MARTINA TANGA

Artists Refusing to Work:
Aesthetics Practices in 1970s Italy

While the politically explosive 1970s are known in Italy by the saturnine name *anni di piombo* (Years of Lead), the Milanese artist Ugo La Pietra remembers them as the best years of his life.[1] New and exciting opportunities seemed possible as artists turned away from the art establishment and immersed themselves in art forms of extraordinary experimentation. Recalling that moment, La Pietra said:

> Above all I can say that the ten years of that decade were the happiest days of my life. I did everything that I wanted. I could do everything I wanted because I did not care and the system was so imposing. I directed four publications, I did a lot of exhibitions…[and] I left the university program [in architecture], I separated from my then wife, I freed myself and I did what I wanted most. Those years were very free and creative.[2]

For La Pietra, these were years of radical creativity, unrestrained from institutional restrictions or economic limits. La Pietra was not the only artist of his generation to view commercial and official art centers as oppressively hierarchical and capitalistic. Many embraced the decision to refuse to work in this environment and under these conditions. Instead, they searched for new autonomous sites for their aesthetic production.

During the 1970s, the city – as opposed to the insular gallery – became the site of activity for many Italian artists wanting to reclaim their aesthetic autonomy from the commercial art economy. Aesthetic practices extended beyond the studio and into urban neighborhoods and communities, paralleling the decade's revolutionary energy. In general, the insurrectional spirit of the 1960s had devolved into fragmented, subversive, local movements that extended beyond the confines of university auditoriums and factory work floors into nearly every arena of society. By the seventies, more people were rejecting Fordism's hierarchical model, which had previously extended capitalist ideals from the workplace into the very organization of society and the structure of political representation. Individuals across the country began taking an active part in decisions affecting their lives, which resulted in new forms of political participation and alternative modes of identification. At the same time, Italian artists formed loose networks of independent agents addressing social concerns beyond the institutional art domain.[3] These artists sought politically

driven creative actions that had an impact beyond aesthetic considerations. Importantly, they practiced direct engagement with the urban environment and invited audience participation.

Autonomia – as both a theory and a political program – is the best known and most influential set of ideas behind the political activism of the 1970s. It began as a critical stance against what many saw as the exploitation inherent to Italy's late capitalist system, and expanded via an unbound network of intellectuals to factory workers and social activists who campaigned for diverse issues such as social needs and access to cultural and political spaces. *Autonomia* called for empowering individuals, so that they might break away from the traditional forms of political identification that were bound up with the capitalist system. These ideas energized Italian artists as they, too, sought new motivations for producing art. Refusing to work within the dictates of the art establishment, many artists withdrew from the capitalist system of the art market. This unique position opened new directions for their aesthetic practices. Specific to the Italian context, a number of artists turned their attention to social forms of value defined by alternative, democratic notions of power that paralleled those espoused by *Autonomia*.

This essay explores the intersections of such innovative art practices – with particular attention to art projects situated in the urban environment – and the dominant stances of political activists in 1970s Italy, especially the widespread application of *Autonomia*'s theories around the issue of work. Three specific artists' projects will be analyzed in relation to *Autonomia*'s alternative critical attitudes: Ugo La Pietra's *La conquista dello spazio* (Conquest of Space) created in Milan in 1971, Franco Summa's *NO* carried out in Pescara's city center in 1974, and Maurizio Nannucci's *Parole/mots/words/wörter* from 1976. I argue that these artists' abandonment of institutional art spheres prompted them to expand their practices into city streets and piazzas at the same time that the politics of the workerist movements infiltrated diverse sectors of urban life.

Like the loose networks of artists working in non-traditional urban spaces, *Autonomia* was a heterogeneous movement, united only in its autonomy from the State, official political parties, trade unions, and any form of political, social, or cultural mediation between what they saw as the interests of the capitalist system and the movement's adherents.[4] It grew out of a workerist tradition that placed the laborer at the center of the class struggle, and was theorized by dissident communist and socialist intellectuals – including Franco Berardi (Bifo), Augusto Illuminati, Antonio Negri, Oreste Scalzone, and Franco Piperno – who denounced orthodox Marxism's portrayal of the working class as victims of the capitalist system.[5] Instead, the theory of *Autonomia* proposed a new understanding of the class struggle, independent from the capitalist

state and its institutions. This constituted a political philosophy, defined by self-determination in everyday life, and was directed to the needs, desires, and subjectivity of working class individuals.[6] Indeed, *Autonomia* was not a claim of autonomy *from,* but rather a radical claim of autonomy *for*: this consisted of workers' refusal to work and forging a source of power alternative to the one established and maintained by capitalism.[7]

Autonomia developed out of the social movements of the late 1960s, but it remained independent of them. *Potere Operaio,* a group active between 1968 and 1973, had revolved around the journal *Quaderni Rossi* and had foregrounded the centrality of the factory worker in the class struggle. Many of *Potere Operaio*'s theoretical underpinnings remained integral to *Autonomia.* The writings of Mario Tronti, particularly his seminal text *Operai e capitale* published in 1964, were key to enlarging the scope of the struggle from the factories in a narrow industrial sense, to the "social factory," or processes of domination in everyday life.[8] But the core difference between *Potere Operaio* and *Autonomia* was that the former developed entirely within traditional communist perspective of politics and power, while the latter took an essentially anti-communist and anti-establishment stance.[9]

Indeed, contrary to the worker's struggles of the 1960s from which it developed, *Autonomia* broke away entirely from organized institutional structures of any kind, including workers' unions. The first national conference of *Autonomia* took place in March 1973, in Bologna, with participants also from Milan, Turin, Rome, Florence, and Naples. The attendees produced a document containing three main ideas: the movement was to be an anti-capitalist attack on the structure of work; it should redefine the workers' struggle as self-determined (that is to say, independent from institutionalized bodies such as trade unions or political parties); and it sought to promote the capacity of self-management.[10] Outlining these notions provided a framework for developing a new conception of the worker's power and autonomy, which traditional organizations, such as the unions, had divested. By 1974, *Autonomia* intellectual Augusto Illuminati argued that even the syndicates were in fact institutions that had been internalized by the logic of the capitalist system of production.[11] According to Illuminati, the unions had, since 1945, been the main vehicles for the penetration of bourgeois politics within the masses. It is, therefore, important to understand that *Autonomia* was a separate and antagonistic force to the unions, although allied to the workers' resistance to the exploitation of labor.

Divergent in terms of theory, *Autonomia* did, however, continue to stress the "direct action" tactics learned from the innovative and confrontational forms of industrial action in the factories at the end of the 1960s.[12] In the 1970s, dissident activities against the capitalist system took on different forms, from

the rejection of work to squatting or petty thievery. *Autonomia* members also advocated what came to be known as *autoriduzione* (auto-reduction), the refusal to pay transport fares or rent. Many of these practices were non-violent and completely distinct from the active "armed struggle" of militant groups, such as the Red Brigades. An important difference from the 1960s movements is *Autonomia*'s emphasis on community-formation outside of extant institutional structures. This, more than its dissident tactics, runs parallel to the contemporaneous artist networks formed on the margins of the art establishment.

Throughout the 1970s, *Autonomia* theorist Antonio Negri reformulated the relationship between workers and capitalist development in ways that are instructive for understanding the art of the same period. In essays like "Worker's Party Against Work" (1973), and "Towards a Critique of the Material Constitution" (1977), he develops two significant concepts: "refusal to work" and "self-valorization." The first indicates the workers' rejection of wage labor in order to terminate their dependence on the capitalist system and its ability to define them. According to the orthodox Marxian notion of the proletarian left, workers must sell their labor for far less than its actual worth, thus reducing the worker to a subservient subject. Instead, Negri proposed that workers take back their labor capacity so that *haute-bourgeoisie* could no longer make a profit by passively owning labor. Refusal to work within the system meant that the worker would not submit his labor to capitalist modes of exploitation. Negri preached refusal to work and the immediate appropriation of productive wealth by the expropriated.

The second concept, self-valorization, calls for defining one's subjectivity in one's own terms as a corrective to exploitation in the factory. Recognizing their innate ability to conceptualize, produce, and organize their own forms of struggle, Negri called on the masses to reject the values imposed upon them by capitalist commandment.[13] By refusing capitalist mediations of productive and reproductive relations, workers could engage in liberated labor, which would lead to a process of self-emancipation.[14] This self-emancipation, at least as Negri viewed it, was at its roots a process of self-expression and a means of seizing agency over the formation of one's identity. Thus, Negri advocated a conscious embrace of a self-determined position, circumventing traditional modes of political representation. Taken together, refusal to work and self-valorization formed a complete renunciation of the capitalist systems of worth and in their place, conjured a new subjective identity.

The parallels between *Autonomia*'s radical espousal of autonomous forms of living and the aesthetic practices of artists like La Pietra, Nannucci, and Summa are striking. While there is no evidence of a direct influence, Negri's formulation of proletarian agency is useful in framing these artists' practice

within this precise historical-political moment. First, these artists refused to work inside institutional establishments or within the art gallery economy. Instead, they formed loose associations and subversive autonomous networks. Second, their interest in audience participation can be connected to the concept of self-valorization. Many of their projects aimed to give audiences the creative tools to express themselves. This involvement drew participants into a process whereby their self-expression was inextricably tied to self-definition and identity formation.

Directly embracing the notion of refusing to work, La Pietra (b. 1938), Summa (b. 1938), and Nannucci (b. 1939) – and other artists – shed traditional labels and began using the label *operatori culturali* (Cultural Operators) to describe their aesthetic work outside the studio and in the broader social and cultural sphere. La Pietra, for example, described himself as an *operatore estetico* (Aesthetic Operator) already in 1971.[15] Especially in the post-1968 period in Italy, artists no longer wanted to consider themselves as an elite caste. Instead, they aligned themselves with the working class, whom they sought to serve in a bid for legitimacy. The critic and curator Enrico Crispolti, a promoter and facilitator within these circles, formalized the term Cultural Operator in his book *Arti visive e partecipazione sociali*, published in 1977, to define the work artists were doing within the city and involving local communities. Crispolti felt that the designation "artist" was limited to traditional preconceptions of aesthetic practice tied to specific mediums like painting and sculpture. Unfettered by conventional medium denomination, the Cultural Operator's new role was to go beyond objects and think about the work of art as action.[16] He outlined how using the term Cultural Operator extended the sphere of "work" to embrace culture more generally, including areas such as education and public life. This move mirrored the politicization of everyday life that was occurring at this time.

Even further from the traditional conception of the "artist," the Cultural Operator, according to Crispolti, engaged in a dialectical practice. Whereas the artist might be seen to unilaterally transfer his specific ideas or vision to viewers, the Cultural Operator instead worked together with the public by soliciting varying modes of active participation. The latter, therefore, formed a dialogue with the audience that was itself the basis of the artwork. Crispolti argued that the Cultural Operator aimed to increase public awareness and empowerment, thus activating their political consciousness.[17] This extended the Cultural Operator's work to new spaces, which Crispolti termed the "social territory."[18] This sphere included all aspects of the social fabric, going beyond topographical definition, to include neighborhoods, schools, and factories.

By working outside the art establishment, these Cultural Operators found common ground in their intent to work directly in the social environment.

Connections between the creative individuals were slack but existent. Instances that brought them together were temporary and provisional, reflecting the flexible nature of the bonds between them. Such diffuse associations proliferated across disciplines to include art, architecture, and design, extending outwards to form a web of interconnections whose distinct demarcations are impossible to define. Yet, they were all held together within the broader counter-cultural sphere. Part of the same generation, La Pietra, Nannucci, and Summa all knew each other and at times collaborated in exhibitions or projects, while maintaining a distinctive practice and living in a different local community (La Pietra was based in Milan, Nannucci in Florence, and Summa in Pescara). Maturing as artists during the 1970s, each sought to redefine his creative production through radical participatory interventions outside traditional art spaces that can be correlated to the central theories of *Autonomia*.

Trained as an architect, La Pietra's conceptual aesthetic practice investigated the experience of everyday life in the urban environment. Often unsanctioned and sometimes illegally, he worked in Milan's city center as well as on its geographic and class margins. During the 1970s, his most important direct action in the urban space was *La conquista dello spazio* (The Conquest of Space) [**fig. 1**], carried out in Milan's Piazza Sempione in 1971. La Pietra painted white lines across the square – at times superimposing the traditional zebra crossing markings – and re-arranged urban stakes and chains in order to enclose the central area in front of the Triumphal Arch. Here, La Pietra unsettled normal patterns of circulation by arresting movement in the piazza. He disrupted the laws of motion dominating the space, hindering transit. The new markings – converging into a central point at the center of the square – seem to offer pedestrians a streamlined way of traversing the space. At the same time, the stakes and chains circumscribe the zone, delineating it as separate from ordinary urban spaces of circulation.

La conquista was a multi-stage project, consisting of photographic documentation of the urban intervention as well as schematic drawings of the piazza that together emphasized an alternative experience of the urban space. In a text written to accompany the project documentation, La Pietra writes that he wanted to recover the sectioned zone of the piazza for alternative and creative experiences.[19] He was critical of how the municipal administration had handled Milan's urban transformations; the interests of industrialists, corrupt governmental officials, and bureaucrats, rather than the citizens, directed the city's chaotic growth.[20] The site of a Napoleonic-era Arch of Peace, the Piazza Sempione by the 1970s had become a traffic circle dominated by the unnatural pace of automobiles at its margins.[21] The piazza's construction was part of a 19th century program of urban modernization,

similar to the Haussmanization of Paris.[22] The plan to beautify Milan emphasized *topoi*, or monuments, creating idyllic vistas of the city.[23] Commenting on landmarks such as the Porta Sempione and its piazza, La Pietra wrote, "monumental architecture expresses itself through the definition of a 'specification', which is only a return to dictatorial expressions".[24] Indeed, he saw these conspicuous displays of military and monarchic power as antiquated symbols of authority.

In Milan, as in many modern cities, the rapid and disjointed process of urbanization alienated many of its inhabitants. La Pietra's *La conquista* attempted to reverse this process, re-conquering the sense of place, as in the work's title. La Pietra's clandestinely inserted stakes and chains indicate a conscious "re-appropriation" of space. Unlike the functional cordoning off of a particular area for road works, *La conquista* suggests that this space, isolated from conventional traffic, should be considered apart, a place for creativity rather than passage.[25] This was a subversive idea, especially as police tended to regard loitering with suspicion.[26] La Pietra invited inhabitants to pause and give themselves space outside of their daily routine.

La conquista interacted with the urban environment by disrupting pre-existing structures and relationships. La Pietra developed a theory he called *Il Sistema disequilibrante* (The Unbalancing System) that underpinned this work and most of his urban undertakings during the 1970s.[27] The Unbalancing System consisted of what he termed "a provocative design practice that aimed to reveal certain contradictions of the urban space".[28] La Pietra indicated that the Unbalancing System was a critique of the standardized city, where the creativity of man neither had the possibility of recovery nor the hope of modifying the organization of culture.[29] He claimed that the "bureaucratic" society had taken exclusive possession of space, and that urban planning was the primary means for this acquisition.[30]

In a 1972 essay entitled "La logica del potere" (The logic of power), published in the journal *IN: argomenti e immagini di design,* La Pietra disclosed the details of the mechanism of what he felt was the current state of a repressive society.[31] Specifically, he implicated politicians and all the governmental bodies that executed the state's power. More generally, he defined power as the ability to influence the will and actions of individuals. Discipline, according to La Pietra, is rigorous obedience to the norms governing life in schools, work, the military, religious life, and any other hierarchical structure, extending even to the organization of everyday life. But these governing institutions were failing to provide basic welfare structures. La Pietra saw that there was a discrepancy between the people's real needs and the powers of the decisional structures. His aesthetic practice aimed to both cause a disruption to these regulated norms and to reveal the reality of the lived environment.[32] His work

functioned to make citizens more aware of their living spaces and empower them to take responsibility for their city.
Situating himself in a position of exteriority was precarious for La Pietra. He has admitted that this antagonism could have potentially been reabsorbed and exploited by the *gruppi dominanti* (dominant groups), also sometimes referred to as *il sistema* (the system). But the Unbalancing System offered an alternative theoretical tool for analysis and subversion external to the system's logic.[33] Drawing on strategies of agitation, La Pietra explains,

> Political groups perform unbalancing actions in terms of the political, economic order. One must, therefore, select strategies that can lead towards the awareness of a phenomenon of uneasiness with respect to behavior and form.[34]

Thus, he embraced aesthetic operations that could decode, provoke, and break codified spatial organizations.[35] Undeniably, he positioned his work as parallel to political activism. But his methods were subtler than the temporary gridlock that street demonstrations provoked. Whereas violent outcry often arrested the gears of societal clockwork, La Pietra equipped his audience with the tools to keep them moving. With a work like *La conquista,* La Pietra offered the Milanese the possibility of questioning the piazza's spatial configuration and the opportunity to inhabit it without restriction. Thus, La Pietra's Unbalancing System opened up for the participants a path towards refusing to conform, which echoed Negri's concept of refusing to work, both within established spatial organization and the capitalist system.
Franco Summa's aesthetic interventions also aimed to cause a disruption within their urban environment. Like La Pietra, Summa used the imaginative to subvert the power relations within the urban space. The possibility for individual creativity seemed anachronistic in the modern city, but both artists equated it with the ability to think and behave freely. Modernizing forces had altered the social fabric of the postwar Italian city, turning everyday life into a series of monotonous activities. Whereas urban inhabitants had once been part of a lively community, they now seemed to have become indifferent to one other. In his essay from 1964, "Casa e la città" (Home and the City), Summa made clear that the modern city no longer expressed the positive *socialità,* or sociability, of a community. Instead, inhabitants had become impassive to their living environment.[36] What was at stake for Summa, and the core of all of his projects during the 1970s, was this disappearance of the social from city life. His aesthetic practice sought to reverse this condition by bringing urban inhabitants an awareness of their lived environment. Working with a diverse array of mediums and techniques, ranging from participatory projects to brightly colored painterly interventions on city buildings, Summa sought to re-activate citizens within their lived surroundings.

Civic participation was an important component of Summa's urban projects. The street, in its openness, was a place where inhabitants could voice their opinions publicly. Summa made this paramount in his 1974 project entitled *NO*, where he reversed the audience's normal role as spectators and placed them at the center of the creative process [**fig. 2**]. In Pescara's city center, he set on the ground a large canvas, measuring roughly 13 by 13 square feet, and handed out spray cans of different colors, inviting passersby to spray paint the word "no" onto the white sheet. Scattered and often overlapping brightly colored letters steadily built up the surface of this unusual painting until it formed a fabric of many "no" created by ordinary participants.

Aesthetic and political participation came together in this work as audiences were already roused by the current debate over the upcoming referendum on divorce. Voters needed to decide whether they wanted to repeal a government law passed three years earlier allowing divorce for the first time in Italian history. Those in favor wanted to reinstate legislation prohibiting divorce while those voting "no" wanted to retain the law and their hard-fought rights. At the time, this was a highly contentious issue as influential Catholic fundamentalists wanted to abolish the law in the name of God. The referendum was defeated by a margin of nearly 20 percent with an exceptionally high voter turnout at 87,7 percent.[37]

The artwork *NO*, perhaps inadvertently, encapsulated an important aspect of the Italian populace at this time. According to historian Piero Ignazi, the divorce referendum represented a turning point in Italian political history.[38] It revealed a secularized society as well as a national detachment from the directives of authority. The dominant political party, the Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrats or D.C.), aligned itself with the Catholic front and attempted to revive the image of a country dominated by its clergy, which was far from reality. Meanwhile, the opposing Partito Comunista Italiano (Communist Party or P.C.I.) mounted a campaign for the defense of the law and managed to attract support even in traditionally conservative constituencies. The losses on the anti-divorce front were due primarily to members of the electorate who did not follow the directives of the D.C. Ignazi has argued that the referendum changed the relationship between parties and voters because, for the first time since 1946, the vote was not directly linked to party symbols.[39] Importantly, the direct relationship between citizens and voting "freed" the electors from predetermined choices, such as voting because one identifies with party politics.[40] More individuals than ever were embracing an autonomous position vis-à-vis political party institutions, as *Autonomia*'s dissident theories permeated into Italy's growing counter-culture.

Summa used this situation – the capacity to oppose prescriptive legislation –

to heighten levels of critical awareness in the general population. [41] The stratification of each individual's gesture – each "no" – exemplified the possibility and necessity of coming together, while still retaining a singular distinctiveness through chromatic differentiation. While the individuals who participated in the piece could be seen to have wanted to uphold the divorce law – because they all participated with "no" – there were plenty of spectators not in favor. Summa recounted that there was palpable tension in the piazza. [42] At one point, he remembers that someone told him that a fascist-sympathizer – also against divorce – went home to get his pistol. [43] Nevertheless, Summa was not deterred and continued with his event in favor of free speech.

Placing this notion of freedom at the center of the work, Summa handed out to spectators an excerpt from the Italian philosopher Dino Formaggio's *L'Arte,* published in 1973, printed on a mimeograph. Formaggio's text solidified the idea that the ability to express the negative, to assert oneself, is the capacity to be free. The crux of the piece stated:

> Studies in child psychology have shown the value of "no". Present from the earliest manifestations, it is an objective affirmation of himself and his own freedom. The spirit, the revolution, and art are born from the power of negation and nullification, from nothing to action. [44]

This text was a way of universalizing the issue, away from the specifics regarding the referendum over the divorce law, toward freedom of expression itself, and the right of citizens to voice their opinions.

Summa's work pivoted on the transformational potential of art in the public space, its ability to change inhabitants' behaviors. His brilliant chromatic language stood in stark contrast to the monochromatic urban landscape, instigating an emotional response in the city's inhabitants and making them more aware of their lived environment. Summa described the painting resulting from this event as a historical picture where the participatory event is not depicted, but instead results from the traces left by those who directly witnessed it. [45] He asserted that it is a painting, not just a material outcome of the actions. [46] At the same time, each "no" can also be read as a unique ballot vote, a verification of opinion, and a certification of choice. Ultimately, his work manifests the ideal that all citizens have a right to participate and determine the conditions of their environment.

Such notions of individuality and public identity were integral to the counter-culture milieu of the 1970s, and can be read as corollaries to *Autonomia*'s political theories. Acts of audience participation in these aesthetic urban projects emphasized the existence of the public, giving them the tools to express themselves. Maurizio Nannucci, like Summa and La Pietra, produced art that sought a direct participatory relationship with audiences. Focusing on

language and modes of communication, he similarly located his practice outside the usual art establishment confines to dialogue directly with the public. Probing the relationship between art, language, and society, his resulting art interventions provided the material basis for analyzing modes of communication and transcription in the urban space.

The most important project Nannucci carried out in this decade was *Parole/mots/words/wörter*, from 1976, where he asked Florentine pedestrians to speak the first word that came to their minds [**fig. 3**]. Engaging openly with inhabitants, Nannucci captured the dialogue on tape and documented the exchanges in a dozen photographs. He transformed these unmediated words into a multi-media artwork. *Parole,* as a completed artwork, now exists as an installation showing the photographs taken of Nannucci's encounter with the public, alongside the uttered words in text format, in addition to the audio recording of each contributor's word.[47] Nannucci's part of the dialogue has been edited from the original track, leaving only a singular sequence of seemingly unrelated words that linger in the space created by the immersive environment.

Although we can only now experience *Parole* as an installation, its constitutive process was a linguistic event that manifested the original, vital human faculty of self-expression.[48] It consisted of the random stream of consciousness of the general population; a novel yet highly expressive medium for artistic production. Each individual's contribution became a distinct component of the final work. Through this process of dialogue, a mass of distinct voices and terms were brought into a dissonant unity. Nannucci has commented,

> the person's identity, with his/her individual thoughts and linguistic expression, is a powerful element in this process, wherein the individual, personal word, deriving from the Latin "personae," "to sound through," becomes superimposed by a collectively interwoven phonetic texture.[49]

Parole gave the public of Florence a platform to speak, and the resulting art piece sounds like a lexicon for that moment in time. Vernacular expressions, plucked from the continuum of everyday life, become a register of individuality.

Working with words inevitably means working with meanings. The individual terms in *Parole* are coded messages in a complex semantic field.[50] Each word is caught in a linguistic lattice energized through dialogue, sparked by Nannucci's introduction and question. These terms, while at first appearing random and superficial, cannot be thought of as independent from the individuals who spoke them. Many aspects contributed to the way they chose to respond to Nannucci's prompt, multiple determinants that range from their socio-cultural background to their mood at that particular moment. Linking

each work with an individual, one cannot help but see that the particular words participants chose reveals some aspect, however small or trivial, of their identity.
Extracted from the actual dialogue that took place between Nannucci and each participant, the audio recording lists words sequentially, beginning with:

> *Good-evening, ciao, violin, Florence, Rome, good-bye, home, book, press, city, death, soccer, love, love, tree, window, soccer, flower, America, Venice, money, soccer, home, oh, Modena, rugby, bed, chocolate, building, America, Columbus, Stefano, two, Maurizio, bread, wine, woman, she, home…* .[51]

Divided by a comma, each word exists in its singularity. Apart, they point to seemingly unrelated places, names, emotions and objects; together, they are the existential components of everyday life. Love, home, tree: words that children learn to pronounce at a young age to describe the world around them. These rudimentary words are the expressive terms of being.
In total, there are 453 words listed in Nannucci's *Parole,* but without the repetitions the inventory is 364. This is a relatively small number compared to the words available in the Italian language. The De Mauro dictionary, the most comprehensive in the Italian language, lists about 250,000 official words. The words cited in *Parole* range from descriptors of place, such as *palazzo* (building) to animal names, such as *ippopotamo* (hippopotamus) and to food, such as *pane* (bread). Most of the words are commonly spoken terms. Their ordinariness is striking; yet, as a narrative, they paint a vivid picture of the materiality of everyday life.
It is not surprising to see that there are a certain number of expletives in Nannucci's recordings; such as *cazzo* (cock), *fica* (pussy), *fottere* (fuck), and *vaffanculo* (fuck-off) – perhaps the participants did not have patience with Nannucci's experiment or maybe they were trying to be subversive or scatologically humorous. A few individuals took Nannucci's inquiry as a game, and replied with well-known tongue twisters; for example, *disarcivescoviscontantinopolizzare,* which means to step down from the position of archbishop of Constantinople. This word is part of a longer sentence: *Se l'arcivescovo di Costantinopoli si dovesse disarcivescoviscontantinopolizzare, vi disarcivescoviscontantinopolizzereste voi per lui?* (This meaningless phrase translates as: if the Archbishop of Constantinople would step down, would you become the archbishop of Constantinople for him?). Replying to Nannucci's prompt with the single word *disarcivescoviscontantinopolizzare*, the participant demonstrates bravura in the ability to seamlessly pronounce a challenging word. But the word, and by extension the whole tongue twister, is semantically empty of content, negating the purpose of the dialogue in Nannucci's work. This participant

refused to meaningfully connect with Nannucci, and spiritedly deflects the artist's gesture.

In addition to playful vernacular, there were numerous words that related to the political climate at the time. The word *comunismo* (communism) is stated four times, as well as *marxismo* (Marxism), *Gramsci* (Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist philosopher), *partigiani* (partisans), and *socialista* (socialist) – all terms that are from the left. Words that might characterize the highly politicized moment include, *contestatore* (protester), *crisi* (crisis) and *tensione* (tension). Overall, the occurrence of these terms amounts to a substantial 5 percent of all the words comprising *Parole*. Their frequency demonstrates how present the social and political situation was in the thoughts and minds of the general public.

Nannucci placed rigid parameters on the execution and presentation of the work. He strictly limited the reply to one word and respected the order in which the interview took place when he came to assemble and edit the recording. With over 10 hours of actual recording that needed to be edited, Nannucci noted that some individuals did not immediately understand what was asked of them, and when they did, they often changed their minds and wanted to substitute their original word for another.[52] In the final edit, Nannucci selected the scrolling list as close as possible to the first spoken word, intervening as minimally as he could.[53] The only impromptu decision Nannucci took during the event was when to end the experiment. This choice was to a certain extent arbitrary, as it could have lasted indefinitely. When, at one point, someone said the word *merda* (shit), Nannucci decided it was an apt time to end the inventory.[54]

The acts of creating both *Parole* and *NO* generated direct one-to-one dialogues with the public. In the democratic space of the street, Nannucci and Summa did not differentiate participants by class, gender, or race; anyone could take part. The openness of their invitation for participation rejected traditional preconceived groupings and highlighted the personal and the individual. In both works, each word can be thought of as an instance of self-expression and therefore an act of self-definition. Looking at their pieces through the lens of *Autonomia*, Nannucci and Summa drew implicit parallels between the audience's participation and the proletariat's self-valorization. According to Negri, self-valorization is the process of workers finding self-worth and definition outside of the system of capital in which they are benighted. Although not necessarily proletarian, the audience in Nannucci and Summa's works, unlike the self-selected group of people who visit galleries and museums, included all those who passed before them and thus formed a composite of anonymous inhabitants who generally play no role in the creation of art nor take on active modes of self-expression. Nannucci and

Summa gave these ordinary citizens the opportunity to create uncommon value, to express themselves, and to have a hand in the generation of art. We can see a direct parallel between this self-valorization of the audience and that of the laborers as described by Negri.

Autonomia's two key concepts, refusal to work and self-valorization, resonated in the greater sociopolitical climate in Italy in the 1970s, and they also serve to decode some of the more unique artistic production of the time. The spirit underlying their workerist polemics can be seen in the rise of the Cultural Operator, a new form of artist-activist working in the urban spaces of Italy's northern and central cities. In particular, La Pietra, Summa and Nannucci adopted an attitude similar to Negri's refusal to work, using it to reclaim their aesthetic autonomy. They rejected the commoditized art market's system of worth and instead located value in the socio-cultural sphere. From an external position, their work gained critical agency. These artists' aesthetic production also intersected with Negri's other central concept, self-valorization. Their focus became working with ordinary citizens, making them more aware of their everyday lived conditions through aesthetic experiences. By engaging the public in these participatory activities, these artists entered the masses into a creative process of self-expression and in turn, self-definition. Thus, their works instantiated self-valorization as art; by participating in the work initiated by the Cultural Operator, individuals discovered greater value in their own imaginative capabilities than through their identity as workers.

PLATES

1 Photograph of Ugo La Pietra, *La conquista dello spazio*, 1971. Piazza Sempione, Milan.

2 Photograph of Franco Summa, *No*, 1974, Pescara.

3 Photograph of Maurizio Nannucci, *Parole/mots/word/wöter*, 1976, Florence.

[1] The phrase *anni di piombo* is taken from the Italian title given to a German film *Die Bleierne Zeit* by Margareth Von Trotta's, which literally means "the leaden time". Though the film is specifically based on the events related to the Baader-Meinhof group (the Red Army Faction), it also broadly deals with the consequences of political violence and the motivations for it. See Alan O'Leary, "Film and the *Anni di Piombo:* Representations of Politically-Motivated Violence in Recent Italian Cinema", in Guido Bonsaver and Robert S. C. Gordon, *Culture, Censorship and the State in Twentieth-Century Italy* (London: Legenda, 2005), 169. However, it was not until the 1990s that the term entered public debate. It first appeared in print in the book by Indro Montanelli and Mario Cervi entitled *L'Italia degli anni di piombo 1965-1978* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1991).

[2] Ugo La Pietra, interview by author, Milan, Italy, June 20, 2012.

[3] Sidney G Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder: Protest and Politics in Italy, 1965-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1.

[4] Patrick Gun Cuninghame, *Autonomia A Movement of Refusal: Social Movements and Social Conflict in Italy in the 1970's* (PhD dissertation: Middlesex University, 2002), 2.

[5] See Antonio Negri's essays "Crisis of the Planner-State: Communism and Revolutionary Organization" from 1971 and "Worker's Party Against Work" published in 1973 are both reprinted in Antonio Negri, *Books for Burning:* between civil war and democracy in 1970s (Italy. London: Verso, 2005).

[6] Cuninghame, Patrick. "For an Analysis of Autonomia: an interview with Sergio Bologna", *Left History* 7, no. 2 (2000): 89.

[7] Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture Within and against Capitalism* (New York: Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture, 2008), 12.

[8] Mario Tronti, *Operai e capitale* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1966).

[9] Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture Within and against Capitalism* (New York: Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture, 2008), 9.

[10] Gianni Piazza, *Movimenti e sistema politico: il caso di Autonomia operaia* (PhD Dissertation: Universita degli studi di Catania, 1987), 201; reprinted in Phil Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!: Rebellion and Repression in Italy, 1972-7* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2009), 68. Original Italian: "a) la natura anticapitalistica e antiproduttivisitica, cioè di attacco della struttura del lavoro degli obiettivi che il movimento si pone. b) il terreno non legalitaristico, ma legato alla necessità di lotta che richiedono gli obiettivi che ci poniamo e condizionato solo alla coscienza del nostro rapporto di forza. c) sviluppo continuo della capacità di autogestione dello scontro, in tutti I suoi aspetti, condotto direttamente dalle stesse masse sfruttate".

[11] Augusto Illuminati, *Lavoro e rivoluzione: produttivismo e lotte operaie dal 1945 al 1973* (Milano: G. Mazzotta, 1974).

[12] Edwards, *More Work! Less Pay!,* 61.

[13] Timothy Murphy "Introduction" in Antonio Negri, *Books for burning: between civil war and democracy in 1970s Italy* (London: Verso, 2005), x.

[14] Antonio Negri, "Towards a Critique of the Material Constitution", in Antonio Negri, *Books for burning: between civil war and democracy in 1970s Italy* (London: Verso, 2005), 199.

[15] Ugo La Pietra, "Dal sistema disequilibrante: Strumenti e metodi per la riappropriazione e l'uso della struttura urbana", *IN: argomenti e immagini di design*, no. 5, 1972, 38-47.

[16] Enrico Crispolti also published the book *Extra media: esperienze attuali di comunicazione estetica* in 1978 in which he reconceives the artistic use of medium to redefine a new working practice whereby the medium and media become contingent and circumstantial to the artistic intervention in order for it to be critically effective in the cultural and social context.

[17] Enrico Crispolti, *Arti visive e partecipazione sociale*, (Bari: De Donato), 13.

[18] Ibid, 18.

[19] Ugo La Pietra, *Il sistema disequilibrante* (Turin: Galleria LP, 1971), p. n. n. Original Italian: "il progetto esprime la volontà di individuare attraverso gli elementi residui recuperabili all'interno della maglia organizzata della struttura urbana, spazi disponibili per le attività collettive".

[20] Ugo La Pietra, *Abitare la città: ricerche, interventi, progetti nello spazio urbano dal 1962 al 1982* (Firenze: Alinea, 1983), 112. Original Italian: Per diversi mesi ho percorso in lungo e in largo la città di Milano rilevando "spazi disponibili" è un primo passo che qualsiasi amministrazione dovrebbe fare, qualsiasi amministrazione che ha interesse a usare e fare usare ogni risorsa dell'ambiente".

[21] Guy Debord, "Situationist Position on Traffic" *International Situationiste*, December 1959, 36-37. Reprinted in Tom McDonough, *The Situationists and the City*, (London: Verso, 2009), 141. Debord states that the automobile is essentially the principal materialization of a notion of happiness that advanced capitalism tends to spread throughout the whole society. All urbanists make the mistake of considering the automobile as the essential means of transport.

[22] "Arco della Pace" (Arch of Peace) was erected in 1807 by Luigi Cagnola and its historic significance was affirmed by Napoleon III and Victor Emmanuel II of Italy's triumphal entrance of on June 8, 1859 after winning the battle of Magenta.For a discussion on the 19th century modernization of Italy's urban centers on par with Paris's *Aménagement de Paris 1853 – 1869* see Mario Fazio, *Il destino dei centri storici* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1977), 37-49.

[23] Lucio Gambi and Maria Cristina Gozzoli *Milano* (Rome: Laterza, 1989), 239-44.

[24] Ugo La Pietra, "Editoriale" *Progettare In Più: l'uso della città,* n. 2, 1973, 2.

[25] La Pietra, *Ugo La Pietra: la sinestesia delle arti, 1960-2000* (Milano: Mazzotta, 2001), 62. Original Italian: "Infatti parlare di sistema disequilibrante, a livello urbano, vuole dire attraverso l'invenzione di 'elementi segnale' (svincolati dal sistemi urbani), porre in luce le contraddizioni che esistono tra le necessità reali dei gruppi sociali e l'intervento delle strutture decisionali, garantendo inoltre la definizione di spazi in cui (attraverso il libero comportamento) ritrovare un abito decisionale autonomo. Luoghi che non riducano, ma accrescano la possibilità di scelta da parte degli individui, e ne favoriscano l'intervento diretto nel processo di configurazione ambientale".

[26] Adrian Lyttleton, "Milan 1880-1922 : The city of industrial capitalism" in Gene A. Brucker, *People and Communities in the Western World* (Homewood, Ill: Dorsey Press, 1979), 259.

[27] La Pietra's Unbalancing System was first propounded in two books: *Sistema disequilibrante* (Milan: Toselli, 1970) and *Sistema disequilibrante II* (Genoa: Masnata, 1971).

[28] Ugo La Pietra, *Abitare la città*, 61.

[29] Ugo La Pietra, "Il sistema disequilibrante: ipotesi progettuale per un superamento de "l'utopia" come evasione," *IN,* 1971, 24-30.

[30] Ugo La Pietra "I GRADI DI LIBERTA' *Progettare In Più: l'uso della città,* no. 2, 1973, 46.

[31] Ugo La Pietra, "La logica del potere" *IN: Argomenti e immagini di design*, no. 7, 1972, 56.

[32] La Pietra, *Abitare la città,* 61.

[33] Parisian Situationist International (SI) group greatly influenced La Pietra's theoretical grounding. At the end of the sixties many artists, gravitating towards the countercultural sphere in Milan, absorbed the theories of the SI. Having conceived a cultural strategy able to critique consumer capitalism, the SI became an almost mythical reference point for revolutionary art practices. La Pietra was especially drawn to the SI's critique of capitalist culture through subversive strategies such as psychogeography – the study of specific effects of the geographical environment on

the emotions and behavior of individuals – and *détournement* – the destabilization appropriated elements from mass-culture in order to expose the their ideological nature. La Pietra incorporated these concepts analyzing the effects of the urban environment on its inhabitants.

[34] Ugo La Pietra, "La cellula abitativa: una microstruttura all'interno dei sistemi di comunicazione ed informazione", *IN: Argomenti e immagini di design*, no. 6, 1972, 19. Original Italian: "I gruppi politici eseguono operazioni disequilibranti a livello dell'asseto politico economico; i formalizzatori devono operare su fenomeni ambientale, cioè sui rapporti che nascono dalle presunte categorie di individuo, ambiente, oggetto."

[35] La Pietra, *Ugo La Pietra: la sinestesia delle arti*, 44.

[36] Franco Summa, "Casa e la città," 1964; reprinted in *Arte e Città: appunti di arte ambientale* (Pescara: Centro di Documentazione Arti Visive, 1987), p. n. n.

[37] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1990), 351.

[38] Piero Ignazi "Italy in the 1970s between self-expression and organicism", in Anna Cento Bull and Adalgisa Giorgio, *Speaking out and silencing* (Leeds: Legenda, 2006), 14.

[39] Ibid, 15.

[40] The typology of vote of exchange, vote of identification and vote of opinion was first proposed by Arturo Parisi and Gianfranco Pasquino, "Relazioni partiti-elettori e tipi di voto", in *Continuita e mutamento elettorale in Italia*, edited by ID. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1977), 215-49.

[41] Summa, *Arte e Città,* p. n. n.

[42] Summa, interview with the author, Pescara, Italy, June 26, 2012.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Franco Summa, "*No*" reprinted in *Pittura Monumentale*, un-published manuscript. Original Italian: "Gli studi di psicologia infantile hanno già messo in evidenzia tutto il valore del "no." Presente fin dalle primissime manifestazioni del bambino quale frase di affermazione oggettiva di sè e della propria libertà. Lo spirito, la rivoluzione, l'arte nascono da una Potenza di negazione e di nullificazione, dal nulla in atto".

[45] Franco Summa, "Segni, simboli miti per abitare il mondo," in *Poeticamente abita l'uomo* (Milano: Editoriale Modo, 2003),13.

[46] Franco Summa, interview with the author, Pescara, Italy June 26, 2012.

[47] Nannucci's *Parole* was presented as an installation: the words were sounded on a speaker, they were also written on a wall of the gallery, along side the projection of photographs from the event. It was presented in this way in the exhibition *Fuori! Arte e spazio urbano 1968-1976* held at the Museo del Novecento, Milano: April 15, 2011-September 4 2011, curated by Silvia Bignami e Alessandra Pioselli.

[48] Barbara Wörwag, "Durch Geheimnisse, Botschaften und Zeichen", in *Maurizio Nannucci: You Can Imagine the Opposite* (München: Städtische Galerie Im Lenbachhaus, 1991). Cat. Exh. (München: Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 1991), 9.

[49] Maurizio Nannucci, interview with Gabriele Detterer, in *There is another way of Looking at Things.* Curated by Lóránd Hegyi (Sant'Étienne: Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Sant'Étienne Métropole, 2012). Exh. Cat. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2012), 142.

[50] Barbara Wörwag in Maurizio Nannucci, Katalin Mollek Burmeister, and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *Maurizio Nannucci: something happened* (Pistoia: Gli ori, 2009), 38.

[51] Original Italian: "buonasera, ciao, violoncello, Firenze, Roma, arrivederci, casa, libro, stampe, città, morte, calcio, amore, albero, finestra, calcio, fiore, America, Venezia, soldi, calcio, casa, spilamberto, oh, rugby, letto, cocacola, palazzo, America, Colombo, Stefano, due, Maurizio, pane, vino, donne, lei, casa…".

[52] Maurizio Nannucci, interview with the author, Florence, Italy, May 8, 2013.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.