

SILVIA BOTTINELLI

## Space Launch from the Laundry Room.

Grazia Toderi's *Soap* (1993)

### Home space and outer space, overlapped

The body is spinning, water all around it. Unresponsive and rigid, it hits surfaces producing sudden, menacing sounds. Yet, an indelible smile shines on its face. The artificial expression cannot change, it remains molded and painted on. In fact, the whole body is made of plastic. It is the doll body of Ken, Barbie's friend. This Ken is the protagonist of artist Grazia Toderi's (b. 1963) video *Soap* (1993) [fig. 1; fig. 2], in which she films the unclothed figurine floating inside a washing machine during a 30-minute cycle. Despite the title of the piece, no detergent's foam appears to coat Ken's inert limbs, which are battered by drips of clear water and dragged by the spiraling waves produced by the drum's movement. The drum's metallic material glitters like a starry sky. Initially, the soundscape is unedited: the viewer hears the mechanical buzz produced by the machine and the swishing of the water, accompanied by the abrupt bangs of Ken's collision with the drum's metal surfaces. Then, the voice of Maria Callas, singing the aria *Casta Diva* from Vincenzo Bellini's opera *Norma*, emerges in the background and intensifies the video's dramatic tone. Notably, the aria is dedicated to the moon.<sup>1</sup>

I argue that the simple domestic setting of the video elicits cultural, social, political, and gender critiques, as shown by the comparisons with postwar art and visual culture established by this article. Toderi's work attacks stereotypical ideas of gender role separation through consistent deconstruction of domestic objects and activities, which gain a central role in her early iconography. This deconstruction is not an end in itself: rather, it allows the artist to affirm her interest in broader themes, including the tension between fragility and endurance, impotence and power, entrapment and openness.

*Soap* points to domestic imagery both through the laundry machine setting and the implicit reference to television. The porthole of the washing machine

frames Ken's figure, recalling the porthole of a spacecraft that frames the astronaut's body; the scene echoes space-travel footage. Toderi positions the viewer intentionally as someone watching television, evoking a landmark moment of her own childhood: witnessing, when she was six years old, the 1969 moon landing on a TV screen. In an interview with art historian and critic Stefano Chiodi, Toderi expands on her fascination with space travel as mediated by the television:

I think that my generation was the first to see significant and impressive events like the landing on the moon on television; events through which we have known an extraterrestrial space, of different physical laws, for a child even more fantastical, more important. That has created a memory that for the first time was not only held by the individual or the family, but belonged contemporaneously to many people in the world. This for me has been one of the reasons why I chose video as a medium; when I began I was fascinated by two things: the first was the fact that it could be potentially broadcast in all the houses in the world, a stupendous potential; the second was that in effect it was not an object but a transmission of light.<sup>2</sup>

Watching the landing on the moon from home in 1969 triggered the artist's lifetime interest in space exploration and its effect on humans. The astronaut, in particular, is a human who models a certain physical and psychological perfection. The artist writes that the astronaut is:

heroic explorer [...] whose gaze in orbit, the most solitary and distanced that ever existed, is the only gaze to embrace the whole planet earth. In February 1992, I was very impressed by the news of the Soviet astronaut Krikalev who remained in orbit for almost one year due to the fall of the Soviet empire.<sup>3</sup>

Here, the artist refers to the story by science journalist Giovanni Caprara titled *1992. Odissea nello Spazio* (1992. *A Space Odyssey*), which was published in the daily paper *Il Corriere della Sera* [fig. 3].<sup>4</sup> The article describes USSR astronaut Volkov Krikalev as superhuman, relying on his endurance for survival during a long mission on the MIR space station. His trip, which launched from Kazakhstan and was supposed to last for five months, was prolonged due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union between 1991 and 1992. As a consequence of this political transition, Kazakhstan stopped being part of the USSR and became independent. The new country nationalized the launching stations located on its territory, including the one on which Krikalev's mission was supposed to land back.

For Toderi, the idealism and the hardships associated with the astronaut are embodied by Ken's plastic figurine in *Soap*. Toderi likens Ken's body in the sealed laundry machine during its wash cycle to the astronaut's encapsulation

in the spacecraft during a mission. Ken's journey inside the washer illustrates the forces at play in space, the distortion of forms and colors affected by centrifugal force in particular.

### **Masculine perfection made vulnerable**

Toderi maintains: "Ken was a little contemporary 'kouros'. He embodied the popular and serial representation of a masculine and ideally perfect human body".<sup>5</sup> Like a Greek statue, the doll's proportioned and muscular body could be seen as an ideal of beauty and a signifier strength, a physical perfection that the artist attributes to the astronaut as well.<sup>6</sup>

Despite its supposed perfection, the doll's body appears vulnerable and out of control. The artist claims: "I was looking for the possibility of inverting a stereotyped role. I thought it was necessary to offer the image of a new man, finally even fragile and vulnerable".<sup>7</sup>

Such vulnerability is underlined by layered and overlapping associations that the artist establishes with Ken's figurine, where both perfection and fragility emerge. In addition to a Greek *kouros*, Toderi's use of the idealized doll body brings to mind Leonardo's Vitruvian man, catapulted into the twentieth century. In her video, the male body is similarly inscribed within geometric perfection – the circular porthole, the cylindrical drum – yet the body loses its centrality, shuffled around by destabilizing and rhythmic movements.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, Ken's floating body may recall that of Ophelia, the female character of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, who drowns after learning the traumatic news that her lover Hamlet had murdered her father Polonius.<sup>9</sup> In a well-known representation by the Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais, Ophelia's internal struggles appear muted by her death, her body calmly floating in water [fig. 4]. By contrast, Toderi's Ken is shown in the midst of a dramatic fight with water, only temporarily paused in-between the spins of the laundry cycle [fig. 5]. We witness the violence of the machine and the stress on the immortal plastic body. The differences between Millais's painting and Toderi's video do not undermine Toderi's point: in *Soap*, Ken is shown in his naked vulnerability.

Such fragility is evident in other contemporaneous videos by Toderi. A clear example is *Mia Testa, Mio Cuore (My Head, My Heart, 1993)* [fig. 6], where the same Ken figurine, placed on a car's windshield, is repeatedly hit by the windshield wipers. The presence of water, the shimmering reflections of light, and the compulsive, repeated violence inferred by machinery appear in both videos. One important difference between them is that in *Soap* Ken's masculinity seems battered within the frame of a domestic space, often

associated with women's realm in the early 1990s, while in the latter he is on a car, stereotypically a man's domain.

### **Against commercials: Margherita Mulinello and Sole Blu**

In *Soap*, Toderi places Ken in a context that runs contrary to contemporaneous ideas about gender roles in the mainstream media. Examining contemporaneous commercials for domestic products casts light on the oversimplified ideas of gender role separation that were modeled by popular media representations. Such analysis also shows that Toderi's *Soap* points to and, simultaneously, positions itself in contrast with such televised models. From a methodological perspective, the comparison is triggered by medium as well as by the artist's acknowledgement that her generation was immersed in television programming, which became part of a shared imagery and culture. The artist has stated that part of her practice is based on the appropriation and elaboration upon televised images:

On the one hand there is the component of inspiration and love, frankly even a little cannibalistic if you will. I have also stolen televised images. I think that all that surrounds you creates a background and that one uses everything that one sees, that one meets.<sup>10</sup>

Given that the televised image is a constant reference for Toderi, this article analyzes *Soap* against contemporaneous commercials for washers or laundry machine detergents. For example, a 1989 commercial of Ariston's washer Margherita Mulinello hinges on close-ups of the drum dripping with water, in a slowed-down cascade of drops that is mirrored by portions of Toderi's video.<sup>11</sup> The advertisement abstracts, purifies, and beautifies the tedious encounter with dirty fabrics, an encounter that is inevitably intertwined with the real-life experience of loading the appliance. According to historian Enrica Asquer, in 1960s and 1970s, washing machine advertisements were championed by periodical publications as well as advertisers, all stressing that the mechanization of the home would allow women more time for other activities.<sup>12</sup> Whereas the feminist publication *Noi Donne* argued that appliances would free up time for engagement in the public sphere, and the architectural periodical *La Civiltà delle Macchine* hoped that women would be able to develop new roles as technically competent and modern subjects, advertisements emphasized that extra time should result in extra devotion to and care of family members. Such marketing approach continued into the 1980s and 1990s and is confirmed by the commercial for Ariston's Margherita Mulinello. The spot opens with brief segments shooting manicured hands

engaged in artistic activities, such as playing the flute, throwing a vase on a pottery wheel, and restoring an antique painting representing a child's face. The camera pauses on details of the washer and the washing process, before closing on the delicate hands caressing the face of a child, who resembles the painting's subject. In the background, a calm and reassuring male voice describes the washer as a "small, big revolution" that Ariston dedicates to "your woman's sensitivity".<sup>13</sup> Through visual associations between domestic care and artistic pursuits, the commercial suggests that chores are a creative endeavor. The centrality of the theme of creativity dovetails with marketing strategies initiated by a 1964 Barilla campaign;<sup>14</sup> fast forward fifteen years, the Ariston commercial continued to hinge on the idea of women's artistry, which, it claimed, was enabled by the purchase of advertised products. In addition, Ariston's commercial appropriated some of the core terms of the feminist struggle of the previous decade. As argued by many articles in this volume and shown by *Noi Donne's* aforementioned position regarding appliances, women activists and artists reclaimed spaces for themselves outside of the family dynamic and searched for women's own imagery outside of patriarchal structures.<sup>15</sup> The Ariston commercial domesticated their battle for independence: it is a male voice that offers a new, pre-packaged revolution to women, as if they could not fabricate their own; it is a male voice that makes assumptions about the modes of female expression. The commercial presents women's creativity as tied to traditional art mediums and to housework, as well as being informed by maternal love.

By contrast, Grazia Toderi's 1993 video *Soap* detaches the washer from any reference to house chores and expressions of love: the artist's images do not show any intention of caring for delicate clothing items, which are indeed removed from the picture to be replaced by Ken's figure. The doll is not caressed gently, rather it is violently battered by the laundry machine's cycle. Finally, Toderi's chosen expressive medium – video – is a departure from traditional ones. While Ariston's commercial depicts sculpture and painting as vehicles of female creativity, Toderi perceives them as male-centered. She argues:

I believed that it helped a lot to use a light medium like video, light in the material sense, light to be used, but also from the point of view of history, because anyway the histories of painting and sculpture have been very male-centered. Video, in the end, was born almost contemporaneously to the entrance of women into the art world. Working with a medium that did not force me to confront a strongly masculine footprint was very liberating for me.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, women artist using video needed to confront television as a producer of gendered messages. As a tool often controlled by male

marketers, it continued to infer women's dependence on man's strength and reassurance.

TV commercials of Sole detergents demonstrate this last point. Starting in 1984, Sole marketing campaigns associated a series of superheroes with Sole products: Sole Bianco, Sole Delicati, Sole Gocce and Sole Blu. Forming a team of superheroes, they were nonetheless linked to products meant for different purposes, from washing the dishes to washing clothes, and each championed a different color.<sup>17</sup> In multiple Sole Blu commercials, the script remained consistent: a male superhero flies into a domestic room, where a woman is in the process of loading the washer.<sup>18</sup> The superhero, dressed in a tight jumpsuit, declares that only he could help. Then he enters the washing machine's compartment and swims into the drum during the cycle, twirling among clothes, penetrating between their fibers, and removing spots and dirt. The woman character thanks the superhero for his unbeatable work: she could have not reached the same results on her own. The packaging of the Sole products themselves came with collectable plastic superhero figurines that recall Big Jim or Ken dolls and bring to mind the protagonist of *Soap* [fig. 7]. Yet, Toderi's video shows a very different figure: the male hero, the modern *kouros*, barely stays afloat inside the appliance.

### ***Soap* as in soap opera**

Critic Francesca Pasini underlines Toderi's sarcastic reference to representations of housework and women's domesticity, pointing to consumer culture beyond appliance advertising. Pasini maintains: "though the piece foregrounded the dullness of housework, it was not sufficient to silence the light, affectionate, but caustic irony surrounding Barbie and her 'soap opera'".<sup>19</sup> Soap operas are characterized by a cyclical structure, an amplified sense of drama, and an extremely slow pace, as pointed out by media scholar Enrico Menduni.<sup>20</sup> Toderi's *Soap* iterates all of the above characteristics, nonetheless removing any form of plot, narrative, and dialogue. In the 1980s and early 1990s, soap operas were becoming more and more popular in the schedule of private TV stations like Rete 4 in Italy.<sup>21</sup> This network was owned by the communications magnate Silvio Berlusconi, who founded the neoliberalist right-leaning political party Forza Italia in 1993 the same year when *Soap* was recorded. Berlusconi held prominent political positions – including that of prime minister – in the subsequent twenty years, igniting debates about the media's collusion with politics, conflict of interest, and the need for antitrust laws.<sup>22</sup> According to Toderi, the title *Soap*, with its reference to the kind of programming screened on private television, was a pun in

response to Berlusconi's rise to power.<sup>23</sup> Largely because of the flourishing of private stations, Italian television had shifted its mission from information to entertainment since the mid-1980s. The programming changed accordingly, fostering the flattening of all sorts of content – from soap operas to scientific outbreaks and everything in between – that took turns on the space of the TV screen. Similarly, in *Soap*, semantic references to juxtaposing narratives co-exist and overlap, as examined above: the choice of Ken – marketed as Barbie's boyfriend in popular advertisements – as *Soap*'s main character brings together the classical statue with the Renaissance man, the Shakespearian female character with the manly hero of space exploration, the soap-opera with the commercial.<sup>24</sup>

While public television (Radiotelevisione Italiana) strived to offer a balance of journalism, entertainment, and educational programming that the audience paid for through the submission of a yearly tax (canone), the financial model of private televisions relied on commercials.<sup>25</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s, Barbie commercials were frequently screened on such stations. The spots enacted children's play with the doll, her many gadgets, and her friends, who all enjoyed privileged, hetero-normative lifestyles: Barbie lived in a spacious villa complete with elevator, TV lounge, and kitchen equipped with top-notch appliances; she went to SPA parties and beauty salons, bathed in large and foamy tubs, and received expensive jewelry from her elegant boyfriend.<sup>26</sup> In the commercials' narrative Barbie was a glamorous top model: this narrative drew parallels with the stories proposed by contemporaneous soap operas, where romance, high social status, wealth, and conformity to binary gender roles supposedly enabled happiness. In a volume published in 1993, the same year in which *Soap* was released, marketing and media studies scholar Stephen Kline argued: "The increased targeting of gender segments in children's promotional toys means that television advertising depicts a gender-specific and sex-typed kind of role play [...]. The commercials show girls looking at the dolls and sometimes manipulating them through simple domestic rituals".<sup>27</sup> Toderi's *Soap* challenges the clichés that mainstream entertainment meant to reinforce: instead of signifying class and happiness, the appliance that Ken inhabits in *Soap* poses threats to the character's masculine strength and the social order it signifies according to mainstream media.

### **At home: resilience and escape, protection and violence**

Critic and curator Giorgio Verzotti stresses how "Toderi's work is [...] simple and modest, and refers to even as it transfigures the everyday environment. In fact, there seems to be a subtext of domestic chores: watering flowers,

washing the dishes, doing the laundry”.<sup>28</sup> The domestic activities listed by Verzotti, as well as the objects and labor that they entail, inhabit Toderi’s 1990s work beyond *Soap*. For example, in her 1993 video titled *Nontiscordardime (Forget-me-not, 1993)* [fig. 8], pounding water showers over a delicate-looking potted plant that balances on the edge of the artist’s bathtub. Water, usually associated with nourishment and life, especially for flowers, now plays the role of the aggressor because of its intense and powerful jutting. The forget-me-not, against the odds, remains bold and alive. In Sandra Pinto’s words, in this video

[...] a fixed video camera films a small plant under a violent, prolonged and obsessive spray of water, while across the screen runs the text ‘nontiscordardime,’ almost as if to underline the passage of time. The fundamental elements that make up the work of Toderi are her minute details and her attention to every-day life enlivened by small objects and events.<sup>29</sup>

In this case, the caring task of watering house plants becomes about the plant’s own resilience. Resistance to external forces, protection mechanisms, and the relationship between inside and outside were all themes that the artist was pondering at the time. This concern becomes clear in the catalogue of the 1993 *Aperto* section of the Venice Biennale, which highlighted work by emerging artists. There, Toderi’s *Nontiscordardime* is paired with a photograph titled *Happy Birthday (1992)*.<sup>30</sup> In this still image, gloved hands hold fading tulips on an aluminum surface recalling a laboratory setting.<sup>31</sup> The artist’s text in the catalogue expresses her meditations on the dialectic of protection and exposure to violence. The artist reflects on the membrane of the capsule, with its pretense to isolate and its potential to break. It is worth quoting her poetic words in full:

*Breaking the Shell.*

An epidemic is the very same evolution of a world which has lost its purity, existing because contamination exists. It has developed through the very mutations produced by the contagion between heterogeneous elements.

To protect oneself: to withdraw into the sterility of a capsule, sealed within the silence of a bell jar with the space itself, with fragility and beauty, sustaining life and the world outside with only the bare minimum. To live in an aseptic microcosm, where nothing can be lost because nothing can get inside.

Or: to shatter the shell violently and finally draw the first breath. With oxygen and through contact we allow ourselves to be contaminated, nevertheless developing as always an adequate immune system. To deny one’s own survival is to assert the priority of our very own lives. To risk, transform, to substitute a beauty (a perfection and a beauty which corresponds to non-time). To expose oneself to the epidemic only to overcome it means the ability to change things, to accept the risk of loss and of transformation. It means to change things,



aware that we ourselves will contaminate the world. To liberate fragility is to draw into light the freedom of living.<sup>32</sup>

In the midst of 2020, a time when the whole globe is battling against a forceful and insidious virus, Toderi's words sound both prophetic and daring. The invitation to contaminate ourselves to be able to fully live takes on a deeper meaning in our uncertain negotiation between the deprivations of social distancing and the striving for fulfilling interactions. In 1992, Toderi's reference to an epidemic was both literal and metaphorical: it pointed to AIDS and its devastating consequences, which had pushed artists and activists to organize.<sup>33</sup> In addition, the poem verbalized Toderi's own reaction to the firsthand encounter with illness when, at age 25, she was diagnosed with pneumothorax, a condition that causes shortness of breath and that requires chest tube drainage. She recalls that the incident was likely linked to the many hours she spent swimming, and ironically the treatment involved water too: "They attached me to a glass demijohn with a plastic tube and I made bubbles in the water".<sup>34</sup> The complex relationship to water is elaborated upon in Toderi's early work, including *Soap* among other videos, where breathing and surviving underwater are central themes. The aforementioned *Happy Birthday* series and the text titled *Breaking the Shell* are both inspired by the artist's personal narrative, and both focus on the desire to get outside of confining spaces, physical and psychological, to embrace risks and get stronger through exposure. *Happy Birthday* was created in parallel with a series of photographic works titled *Bubble Baby* (1992) [fig. 9], where Toderi embraced the concept of "breaking the shell" by showing crushed Petri dishes – used by biologists and other scientists for cell cultures – with small flowers inside or next to them. The idea for the title came from reading about the Bubble Baby syndrome, an immunodeficiency that was treated by isolating patients inside soft plastic structures that insulate from possible pathogens.<sup>35</sup> To Toderi, the constant exchange between inside and outside is inevitable and necessary in most scenarios.<sup>36</sup> The need for such exchange is often pointed out in literature about domestic cultures, in particular when addressing women's histories and their ties to the home.<sup>37</sup>

### A theoretical question

To further investigate Toderi's reliance on home iconographies and especially the possible reference to women's issues in early works like *Soap*, art historian and critic Stefano Chiodi asked Toderi if she felt aligned with gender studies and theories. Chiodi asked: "In those years, were you close to the ideas, to the theories that assigned women the task of manifesting an alternative

imaginary, a different and irreducible cultural position, especially in the art world?"<sup>38</sup>

More than pointing to the Italian separatist feminist movement that had developed since the 1970s,<sup>39</sup> Chiodi's question implicitly referred to English-language literature by scholars and critics such as Lucy Lippard, Linda Nochlin, Laura Mulvey, Judith Butler, and Rosalind Krauss. It must be acknowledged that their works did not circulate widely in Italy. Indeed, it was thanks to a residency abroad in the late 1980s that he read works by such authors.<sup>40</sup> Their writings deconstructed the institutional marginalization of women both as artists and as subjects of art; examined the internalization of patriarchal ideologies to the point that they had become camouflaged as social norm; analyzed the work of women artists to emphasize their contribution to society and culture; and looked at women's representation as well as women as artists.<sup>41</sup> My brief observations do not intend to represent the breadth and depth of these thinkers' arguments. Yet, a short discussion of select aspects of their vast research helps to frame Chiodi's question; it also provides background for Toderi's early work, even though similarities do not necessarily indicate direct influence.

Lucy Lippard's essay *Household Images in Art* maintains that female artists had employed domestic imagery with caution, almost fearing being targeted as too feminine, a characteristic that was deemed unprofessional and uninteresting when the essay was first published in the early 1970s.<sup>42</sup> Lippard states: "the art world works this way, which may explain why there are fewer women artists working with 'household imagery' than one would expect".<sup>43</sup> And yet,

it makes sense that those women artists who do focus on domestic imagery often seem to be taking off from, rather than getting off on, the implications of floors and brooms and dirty laundry. They work from such imagery because it's there, because it's what they know best, because they can't escape it.<sup>44</sup>

For the artists identified by Lippard, domestic iconography is a departing point to explore broader issues and such observation can apply to Toderi's work as well, despite the differences in context.

With a particular focus on art history from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, Linda Nochlin questioned the systemic discrimination against female artists starting in the 1970s. Her social art history approach showed how women had not had equal access to art institutions for centuries. They remained neglected and undervalued by critics, curators and art historians, especially because they were denied opportunities to fully dedicate

themselves to the study of art and were expected to prioritize family and home matters.<sup>45</sup> Nochlin highlights the parallelisms between women's condition in the 1800s and in the 1970s. My above analysis of commercials shows that the expectation that women put family first continued to be reinforced in the 1980s and early 1990s, and other writers have highlighted how there is continuity even with today's scenario, "particularly in regards to the tension between family life and work".<sup>46</sup> That said, in the 1990s an artist like Toderi could engage with art as her full-time occupation despite stereotypes and inequalities in the art world.

Women's representation as sexual objects is the focus of Laura Mulvey's scholarship in the discourse of film. In Mulvey's seminal essay titled "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," she argues that "Psychoanalytic theory is thus appropriated here as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured the film form".<sup>47</sup> Mulvey's thesis concerns the position of the male viewer who sees women characters as fixed, fragmented, and disconnected from action in mainstream Hollywood cinema. Adopting Freud's idea of scopophilia – the pleasure generated by looking – Mulvey argues that the male gaze translates the female character into an object of desire. Also, she maintains that the male viewer identifies with the male protagonist, reenacting what Lacan describes of the mirror phase – that is the phase in which a child gains a sense of his (sic) own subjectivity as distinct from his mother's by first recognizing himself in a mirror.<sup>48</sup> Mulvey, who writes in 1975, recognizes the potential for an alternative cinema fostered by new portable technologies, a promise that was in part fulfilled by video for women of Toderi's generation.<sup>49</sup> Even if unintentionally, Toderi's *Soap*, which positions Ken's perfect and plastic character as a fragmented and vulnerable body, echoes what Mulvey describes as women's representation in mainstream cinema: "One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative...".<sup>50</sup> This concept almost mirrors Toderi's later description of Ken's figure in *Soap* (1993): "the figure rotating inside the washer was in fact a reference to Leonardo and to the discourse of the man inside the circle who loses his centrality".<sup>51</sup>

Beyond the deconstruction and questioning of the rigid separation between male and female spheres both in the realm of representation and of lived experience, thinkers and writers have analyzed non-fixed gender and sexual identity; in 1990, philosopher Judith Butler wrote:

The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms. There is a great deal of material that not only questions the viability of 'the subject' as the ultimate candidate for representation, or, indeed, liberation, but

there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women.<sup>52</sup>

In Rosalind Krauss's 1999 book titled *Bachelors*,<sup>53</sup> the author reevaluates the nuances of women's art practice by arguing that there is fluidity between male and female imaginary. Krauss compares works by male and female artists, in part using psychoanalytic theory, to notice similarities in the exploration of identity and subjectivity. Toderi herself finds that her art is about expressing herself as a human being, beyond gender distinction.

### Generational differences

When Chiodi asked Toderi if she found inspiration in feminist theory that fosters the idea of a unique and almost non-negotiable female subjectivity, the artist answered with a complete refusal. She argued:

No, frankly no. It was something that was perhaps already exhausted by my generation; I believe that other women had to really face the 'gender' issue in ideological, militant ways in the past. By contrast, I belong to a generation that fortunately enjoys the results of the battles of those women. Even though you still feel that you are a woman in your practice.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the complex allusion to and subtle critique of gender stereotypes in her early work, the artist felt that she had moved beyond the need to affirm her rights as a female artist, and claimed that the preoccupations and oppression experienced by women of the previous generations were not totalizing for her. Feminism was perceived as a struggle of the past, a historical movement that had enabled her to thrive by making art on her own terms as a human being rather than a woman. Elements of her claim are aligned with the aforementioned arguments of Butler and Krauss and questioned the boundaries of essentialist definitions of womanhood. Boundaries have the potential of becoming caging, according to Toderi.<sup>55</sup> Even if structural inequalities in the art world continue to be documented by statistics on income and museum representation,<sup>56</sup> Toderi's reclamation of her expressive freedom and ability to engage with broad themes can be cherished as an important step forward. For feminist artists practicing in the 1970s, opportunities to exist outside of rigid roles were very limited, thus they often channeled their creativity towards the deconstruction of their own social and existential condition.

A case in point is the sculpture *Lapide alla Casalunga. Elemento di Lavastoviglie (Gravestone to the Housewife. Part of a Dishwasher, 1974)* [fig. 10], by artist,

writer, curator and activist Mirella Bentivoglio.<sup>57</sup> The piece is a ready-made composed of a dishwasher part (the cross) and a pedestal similar to those used to display modernist sculptures (the gravestone). *Gravestone to the Housewife* can be read as an ode to the dishwasher and its supposed power to eliminate women's work, to the point of causing the metaphorical death of the housewife's role. A second interpretation is perhaps subtler: since Bentivoglio takes out the heart of the appliance jeopardizing its functionality, she actually kills the appliance together with the housewife. In fact, the burial of the housewife seems to be achievable only if the dishwasher is also dead. In a way, the execution is a tool to completely reclaim women's autonomy from housework. Bentivoglio destabilizes the myth that women's affirmation depends on the consumption of labor-saving products, and rather affirms that the housewife can only fade away if house chores and family care are not deemed as women's exclusive responsibility- with or without appliances.<sup>58</sup> In the 1990s, Bentivoglio created two artworks that echoed *Gravestone to the Housewife*: they are titled *Cucinare parole (Cooking Words, 1995)* [fig. 11] and *Il bouquet della casalinga (lapide all'ultima casalinga) [The housewife's bouquet (Gravestone to the last housewife), 1998]* [fig. 12]. Both are ready-mades that incorporate parts extracted from appliances and repurposed to become something else: in these cases, a book and a bouquet of flowers. While the process of breaking down a machine to recompose its elements into new objects remains consistent across all three artworks, the imagery does not. The image of the grave, with its prominent associations to death and closure, is countered by the open book and the flower bouquet, often seen as signifiers of openings and new beginnings. Despite the perhaps more optimistic iconographies of the later works, it has been argued that *Cooking Words* is a pun to the limits imposed on women's creativity, which remains confined to the realm of the kitchen.<sup>59</sup> In addition, *Gravestone to the last housewife*, that is the subtitle of *The housewife's bouquet*, mirrors the title of the 1974 sculpture, underlining the threads connecting the two artworks and eliciting the persistence of gender role separation issues into the 1990s.

In the early 1990s, Bentivoglio was an established personality in her fifties, while Toderi was emerging as a young artist. The two artists' position towards women's issues in part amplified their life experiences and their ability to access opportunities at the time of their upbringing.

Despite generational differences, the challenges of women artists were apparent to Toderi. She maintains:

In art school I thought about my future, about the fact of feeling like an artist, but I found only a few women artists and this scared me. There were only Carla Accardi and Marisa Merz, yet from other generations: I thought of them and told

myself, in the end there are two exceptional women in Italy, this means that we can exist, that this possibility exists.<sup>60</sup>

The presence of female artists like Accardi and Merz gave Toderi strong models to look up to. As shown by recent studies, both Accardi and Merz had complex relationships with feminist art, either wanting to separate art from activism or engaging with women's maternal and domestic experience without ties to militant feminism.<sup>61</sup> Toderi's relationship with feminism is similarly layered: on the one hand, the imagery of her early work, including *Soap*, violently reveals the vulnerability of macho icons and echoes aspects of contemporaneous feminist philosophy; on the other hand, the artist denies the influence of feminist theory on her practice. Such refusal should be read as a commitment to exploring discourses beyond the deconstruction of women's systemic oppression or the exploration of their identity, themes which Toderi deemed less urgent to her generation than they were in the 1970s.

### From micro to macro

Through time, Toderi embraced broader themes. As maintained by Ester Coen:

The focus on the everyday, the attention to appliances change into a vision that is progressively less concentrated on the initial subject and becomes increasingly attracted by the engagement with broader issues; to witness this shift, in the videos the horizons open up, the spaces change from private to public, the sky and the planets appear. A reflection on the dialectic between the infinite and the human takes shape.<sup>62</sup>

In Toderi's practice, the domestic environment functions as a launching pad towards new horizons.

The sky enters the realm of Toderi's work as early as 1991. In the installation titled *Subjects* [fig. 13], the artist frames photographs of plants and outer space inside Petri dishes illuminated by desk lamps. To make the artwork, she requested a list of more than twenty slides to the University of Bologna: ESA and NASA photographic documentation of space missions to the Department of Astronomy,<sup>63</sup> and microscope views of plant organisms to the Department of Agronomy, where Toderi was allowed access to the laboratory of biotechnology professor Roberto Tuberosa, who was then experimenting with in-vitro cultures of corn and wheat based on techniques he had been exposed to during a research period in Minnesota. Tuberosa allowed Toderi to

photograph microscopes in his laboratory, and Toderi included the resulting photographs in her installation.<sup>64</sup>

In *Subjects*, Toderi creates visual parallels between terrestrial and non-terrestrial matter, photographic representations of which she positions under domestic lighting. *Subjects* elicits parallelisms between different realms; for example, photographs and plants both need light to flower and take form. Also, the earth, the stars, and the planets look similar when they are seen up close or from afar. Distanced points of view allowed Toderi to highlight broader relationships and patterns.

The shift from private settings to public ones, from micro to macro, is fully expanded in Toderi's latest exhibition titled *Marco. I Mark* (2019), an installation of video projections in the Sala d'Arme of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence [fig. 14].<sup>65</sup> The videos show almost imperceptibly moving images with a dominant light red coloration. The images layer juxtaposed photographs of stars and rocks interspersed with luminous target signs. The process for *Marco. I Mark* begins with a series of photographs the artist's brother Marco Toderi, an agronomist like their father Giovanni Toderi, shot upon Grazia's request. Her instructions ask for photographs of "terra", a word which can indicate either planet Earth or soil in Italian. In a long conversation over WhatsApp, the siblings eviscerate the ambiguous meanings of the term, a word that Marco Toderi associates with nourishment and life.<sup>66</sup> The underlying themes of *Subjects* reappear here, including the idea of growth and the similarities of things that are often classified separately. The coloration of the images and the cruciform shape of the targets recall some of the slides included in *Subjects*, establishing a visual thread between the first and the last project in which Toderi explores the connection of earth and stars, matter and light. The scale and materials of the artworks are nonetheless different. In *Subjects*, tangible prints from archival documents could fit inside Petri dishes no larger than two cupping hands. In *Marco. I Mark*, Toderi's videos are made of light and evoke the light projections emanating from the stars, thus almost embodying the essence of the subject that they represent. Also, the video projections fill the tall walls of the Sala d'Arme like contemporary frescoes that recall the medieval and renaissance decorations in the palace. In contrast with the paintings in Palazzo Vecchio's Hall of Geographical Maps, where the practice of mapping can be interpreted as a tool for war, conquest, and power,<sup>67</sup> – Toderi's images suggest open spaces that are unaffected by boundaries and confines.

Consistencies and differences between *Subjects* and *Marco. I Mark* indicate that Toderi's art has grown through the years, moving along a path that she first opened at the very beginning of her career. In this sense, one can argue that her early works were almost launching pads through which she began a long journey. In 1993, *Soap* showed a domestic washer drum revolving around

the small Ken doll, making it twirl like an astronaut in a spaceship. In 2019, *Marco. I Mark* almost positions the artist herself and the viewers as Ken: they are immersed in the Sala d'Arme surrounded by sublime projections of distant planets and stars, imagining themselves floating in space and time and accepting their own vulnerability. As far as the artist may have traveled, she started from questioning and reinventing everyday objects and assumptions, which she transfigured into a contemplative and sublime experience through the course of a lifetime.



# PLATES



1 Grazia Toderi, *Soap*, 1993, still from video, DVD from Betacam SP, color, stereo sound, variable dimensions, 30'. Courtesy of the artist.



2 Grazia Toderi, *Soap*, 1993, still from video, DVD from Betacam SP, color, stereo sound, variable dimensions, 30'. Courtesy of the artist.

ESTERI

SABATO 22 FEBBRAIO 1992 11

Non finiscono mai i guai per la stazione Mir, sempre più isolata dalla terra

## 1992, Odissea nello spazio

Non funziona più il sistema di raffreddamento della tuta di un astronauta  
Il «superuomo» Krikalev è in orbita dal maggio '91: doveva starci solo 5 mesi

I guai sembrano non finire mai per i due forzati dello spazio Volkov e Krikalev. L'altra notte poco dopo le 23, mentre Mosca si immergeva nel sonno, i due cosmonauti hanno aperto il portellone della stazione Mir ormai vecchia di sei anni, e sono usciti per una passeggiata spaziale. Dovevano compiere dei lavori di manutenzione: pulire le telecamere, recuperare degli strumenti e sistemarne altri.

Volkov e Krikalev hanno cominciato a lavorare spostandosi lungo il treno orbitale a 400 chilometri d'altezza quando il silenzio è stato interrotto dalla voce del comandante Volkov: «Il sistema di raffreddamento della mia tuta non funziona bene. Devo rientrare». E precipitosamente ha raggiunto il portellone rimasto aperto scomparendo alla vista di Krikalev, rimasto per 4 ore e 12 minuti a completare da solo le operazioni.

Krikalev non si è lamentato della strana sorte che lo accompagna dal maggio dello scorso anno quando è partito a bordo di una navicella Soyuz-Tm in compagnia di Anatoli Artsebarsky.

Doveva essere un volo di normale routine: una permanenza di cinque mesi in orbita secondo la durata standard delle missioni su Mir e poi a ottobre il rientro. Ma la storia nell'impero sovietico si è messa a correre più rapida del treno spaziale. E sono arrivati i guai.

Quando Krikalev era partito col suo razzo da Baykonur si era lasciato alle spalle i dubbi che serpeggiavano nel Parlamento sovietico circa il futuro impegno nello spazio. Ma sta pure tra difficoltà si andava avanti e Gorbaciov aveva siglato con Bush un accordo per una missione congiunta USA-URSS.

Il colpo di Stato del 18



I cosmonauti della Mir. A destra Sergel Krikalev, prigioniero dello spazio da maggio

agosto aveva rimesso tutto in discussione. Superati i giorni del golpe le vecchie strutture di gestione erano entrate in crisi. Le basi spaziali erano distribuite tra la Russia e il Kazakistan da dove partono e arrivano i cosmonauti e il Kazakistan decise di nazionalizzare tutti gli impianti. Ma si trattava di una decisione senza conseguenze perché, in realtà, tutte le basi erano gestite dai militari che mantenevano il controllo. Il lancio dei vetri, tuttavia, era solo un aspetto delle missioni spaziali alle quali contribuivano, per quanto riguarda le navicelle, i centri di produzione dislocati intorno a Mosca. E furono soprattutto questi a non essere più in grado di fornire astronauti e apparati.

Poi Glavkosmos, la Nasa sovietica da cui dipendevano le attività che avevano risvolti applicativi e commerciali

(come le spedizioni su Mir), di fatto si è dissolta.

Si è creata allora una complicata e temporanea cogestione suddivisa tra i militari e il grande complesso industriale Npo-Energia. Nel frattempo esisteva la necessità di rispettare gli accordi presi a livello internazionale. E la prima scadenza si è presentata ad ottobre, quando in calendario c'era il lancio di una Soyuz con a bordo un cosmonauta austriaco.

Vienna aveva pagato 16 milioni di dollari per la spedizione di Franz Pielock e non intendeva rinunciare. Ma anche Mosca manteneva l'interesse a rispettare i patti. Così il 2 ottobre è decollato da Baykonur la Soyuz-Tm 13 con a bordo il comandante Alexandre Volkov, l'austriaco Fiebeck e il kazako Taktir Aubakrov. Aubakrov tuttavia era una sorpresa. Al suo

posto doveva essere seduto un cosmonauta professionista che assieme a Volkov avrebbe dovuto dare il cambio a Krikalev e Artsebarsky in orbita da maggio. Invece le necessità politiche e i difficili rapporti tra Russia e Kazakistan imposero la presenza di Aubakrov, il quale doveva rientrare assieme all'austriaco dopo la tradizionale missione di pochi giorni riservata agli ospiti. Il centro di controllo dei voli umani di Kaliningrad chiese quindi a Krikalev se era disposto a prolungare la sua permanenza nello spazio: accettò, pur rendendosi conto che questo avrebbe comportato seri rischi.

Egli sapeva benissimo che il programma prevedeva il successivo cambio soltanto nel marzo 1992 e che la situazione a terra sempre più complicata poteva rimettere in discussione ogni data. Così riprese il lavoro con

Alexandre Volkov, sostituto di Artsebarsky.

Ma nella nuova Comunità degli Stati Indipendenti lo spazio ha trovato il primo spraglio di un accordo soltanto il 30 dicembre 1991, quando i capi di Stato riuniti a Minsk hanno deciso la formazione di un Consiglio interstatale per le attività spaziali senza tuttavia precisare come gestirlo.

Intanto sulla Mir trascorrevano i giorni e cresceva la percezione di essere sempre più lontani da terra. A causa della riduzione delle navi che facevano da stazioni mobili di ricezione e comunicazioni con il centro di controllo che prima erano permanenti si riducevano a poche ore nella giornata. Ed anche il collegamento con la famiglia veniva circoscritto a tre volte la settimana.

Nei rifornimenti portati dal veicolo automatico Progress scompariva il miele ormai difficile da trovare anche per gli eredi dello spazio. Per Krikalev, partito nel maggio dell'anno scorso, la sua odissea cosmica era diventata un viaggio nel tempo. Era partito con l'aureola del superuomo e quando tornerà il suo salario di 600 rubli varrà poco più di sei dollari.

Al Cremlino non c'è più Gorbaciov e la molitica struttura delle imprese spaziali sovietiche si è sgretolata e gli scoperi minacciano anche quelle poche missioni che si vuoi realizzare perché in parte pagate con denaro straniero.

Quella del 25 marzo prossimo, quando Krikalev rientrerà, infatti, avrà a bordo il tedesco Klaus Fiedler per il quale Bonn ha versato 14 milioni di dollari, e la successiva di luglio con il francese Michel Tognini è garantita dai 12 milioni già assicurati da Parigi. Oltre questa data per il momento c'è il nulla.

Giovanni Caprara

3 I Cosmonauti della Mir..., image published in Giovanni Caprara, "1992. Odissea nello Spazio," *Corriere della Sera*, February 22, 1992. Courtesy of the artist.



4 John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851-52, oil on Canvas, 76,2 × 111,8 cm. Tate Britain, London. Image released under Creative Commons <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-ophelia-n01506> (accessed June 08, 2021).



5 Grazia Toderi, *Soap*, 1993, still from video, DVD from Betacam SP, color, stereo sound, variable dimensions, 30'. Courtesy of the artist.



6 Grazia Toderi, *Mia Testa, Mia Cuore (My Head, my Heart)*, 1993, video, ' loop, variable dimensions, color, stereo sound, 30'. Courtesy of the artist.

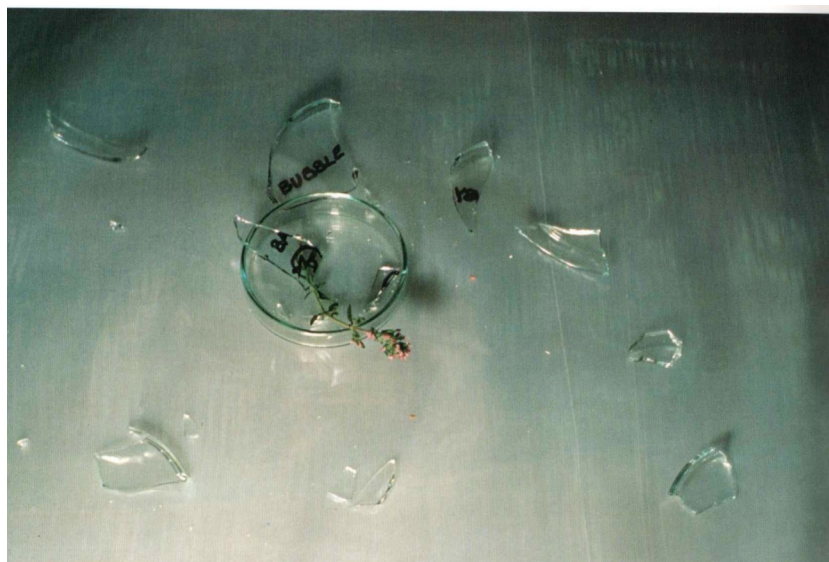


7 Sole Team Figurines, 1980s. Image available online.  
[https://www.giocattolivecchi.com/Forum\\_detail.aspx?t=0&id\\_d=1065453&p=1](https://www.giocattolivecchi.com/Forum_detail.aspx?t=0&id_d=1065453&p=1)  
(accessed June 08, 2021).





8 Grazia Toderi, *Nontiscordardime (Forget-me-not)*, 1993, video, loop, variable dimensions, color, stereo sound, 34'. Courtesy of the artist.



9 Grazia Toderi, *Bubble Baby*, 1992, photographic paper on aluminum, 50 x 75 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



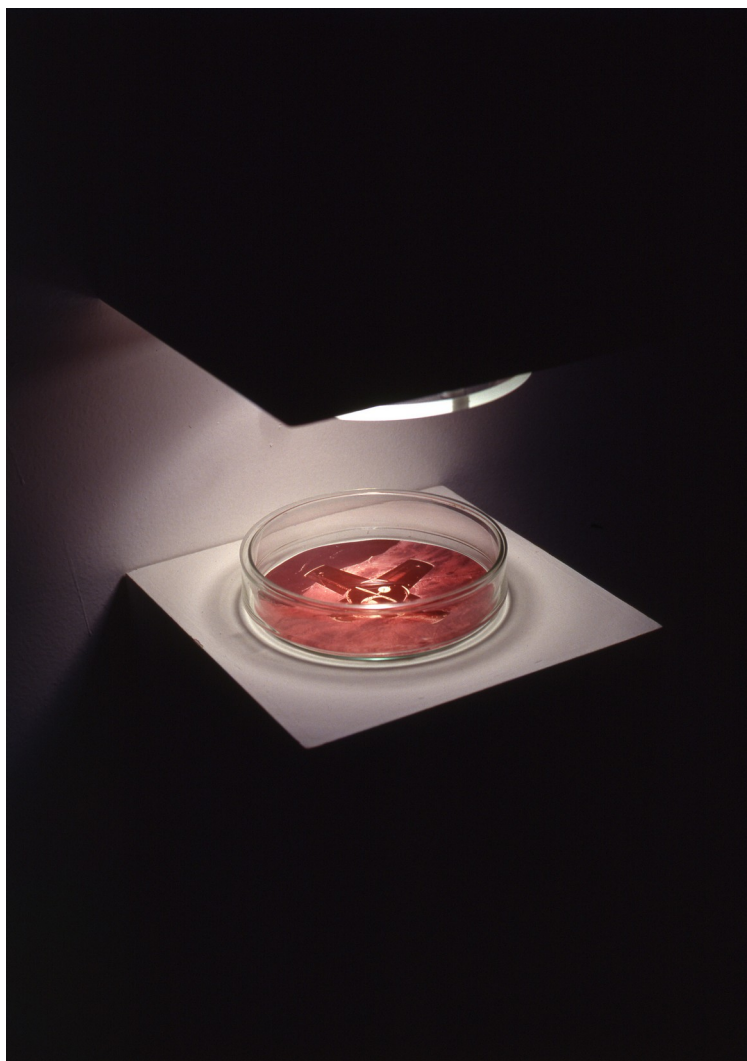
10 Mirella Bentivoglio, *Lapide alla Casalinga. Elemento di Lavastoviglie* (Gravestone to a Housewife. Part of a Dishwasher), 1974, ready made. Special Collections, The University of Iowa Libraries, The Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry, on Loan from Ruth and Marvin A. Sackner and the Sackner Family Partnership, Iowa City. Courtesy Archivio Mirella Bentivoglio, Rome.



11 Mirella Bentivoglio, *Cucinare parole* (Cooking Words), 1995, ready made, 58 x 51, 5 x 20 cm. Courtesy Archivio Mirella Bentivoglio, Rome.



12 Mirella Bentivoglio, *Il bouquet della casalinga (lapide all'ultima casalinga)* (The housewife's bouquet. Gravestone to the last housewife), 1998, ready made, dimensions not known. Courtesy Archivio Mirella Bentivoglio, Rome.



13 Grazia Toderi, *Subjects*, 1991, detail of the installation for the exhibition *Nuova Officina Bolognese* (Bologna: Galleria d'Arte Moderna, 1991). Courtesy of the artist.



14 Grazia Toderi, *Marco (I Mark)*, 2019, seven video projections, loop, variable dimensions. Sala d'Arme, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Courtesy of the artist.

- <sup>1</sup> Francesca Pasini, “Grazia Toderi. Galleria Fac-Simile, Milano aprile 1994,” *Artforum*, September 1994, 113-114, (available online, <https://www.artforum.com/print/199407>). See also Grazia Toderi, unpublished email message to author, May 26, 2020.
- <sup>2</sup> Grazia Toderi, “Grazia Toderi,” interview by Stefano Chiodi, in Stefano Chiodi, *Una sensibile differenza. Conversazioni con artisti italiani di oggi* (Rome: Fazi Editore, 2006), 287, English translation by author. Original text in Italian: “Penso che la mia sia stata la prima generazione ad aver visto attraverso la televisione avvenimenti significativi e impressionanti come lo sbarco sulla Luna, eventi attraverso i quali abbiamo fatto la conoscenza di uno spazio extraterrestre, di leggi fisiche differenti, per un bambino ancora più fantastici, più importanti. Ciò ha creato una memoria che per la prima volta non era solo individuale, o familiare, ma apparteneva contemporaneamente a tantissime persone nel mondo. Questa per me è stata una delle ragioni della scelta di un mezzo come il video, quando ho iniziato ad usarlo ero affascinata da due cose: la prima riguardava il fatto che esso potenzialmente potesse essere trasmesso in tutte le case del mondo, una potenzialità stupenda; la seconda era il fatto che non si trattasse in realtà di un oggetto, ma di una trasmissione di luce”.
- <sup>3</sup> Grazia Toderi, unpublished email message to author, October 25, 2019, English translation by author. Original Italian text: “eroico esploratore [...] il cui sguardo in orbita, il più solitario e lontano che esista, è l'unico ad abbracciare la terra intera. Nel febbraio 1992 mi colpì molto la notizia dell'astronauta sovietico Krikalev rimasto in orbita per quasi un anno a causa della caduta dell'impero sovietico”. Many thanks to the artist for the in-depth and eye-opening dialogue about her work.
- <sup>4</sup> Giovanni Caprara, “1992. Odissea nello Spazio,” *Corriere della Sera*, February 22, 1992.
- <sup>5</sup> Toderi, “Grazia Toderi,” interview by Chiodi, 287, English translation by author. Original Italian text: “Ken era un piccolo ‘kouros’ contemporaneo. Incarnava la popolare e serializzata rappresentazione di un corpo umano maschile e idealmente perfetto”.
- <sup>6</sup> Toderi, email, October 25, 2019, English translation by author. Original Italian text: “Ero attratta [...] soprattutto dalla visualizzazione della forza centrifuga, che cambiava le forme e i colori di ciò che conteneva”.
- <sup>7</sup> Toderi, email, October 25, 2019, English translation by author. Original Italian text: “Cercavo la possibilità di invertire un ruolo stereotipato. Pensavo fosse necessario offrire l'immagine di un uomo diverso, finalmente anche fragile e vulnerabile”.
- <sup>8</sup> Toderi, “Grazia Toderi,” interview by Chiodi, 290.
- <sup>9</sup> Grazia Toderi, unpublished email message to author, October 9, 2019.
- <sup>10</sup> Toderi, “Grazia Toderi,” interview by Chiodi, 292, English translation by author. Original Italian text: “Da una parte c'è la componente d'ispirazione e di amore, sicuramente anche un rapporto un po' cannibale se vuoi. Ho anche rubato delle immagini televisive. Penso che tutto ciò che ti gira intorno crei un background, e che si usi tutto ciò che si vede, che si incontra”.
- <sup>11</sup> The commercial of Margherita Mulinello (Ariston washer) is available at the following web-page: [cristin4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olaPyZrPC4o), “spot Ariston 1989”, *YouTube*, October 15, 2006, length 31 secs, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olaPyZrPC4o> (accessed May 20, 2021). The washer was designed by Makio Hasuike. See Maria Cristina Tommasini, Mario Pancera, *Il Design Italiano. Protagonisti, Opere, Scuole* (Milan: Mondadori, 1992), 83.
- <sup>12</sup> Enrica Asquer, *La Rivoluzione Candida. Storia Sociale Della Lavatrice in Italia (1945-1970)* (Rome: Carocci, 2007), chapter 4.
- <sup>13</sup> The Italian script of the 1989 Ariston



commercial reads as follows: “Alla tua sensibilità di donna Ariston dedica una piccola grande rivoluzione: è mulinello, il nuovo sistema di lavaggio con caduta cascata, per trattare con amore anche i tuoi capi più fini. Margherita Mulinello, la lavatrice che lavora come le mani di una donna. È una nuova idea Ariston”.

- <sup>14</sup> The Barilla advertisement positioned a female protagonist as inventive and capable of innovating in the kitchen, yet only by leaning on Barilla products. The slogan included keywords like “masterpiece” and “unveiling”, which are proper of the art jargon, to underline women’s artistic potential. A more detailed analysis of Barilla’s campaign can be found in Silvia Bottinelli, “Tradition and Modernity: Industrial Food, Women, and Visual Culture in 1950s and 1960s Italy”, *Food Studies, An Interdisciplinary Journal* 5, no. 1 (December 2014): 1-17.
- <sup>15</sup> In this volume, see in particular Caterina Caputo, “‘Dietro la facciata.’ Candiani, Cerati, Mattioli e Nuvoletti, fotografe impegnate in una indagine sulla quotidianità femminile nell’Italia degli anni ’70”; and Raffaella Perna, “Il femminismo come ‘recupero di un soggetto celato’: l’opera di Libera Mazzoleni 1973-1979”.
- <sup>16</sup> Toderi, “Grazia Toderi,” interview by Chiodi, 292, English translation by author. Original text in Italian: “Credo mi abbia aiutata molto il fatto di poter usare un mezzo leggero come il video, leggero dal punto di vista fisico, leggero da usare, e leggero anche dal punto di vista della storia, perché comunque la storia della pittura e della scultura sono state storie molto maschili. Il video, in fondo, è nato quasi contemporaneamente all’ingresso delle donne nell’arte; lavorare con un mezzo che non obbligava a confrontarsi con un’impronta fortemente maschile per me è stato molto liberatorio”.
- <sup>17</sup> “La Nostra Storia,” *Sole Detersivo*, <https://www.soledetersivo.it/noi-di-sole/la-nostra-storia/> (accessed June 9, 2020).
- <sup>18</sup> Examples of Sole commercials from the 1980s are available online, see: Tutto Spot 80, “10 SPOT di DETERSIVI ANNI 80 (dal 1980 al 1989)”, *YouTube*, January 8, 2019, length 6 mins 13 secs, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poxth-UbutI> (accessed May 20, 2021); and Roberto Negro, “Spot Sole Blu (1987)”, *YouTube*, August 13, 2008, length 31 secs [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xncz\\_6m48s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xncz_6m48s) (accessed May 20, 2021).
- <sup>19</sup> Pasini, “Grazia Toderi”, 113.
- <sup>20</sup> Enrico Menduni, *Televisione e radio nel XXI secolo* (Bari: Laterza, 2016), 36. See also Elisa Giomi, *Il Piacere di “Vivere”. Analisi di una Soap Opera di Successo e del suo Pubblico* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004).
- <sup>21</sup> Paolo Baudi di Vesme, Franco Brigida and Laura Francia, *Media e Pubblicità in Italia* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004), 148.
- <sup>22</sup> Much has been written on Silvio Berlusconi’s business and political trajectory, which eventually came to a halt due to criminal convictions. For a critical overview of Berlusconi’s impact on Italian culture and society, see for example Paul Ginsborg, *Silvio Berlusconi: Television, Power and Patrimony* (London-New York: Verso, 2004).
- <sup>23</sup> Grazia Toderi, unpublished email message to author, May 28, 2020.
- <sup>24</sup> *Soap’s* reference to soap operas is clarified in Pasini, “Grazia Toderi”, 113-114.
- <sup>25</sup> Baudi di Vesme, Brigida and Francia, *Media e Pubblicità*, 148. See also Elio Matarrazzo, *La RAI che non vedrai. Idee e progetti sul servizio pubblico radiotelevisivo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007), 45.
- <sup>26</sup> A compilation of select 1980s Barbie commercials is available here: Tutto Spot 80, “10 Spot Storici di BARBIE Anni 80”, *YouTube*, February 20, 2018, length 5 mins 43 secs, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xm51vcR\\_Jak](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xm51vcR_Jak) (accessed May 20, 2020).

- <sup>27</sup> Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing* (London; New York: Verso, 1993), 252.
- <sup>28</sup> Giorgio Verzotti, "Grazia Toderi", *Artforum*, April 1996, 95.
- <sup>29</sup> Sandra Pinto, *A History of Italian Art in the 20th Century* (Milan: Skira, 2002), 166.
- <sup>30</sup> Achille Bonito Oliva and Helena Kontova, *Aperto '93. Emergency-Emergenza* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1993), 426-7.
- <sup>31</sup> Grazia Toderi, unpublished email message to author, May 15, 2020.
- <sup>32</sup> Grazia Toderi, "Breaking the Shell," in Bonito Oliva and Kontova, *Aperto '93*, 426.
- <sup>33</sup> Sean Grattan, "ACT-UP and the Queer Commons", *Minnesota Review*, no. 93 (2019): 126-32. See also Benjamin Shepard and Ronald Hayduk, *From ACT UP to the WTO: urban protest and community building in the era of globalization* (London-New York: Verso, 2002).
- <sup>34</sup> Grazia Toderi, unpublished email message to author, June 9, 2020, English translation by author. Original Italian text: "Mi hanno collegata con un tubo di plastica ad una dama di vetro che conteneva acqua. Per dieci giorni respiravo e facevo le bolle nell'acqua".
- <sup>35</sup> Grazia Toderi, unpublished email message to author, May 27, 2020.
- <sup>36</sup> Toderi, email, May 26, 2020.
- <sup>37</sup> For an informative overview of this topic, see Joanne Hollows, *Domestic Cultures* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2008). See also Susie McKellar and Penny Sparke, *Interior design and identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) and Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (London: William Heinemann, 1988).
- <sup>38</sup> Toderi, "Grazia Toderi," interview by Chiodi, 289, English translation by author. Original Italian text: "In quegli anni eri vicina alle idee, alle teorie che assegnavano alle donne, nel mondo dell'arte in particolare, il compito di manifestare un altro immaginario, una posizione culturale diversa, irriducibile?".
- <sup>39</sup> In this volume, see Giovanna Zapperi, "Second-wave feminism and the refusal of art: women artists in Italy". See also *The Unexpected Subject. 1978 Art and Feminism in Italy*, edited by Marco Scotini and Raffaella Perna (Milan: Flash Art, 2019).
- <sup>40</sup> Stefano Chiodi, unpublished email message to author, June 2, 2020. I am grateful to Chiodi for the generous exchange of ideas during our long phone conversation on June 4, 2020.
- <sup>41</sup> For overview of the feminist art history landscape in the late 1980s, see Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History", *The Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (1987): 326-357.
- <sup>42</sup> Lucy Lippard, "Household Images in Art," *Ms* (March 1973): 22-25; reprinted in Lucy Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Womens Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 56-9; and in Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 62-65.
- <sup>43</sup> Lippard, *From the Center*, 56.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," *ARTnews*, January 1971, 22-39, 67-71, reprinted in *Art and Sexual Politics*, edited by Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth C. Baker (New York: Collier Books, 1973), 1-39, (available online, [http://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Nochlin-Linda\\_Why-Have-There-Been-No-Great-Women-Artists.pdf](http://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Nochlin-Linda_Why-Have-There-Been-No-Great-Women-Artists.pdf)).
- <sup>46</sup> Tiernan Morgan and Lauren Purje, "An Illustrated Guide to Linda Nochlin's 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?'," *Hyperallergic*, May 23, 2017, <https://hyperallergic.com/377975/an-illustrated-guide-to-linda-nochlin-why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists/> (accessed May 20, 2021).
- <sup>47</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and

- Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1975): 6.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., 12-17.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 6-7.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 12-13.
- <sup>51</sup> Toderi, “Grazia Toderi,” interview by Chiodi, 290, English translation by author. Original Italian text: “la figura all’interno della lavatrice che ruotava era in realtà un riferimento a Leonardo e al discorso dell’uomo all’interno del cerchio che perde la sua centralità”.
- <sup>52</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 2.
- <sup>53</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).
- <sup>54</sup> Toderi, “Grazia Toderi,” interview by Chiodi, 288, English translation by author. Original Italian text: “No, sinceramente no. Era qualcosa forse già superato per la mia generazione. Credo che altre donne in passato abbiano dovuto affrontare veramente la questione del ‘genere’ in maniera ideologica, militante. Io invece appartengo a una generazione che fortunatamente ha goduto del risultato delle lotte di quelle donne. Anche se poi nel lavoro il fatto di essere donna lo senti ancora comunque”.
- <sup>55</sup> Grazia Toderi, unpublished video conversation with author, June 16, 2020.
- <sup>56</sup> “Get the Facts,” *National Museum of Women in the Arts*, <https://nmwa.org/advocate/get-facts> (accessed May 20, 2021). See also Julianne McShane, “Women’s Art Is Every Kind of Art,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/arts/design/mfa-boston-women.html> (accessed May 20, 2021).
- <sup>57</sup> On Bentivoglio, see Elisabetta Rattalino’s article in this volume.
- <sup>58</sup> A more in-depth analysis of Mirella Bentivoglio’s *Lapide alla Casalinga. Elemento di Lavastoviglie* (1974) is available in Silvia Bottinelli, *Double-Edged Comforts. Domestic Life in Modern Italian Art and Visual Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2021), chapter 4.
- <sup>59</sup> Rosaria Abate, “Lapide alla Casalinga,” unpublished archival record, no date. Archivio Mirella Bentivoglio, Rome. Many thanks to Paolo Cortese for sharing this document with me.
- <sup>60</sup> Toderi, “Grazia Toderi,” interview by Chiodi, 288, English translation by author. Original Italian text: “all’Accademia pensavo al mio futuro, al fatto di sentirmi artista, ma trovavo poche donne artiste e questo mi spaventava. C’erano solo Carla Accardi o Marisa Merz, ma di altre generazioni: pensavo a loro e mi dicevo, in fondo ci sono due donne bravissime in Italia, quindi questo vuol dire che possiamo esistere, che può esistere questa possibilità”.
- <sup>61</sup> Lucia Re, “The Mark on the Wall. Marisa Merz and a History of Women in Postwar Italy,” in *Marisa Merz. The Sky is a Great Place*, edited by Connie Butler (Munich-London-New York: DelMonico Books-Prestel, 2017), 37-75; Leslie Cozzi, “Spaces of self-consciousness: Carla Accardi’s environments and the rise of Italian feminism,” *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 21, no. 1 (2011): 72; Teresa Kittler “Living Differently, Seeing Differently: Carla Accardi’s Temporary Structures (1965-1972),” *Oxford Art Journal* 40, no. 1 (2017): 87-107.
- <sup>62</sup> Ester Coen, “Grazia Toderi,” in *Contemporanee*, edited by Emanuela De Cecco and Gianni Romano (Milan: Postmedia Books, 2002), 260, English translation by the author. Original Italian text: “Lo sguardo sul quotidiano, l’attenzione ai dettagli domestici si trasformano in una visione progressivamente meno focalizzata sul soggetto di partenza e sempre più attratta dal confronto con questioni di più ampio respiro: a testimoniare questo avvenuto

cambiamento, nei video si aprono gli orizzonti, gli spazi da privati diventano pubblici, appaiono il cielo e i pianeti. Prende corpo una riflessione sulla dialettica tra l'infinito e la condizione umana". Similarly, Sergio Risaliti has recently argued: "Day after day, year after year, work after work, the artist has detached herself from her own domestic space, from the cities and even from the planet, leaving behind the limited self to exist in the purity of an alien gaze roaming the cosmos". [Sergio Risaliti, "Grazia Toderi, *Cosmografia*. Grazia Toderi, *Cosmography*," in *Grazia Toderi. Marco (I Mark)*, curated by id. (Florence: Palazzo Vecchio, 2019), exh. cat. (Florence: Museo Novecento, 2019), 15-16]. See also Marina Pugliese, *Tecnica Mista. Com'è Fatta L'Arte del Novecento* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), 125.

- <sup>63</sup> Grazia Toderi, letter to the Department of Astronomy of the University of Bologna, October 21, 1991, Grazia Toderi's personal archive. Many thanks to the artist for sharing this document with me.
- <sup>64</sup> Roberto Tuberosa, email message to Grazia Toderi, September 27, 2020, Grazia Toderi's personal archive.
- <sup>65</sup> Risaliti, *Grazia Toderi. Marco (I Mark)*.
- <sup>66</sup> Marco Toderi and Grazia Toderi, "Conversation about Earth," in Risaliti, *Cosmografia*, 35-45. Marco partially inspires the exhibition's title that also references planet Mars.
- <sup>67</sup> John Marino, "Administrative Mapping in the Italian States," in *Monarchs, Ministers, and Maps. The Emergence of Cartography as a Tool of Government in Early Modern Europe*, edited by David Buisseret (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 5-25. See also Lia Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici's Florence* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2016), chapter 3.