of a new society of the spectacle, under the homogeneous auspices of mass media, but polarized, rather than unified, by its geographical and economic schism: "In countries like Italy, where the TV message is developed by a centralized industrial Source and reaches simultaneously a northern industrial city and a remote rural village of the South, social settings divided by centuries of history, this phenomenon occurs daily."[37] Eco continued: "For a Milanese bank clerk a TV ad for a refrigerator represents a stimulus to buy, but for an unemployed peasant in Calabria the same image means the confirmation of a world of prosperity that doesn't belong to him and that he must conquer. This is why I believe TV advertising in depressed countries acts as a revolutionary message."[38] Umberto Eco's closing remarks revealed a certain optimism about the potential for social chance in "non-industrial forms of communication" to challenge this hegemony of the industrial and technological society as sowing the seeds of a future "communications guerrilla warfare."[39]

35. Marcuse's *Eros and Civilisation* (London: Vintage Books, 1955) was translated and published as *Eros e civiltà*, trans. Lorenzo Bassi (Turin: Einaudi, 1964).

36. Marshall McLuhan, *La comunicazione di massa*, trans. Giovanna Bettini (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1966).

37. Umberto Eco, "Per una guerriglia semiologica," in *La Struttura assente* (Milan: Bompiani, 1968). Translated as "Towards A Semiological Guerrilla Warfare," in *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (London/San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1986), p. 140.

38. *Ivi*, p. 141.

39. *Ivi*, p. 143.

In 1973, Ettore Scola made a film called *Trevico–Torino: Viaggio nel Fiat-nam* (*Trevico-Turin: Voyage in Fiatnam*). Scola's low-budget feature—part drama, part documentary, and funded by Unitelefilm (the PCI's film collective)—followed the struggles of a migrant southern Italian laborer who relocates to Turin to work on the Fiat production line.[40] The plot and geographical journey of the film weren't new—indeed, by this time the trajectory of the protagonist was becoming a cliché after Visconti's similar *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (*Rocco and His Brothers*, 1960)—and neither was the combination of narrative and newsreel footage, which Pasolini had done in his *Uccellacci e uccellini* (*The Hawks and the Sparrows*, 1966), intercutting his Marxist parable of the life of Saint Francis with documentary images of Palmiro Togliatti's funeral procession in Rome in 1964. What was striking about the film was the way it documented the transition from what had jokingly been referred to as "Fiat-ville" in the 1960s (as the Turin-based automobile company became the economic dynamo behind the *miracolo italiano*) to a city tinged with the apocalyptic imagery of Vietnam, as strikes and social dissent engulfed it. The film's title implied that Turin, the epicenter of Arte Povera, was now witnessing the conflation of the Italian car and the American war, as the political concerns of the Left in Italy became increasingly internalized and the focus shifted from the international implications of the Cold War to the national concern of a possible civil war during the "Anni di piombo," or "Years of lead."

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40. For a review of the film, see Goffredo Fofi, "Qualche film," *Quaderni Piacentini*, no. 50, July 1973, pp. 205–207.