

JANNIS KOUNELLIS, CARLA LONZI AND THE APPROPRIATION OF THE
WORKERISM MOVEMENT'S IDEAS IN *UNTITLED (12 HORSES)* AND *AUTORITRATTO*

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By

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To my father and my sister, who supported me every step of the way.

To Marshall, my first and favorite editor.

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Introduction

There are historical moments that are of such vibrant intensity that they permeate every part of life. The twentieth century, with its violence and destruction, has had many of those type of moments. In the year 1968, an uprising of students, workers, intelligentsia, and other participants forever changed the history of Europe. In Italy, this year is referred to as *Sessantotto*, a moment that signalled the beginning of a decade of terrorism and violent social activism. One of the most significant features of this year and the preceding period was a multi-directional exchange of ideas. Typical of the post–World War II period in Italy, this intellectual hybridity created a multitude of movements, most of which spread into various cultural field. In Italy, as in most other parts of the world, the 1960s also represented the consolidation of the relationship between art and politics, which took the form of a deep involvement in social issues by the art world. Artists and art critics became activist and used art as a means to engage with the violent political tension of those years.

In Italy, a result of this multi-directional dialectic was the creation of a bond between various distinct players. Most famously workers, students, and the intelligentsia of various fields, not only art history, worked together toward political change. My father has been an activist his whole life, and his passion for politics started when he was a medical student in Rome in the late 1960s. As a student leader, he was heavily involved in the protests that eventually led to *Sessantotto* and the Years of Lead in the 1970s. He often talks about how students in the universities often discussed their concerns with the quality of life in the factories. In fact, a sense

of comradeship bonded a generation of young people who were fed up with a system that oppressed their identity, with a generation of older factory workers, most of whom were part of the Resistance Movement during World War II and disappointed at the post-fascism left that failed to maintain the promises it made.¹

The Workerism movement was born from this interest of the students and intelligentsia in the *Realta' Operaia* (Workers' Reality) and their frustration with the new approach taken by the Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party), or PCI, toward their diminished commitment to the workers. Many students and thinkers started to build a close relationship with the workers, and some even worked in factories for a few months in order to become immersed in the workers' reality. Inspired by this direct experience and their oral interviews of workers, the members of the Workerism movement wanted to restructure the PCI according to a true understanding of the factory, and to use the workers' reality as the basis for re-conceiving class relationships.

This multi-directional interest in the *Realta' Operaia* by the Workerism movement was reflected in many of the stories my father told me about those years. For example, as a recent graduate from medical school, he wrote a book called *Esperienze di lotta contro la nocività in alcune aziende italiane tra il 1965 e il 1980* about how Workerism could influence the methods of immunological research in the factories.² The intersectionality of the scholarship of a specialized field like medicine, of which my father's book is an example, is the result of a consolidated relationship between the factory Italy's intellectually vital groups. This

¹ Balestrini, Nanni, Primo Moroni. *L'orda D'oro 1968-1977*. Feltrinelli, 1997, 17.

² Biocca, Marco, Pietro Schirripa, *Esperienze di lotta contro la nocività in alcune aziende italiane tra il 1965 e il 1980*, CENSAPI, 1981

horizontality, as previously mentioned, was not circumscribed to political theory and medicine, but it is also present in the art world.

The interest of the art world in the workers's reality is evident in the artistic production of the new generation of Italian artists and art critics at this time. Jannis Kounellis and Carla Lonzi were among those members of the Italian art world who deeply engaged with the political tensions of the 1960s, and their engagement affected their artistic and scholarly production.

In fact, among the result of the involvement of the art world into political activism there is the creation of politically oriented artistic movement, like *Arte Povera*. The materiality of *Arte Povera* has been the focus of the scholarship of the movement for a long time, with the consequence of scholars often obscuring its political nature. This is not surprised considering the originality of the material choices of the *Arte Povera* members, which often included objects from everyday life. However, since the turn of the century, academic interest has grown in the movement's "legacy of politicizing aesthetic."³ Scholars like Nicholas Cullinan and Christov-Bakargiev stand out among the various politicizing voices.⁴ Nicholas Cullinan has written about the closeness between Workerism and the *Arte Povera* movement in his article *From Vietnam to Fiat-nam*.⁵ His work primarily focuses on the figure of Germano Celant and the political activism of artists like Pino Pascali and Mario Merz.

This thesis will focus on how the methodology of Workerism influenced the work of Kounellis and Lonzi from 1969, specifically, Kounellis's live sculpture *Untitled (12 horses)* and Lonzi's book *Autoritratto*. It is important to note these two pieces are not a mere reflection of the

³ Cullinan, Nicholas. *From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam: The Politics of Arte Povera*. October, vol. 124, 2008, 30.

⁴ Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn. *Arte Povera*. New York City: Phaidon, 2014

Cullinan, Nicholas. *From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam: The Politics of Arte Povera*. October, vol. 124, 2008, 25.

⁵ Cullinan, Nicholas. *From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam: The Politics of Arte Povera*. October, vol. 124, 2008, 25.

context in which they were produced. Their affinity with the Workerism movement is the result of a dialectic act performed by both Kounellis and Lonzi to engage with the political activity of the time. Thus, *Untitled (12 horses)* and *Autoritratto* do not simply mirror Workerism's agendas; rather, they actively appropriate the political and militant methodology of the movement, which is referred to as *con-ricerca*. *Con-ricerca* was a methodological approach to developing the theoretical and political direction of the PCI with the aim of steering the party towards a better understanding of the workers' reality. This understanding was to be gained through oral interviews with the workers and an immersion of the intellectuals in factory life, and would hopefully lead to improvements of the workers' condition.⁶

Untitled (12 Horses) and *Autoritratto* were produced in 1969. Their powerful agency can be appreciated by analyzing them individually and together. When considering the work of Kounellis and Lonzi together, their affinity with the Workerism Movement becomes even more clear, since they each embody the two agents of the *con-ricerca* dialectic, Lonzi being the intellectual and Kounellis the worker. Lonzi's approach to the creation of *Autoritratto* has parallels with the work of Workerism intelligentsia, since she argues that using interviews with artists in the prose of her writing and as the center of her scholarship allows for a deeper involvement of the art critic in the creative process and works as a means to achieve a truly critically understanding the art object itself. In a similar way, Kounellis's concern with the negative impact the new capitalistic direction of the Italian government would have on his artistic production connects him with the proletariat workers. Both Carla Lonzi and Jannis

⁶ Balestrini, Nanni, Primo Moroni. *L'orda D'oro 1968-1977*. Feltrinelli, 1997, 37.

Kounellis translate this affinity in their work in the end of the 1960s, specifically in *Autoritratto* and *Untitled (12 horses)*.

Furthermore, this affinity between the Workerism Movement and the work made by Kounellis and Lonzi in 1969 gives new insight on the universality of the factory workers' struggle into the general Italian working class. In fact, the neo-capitalistic approach to production that maximizes production at the cost of worsening workers' condition had repercussions not only in the factories, which were central to the left intelligentsia because of Marx's theoretical focus on them, but also in artistic production, as can be seen by the concern Kounellis had about the impact of the capitalistic societal structure on artistic freedom and creativity.⁷

Untitled (12 horses) was first shown in the Attico gallery in Rome in 1969. In this project, Kounellis chose 12 live horses and tied them around the main room of the gallery. Through *Untitled (12 horses)*, the artist brought the workers' point of view to the consumerist world of the bourgeoisie. He undermined the high-class environment of the art gallery by creating a temporary horse stable in the middle of urban Rome. Furthermore, this project forced the bourgeoisie to face the workers' reality, creating a dialectic that represents a specific environment while contesting another. The idea behind Kounellis's piece was to bring the upper class to a raw and true understanding of lower class struggle through direct observation, since the lower class condition was embodied by the horses that the public attentively observed. In *Untitled (12 horses)* and other work from the same period, Kounellis shows an interest in exploring how the capitalist structure of the art gallery would change by creating an exhibition around a work of art that could not be considered a commodity.

⁷ Lonzi, Carla. *Autoritratto*. De Donato, 1969, 147.

Lonzi's work, on the other hand, can closely compare with that of the Workerism intelligentsia. In her desire to reform the practice of art criticism, Lonzi appropriated the methodology of *con-ricerca*, substituting the interpretation of the art critic with the insider point of view of artists regarding the creative process. For *Autoritratto*, she gathered and transcribed oral interviews, a process typically used by the Workerist intellectuals who based their theories on "intrusion" of the workers' lives and the collection of their experiences through oral interviews. Furthermore, the choice to develop her art criticism prose starting from the artist's personal experience shows Lonzi's interest to *join* the process of artistic production. This movement from the outside inward is also shared by the Workerism intelligentsia members, who would often even work in the factories in order to gain a first hand perspective on the workers' reality.

The thesis is divided into four chapters, each of which contain smaller sections covering specific nuances of the chapter's main theme. Chapter 1, "Lives," is an introduction to the material, including the biographies of Kounellis and Lonzi and the general characteristics of *Untitled (12 horses)* and *Autoritratto*. Chapter 2, "Politics and the Historical Background," mostly centers on the events that unfolded in Italy during the 1960s, specifically, the birth of the Workerism Movement. It also contains a contextualization of the Arte Povera movement, including its political nature and the influence of Lonzi's work on the movement. Chapter 3, "Art and Workerism," unfolds the main idea of this thesis further. Starting with an introduction to the political activism of both Lonzi and Kounellis, this chapter compares their activities in 1969 and the methodology of Workerism. Chapter 3 also introduces the theoretical frameworks of Umberto Eco and John Dewey, two thinkers who strongly influenced the art world and,

specifically, Lonzi and Kounellis. This chapter undertakes a deeper analysis of the affinity between Kounellis and Workerism. His connection to this movement was formed through his artistic production, while Lonzi's involvement is more easily noticed in her writing. To understand the visual translation of the Workerism methodology in the work of Kounellis, this thesis refers to oral interviews. Based on the artist's statements about the relationship between his work and its context, it is possible to safely infer a mutual affinity existed between Kounellis and the workers' movement. Chapter 4, "Theory and Practice," focuses on pointing out evidence in *Untitled (12 horses)* and *Autoritratto* of the connection that Kounellis and Carla had to the Workerism Movement .

Chapter 1

Lives

Jannis Kounellis and *untitled (12 horses)*

Kounellis was born in 1936 in Piraeus, Greece. By age 20, he had lived through World War II (1939–1945) and the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). He left Greece in 1956 to study in Rome at the *Accademia delle Belle Arti*. Kounellis fell in love with the city, especially its vibrant urban environment, which he explored in the 1960s in his first Italian series, *Urban Symbols*.⁸ At the time, urban life was a common theme in the Roman art scene. Artists like Mario Schifano, a member of the art group *Scuola di Piazza del Popolo*, focused their work on representing everyday life in the Italian capital, with its urban “signs and clichés”.⁹ The interest of Schifano and the other members of the *Scuola di Piazza del Popolo*’s in the urban environment might have been an early influence on the young Kounellis.¹⁰

During this period, other artists were investigating city life through their work, but they wanted to approach the theme with a different aesthetic sensibility. Alberto Burri, one of the most prominent Italian artists at the time, was also exploring the fabric of urban life in his art. Kounellis’ art was deeply influenced by Burri’s work, its themes, exuberant materiality, and interest in the socio-political context.¹¹ Kounellis was famously part of the *Arte Povera* movement, to which he was linked because of the radical materiality of his art. *Arte Povera* officially began in 1967 after its manifesto, *Arte povera: notes for a guerilla art*, was written by

⁸ Celant, Germano. *Arte Povera: History and Stories*. Electa, 2011, 82.

⁹ Flood, Richard, and Francis Morris.. *Zero to infinity: Arte Povera, 1962-1972*. Minneapolis: D’Argenzio. Walker Art Center, 2001, 38

¹⁰ Ibid, 38

¹¹ Ibid, 36.

Germano Celant and published by Flash Art. The movement originally included Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Luciano Fabro, Piero Gilardi, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini, and Gilberto Zorio. The term *povera* (poor) reflects the movement's materials and practices which differed from the standard production practices of Western artists.

¹² The adjective *poor* hints to the active research of the artists to use elementary materiality to express their artistic creativity. Inspired to Grotowski "poor theatre", Germano Celant, commenting on the term poor, says that it consists of "taking away, eliminating, downgrading things to a minimum, *impoverishing* signs to reduce them to archetypes" ¹³

The materiality of Kounellis's oeuvre was particularly radical. Generally, his work is three-dimensional, site-specific, and composed of found objects. In fact, Tony Godfrey defines it as "assisted readymade" because of the artist's choices in materiality. ¹⁴ Among his most famous work are the *sacchi* series and his various "coat" pieces. ¹⁵ In both projects, Kounellis challenges the idea of artistic creation by *composing* his work, rather than creating it. For one of his most iconic pieces, *Untitled (12 horses)*, which launched his international career, Kounellis used live animals, which are not uncommon in his work. ¹⁶

On January 14, 1969, at his gallery *L'attico*, Fabio Sargentini hosted a one-piece, solo show of *Untitled (12 horses)* by Kounellis. Opened in 1957 by Sargentini's father, Bruno Sargentini, *L'attico* was taken over in 1966 by Fabio, who celebrated the gallery's new chapter

¹² [This is the explanation is taken from the Tate -Art term dictionary].

¹³ Lumley, Robert. *Arte Povera*. New York City: Abrams, 2005, 12.

¹⁴ Lumley, Robert. *Arte Povera*. New York City: Abrams, 2005, 33.

¹⁵ [In both cases Kounellis uses real sacchi and real coats.]

¹⁶ [Famously, before untitled he created a piece with birds.]

with a solo exhibition of the young Roman artist Pino Pascali.¹⁷ His choice of moving the gallery from an old *palazzo* between Piazza del Popolo and Piazza di Spagna, in the center of Rome, to a new location in Via Beccaria was a sign of Fabio Sargentini's desire to align himself with the Italian avant-garde movement.¹⁸ Sargentini's decision to show *Untitled (12 horses)* proved controversial from the beginning; many critics perceived the exhibition as an affront to the Italian art world.¹⁹ Today, the show is considered a hallmark of twentieth-century art and a symbolic moment in the history of the Arte Povera movement. The fame of this work led to five iterations since its inception, the last being in 2015 in New York on the occasion of the closing of the Gavin Gallery in the West Village for its relocation to Harlem.²⁰

In the *Attico*'s new location, previously a garage, Kounellis tied twelve live horses, each with different colors, to rings attached to the gallery walls. The show remained on view for only three days.²¹ The layout of *Untitled (12 horses)* can be seen in photos of the exhibition taken by Claudio Abate, which became the official archival photo. The photos make it possible to envision the experience of the audience. Upon entering the exhibition, the viewer would have seen four horses on the left wall, three on the front wall, and five in the right wall. This layout created an uninviting environment for the audience, who had to step in among the powerful horses and be surrounded and overwhelmed by their mass.²² With its drastically elemental

¹⁷ Viva, Denis. "Parallasse per Una Foto: I Dodici Cavalli Vivi Di Jannis Kounellis Su Cartabianca." *I Palinsesti*6 (2017), 60.

¹⁸ Viva, Denis. "Parallasse per Una Foto: I Dodici Cavalli Vivi Di Jannis Kounellis Su Cartabianca." *I Palinsesti*6 (2017), 61.

¹⁹ Lumley, Robert. *Arte Povera*. New York City: Abrams, 2005, 33.

²⁰ [The piece *Untitled (12 horses)* has been shown often in different gallery setting, the latest in 2015 in a gallery in NY Gavin Brown's Enterprise.]

²¹ Flood, Richard, and Francis Morris.. *Zero to infinity: Arte Povera, 1962-1972*. Minneapolis: D'Argenzio. Walker Art Center, 2001, 38

²² Viva, Denis. "Parallasse per Una Foto: I Dodici Cavalli Vivi Di Jannis Kounellis Su Cartabianca." *I Palinsesti*6 (2017).

materiality, bold control of space, and annihilation of artistic norms, *Untitled (12 horses)* encapsulates most of the criteria that Celant had set for Arte Povera artists.

In his consideration of the materiality of this work, Kounellis completely rejected the historic idea of artist as craftsperson and creator. With *Untitled (12 horses)*, Kounellis assumed the role of curator of his own exhibition by selecting and moving the horses from their stables to the Attico gallery. In contrast to one of Duchamp's ready-mades the power of Kounellis' installation resides in the fact that the horses were decontextualized when removed from their stables into the *Attico* gallery, while at the same time they were re-contextualized in their new location. When they are re-positioned, the essence of the horses not only changes but also their surroundings, which become *re-composed* by the presence of the animals. The gallery is transformed into a stable, replete with the strong smell of the animals and their feces, while the animals become an art *object* to observe, admire, and analyze. Kounellis negates the canonic essence of the horses and the gallery, and he resolves this paradox within the work itself by subverting the function of both of these components. Consequently, as the live horses are objectified and the art gallery turns into a stable, the viewers become stripped of their ability to be consumers. Even though the installation is featured in a commercial gallery, it is unsellable. The assumption is that the audience of a gallery opening not only seeks an aesthetic encounter but is also in the market to buy art. Yet, the impossibility of buying this installation removed the commercial aspect of the audience's visit to the *Attico* gallery. Once again, Kounellis uses the materiality of his work—live animals in the case of *Untitled (12 horses)*—to render it non-collectable.²³

²³ Flood, Richard, and Francis Morris.. *Zero to infinity: Arte Povera, 1962-1972*. Minneapolis: D'Argenzio. Walker Art Center, 2001, 38

The clean, sharp, white gallery space, created to be a show window for Roman bourgeois audiences, is transformed into a dirty, smelly stable, which alienates the city's elite.²⁴ Kounellis' choice to create work that was meant to be temporarily experienced and not be sold challenged the "ideological and economic interests that are at the foundations of a gallery."²⁵ Furthermore, by stripping the artist of the "creator" title and undermining the commercial potential of his exhibition, Kounellis re-formulated the entire ecosystem of the gallery with this installation, disrupting its capitalist purpose.

It is possible to imagine that even the thick air in the gallery was politically charged. In its thickness, there is the incumbency of the worker uprising of those years, which had been far overlooked by the bourgeois, but after 1968 became a national news. Maybe in that air, the elites of Rome could smell again the *Sessantotto* and the imminent arrival of the bloody *anni di piombo* ("years of lead"), when the inability of the Italian society to resolve its political tensions brought to unforgiving terrorist actions.

Carla Lonzi and Autoritratto

Lonzi was born in Florence in 1931, but during World War II, she and her middle class family had to flee the city. Lonzi returned to her native city to attend the University of Florence, where she became the pupil of the famous Italian art critic Roberto Longhi. Her relationship with Longhi had a strong impact on the trajectory of Lonzi's career; he played an important role in

²⁴ Lumley, Robert. *Arte Povera*. New York City: Abrams, 2005, 33.

²⁵ Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn. *Arte Povera*. New York City: Phaidon, 2014, 109.

introducing Lonzi to the Italian art scene and launching her career.²⁶ Yet, Longhi and Lonzi grew apart as her involvement in politics deepened, which eventually led to a methodological and theoretical break with her teacher.²⁷ In 1954, Lonzi became a member of the PCI, the Italian Communist Party, thus starting her lifelong political involvement in Italy. In 1957, she moved to Rome, and during her years in the capital, she truly developed as both a critic and a feminist. Lonzi became strongly involved with the new generation of Italian artists, including Jannis Kounellis, as evidenced by her work and her friendship and partnership with the painter Carla Accardi and her romantic relationship with the sculptor Pietro Consagra, both of who participated in the Italian post-war movement *Forma 1*.

In 1958, Lonzi started working as an art critic for *Marcatré* and became the magazine's contemporary art specialist. *Marcatré* covered contemporary culture, specifically focusing on art, architecture, and music. Right after she finished college, Lonzi had received the offer to become the magazine's art critic as a result of a recommendation made by Longhi to the chief editor.²⁸ Although Lonzi's political activism was fully entwined with her work as an art critic, she chose to officially leave the art world in 1969 to focus on her feminist work. However, she did not altogether abandon her involvement with art world, but only the institutions that controlled it, which she regarded as oppressive. She renounced her career as an art critic because she could not reconcile it with her political beliefs. In 1970, along with her friends Carla Accardi and Elvira Banotti, Lonzi found the magazine and feminist group *Rivolta Femminile*, which later developed

²⁶ Baldini, Michela. "Le Arti Figurative all'Apporodo. Carla Lonzi: un'Allieva Dissidente di Roberto Longhi." *Italianistica: Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, Vol.38, No.3, 2009, 119.

²⁷ Baldini, Michela. "Le Arti Figurative all'Apporodo. Carla Lonzi: un'Allieva Dissidente di Roberto Longhi." *Italianistica: Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, Vol.38, No.3, 2009, 125.

²⁸ Baldini, Michela. "Le Arti Figurative all'Apporodo. Carla Lonzi: un'Allieva Dissidente di Roberto Longhi." *Italianistica: Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, Vol.38, No.3, 2009, 118.

into a publishing house.²⁹ Aside from her work as an art historian, which she sublimated in her magnum opus *Autoritratto*, Lonzi also wrote *Sputiamo su Hegel. La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale e altri scritti* (*Let's Spit on Hegel, the Clitoridian Woman and the Vaginal Woman, and Other Writings*) in 1970.³⁰

For Lonzi, *Autoritratto* simultaneously represented the peak of her maturity as an art critic and her break from the art world. *Autoritratto* is a book that compiles fourteen interviews which Lonzi conducted and recorded between 1962 and 1969. The De Donato printing house published the volume as part of the series *atti*, which consisted of contemporary texts that applied unconventional stylistic approaches.³¹ The interesting title, which translates from Italian to “self portrait” is very ambiguous. It might hint to the intimacy of the piece, both because of the very personal criticism toward art criticism, her own career path, that the volume proposes, or because of the intimacy achieved in expressing the individual voices of each artist.

Each interview that eventually became part of *Autoritratto* was produced individually, but then Lonzi transcribed and edited them together to create the illusion of a colloquium being held among the critic and the fourteen artists at the same time. Lonzi started the process of transcribing the various interviews while living in Minneapolis, USA, where she lived from 1966 to 1967 with her partner Pietro Consagra, who taught at the Minneapolis School of Arts.³² Lonzi chose to interview Carla Accardi, Getulio Alviani, Enrico Castellani, Pietro Consagra, Luciano Fabro, Lucio Fontana, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Nigro, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Mimmo

²⁹ Baldini, Michela. “Le Arti Figurative all’Apporodo. Carla Lonzi: un’Allieva Dissidente di Roberto Longhi.” *Italianistica: Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, Vol.38, No.3, 2009, 119.

³⁰ Lonzi, Carla. *Sputiamo Su Hegel*. Roma: Editoriale Grafica, 1970.

³¹ Iamurri, Laura. *Un margine che sfugge: Carla Lonzi e l'arte in Italia, 1955-1970*. Quodlibet, 2016, 204.

³² Ibid, 169.

Rotella, Salvatore Scarpitta, Giulio Turcato, and Cy Twombly. All of these artists were active in Rome in the 1960s, and many were a part of the Arte Povera movement. Twombly was American, but also active in Rome.

Autoritratto contains no chapters or headings; everything within the volume flows as if “montaged cinematographically.”³³ This undefined structure hints to the heterogeneous conversation that Lonzi aspired to recreate artificially. The themes shift quickly, at times without transitions, creating the illusion of listening to an informal discussion among the various artists. Consequently, Lonzi *decontextualized* the words of the original interviews in order to *recontextualize* them within a larger conversation. This strategy recalls that used by Kounellis in *Untitled (12 horses)*, which decontextualized and recontextualized both the horses and the gallery space. In *Autoritratto*, this approach allows the artificial conversation to flow and develop organically, with points being raised and discussed quickly and freely, and maintains the conversational cadence of the transcripts, which at times are lively and engaging, eliciting quick answers, and other times are more introspective, developing into long, personal monologues.

The conversation in *Autoritratto* is interspersed with archival material, mostly photos but also various small miscellaneous. There is no clear and direct connection between the text and the placement of the visuals. Among the numerous images, there are personal memories of the various artists, recollections from their daily lives, sketches or quick diagrams that they had created, and even content related to the social events of the Roman art scene. The archival material creates a warm, direct connection with each artist, as though the conversation had taken place among friends sharing memories with one another. The intimacy created by the images

³³ Flood, Richard, and Francis Morris.. *Zero to infinity: Arte Povera, 1962-1972*. Minneapolis: D’Argenzio. Walker Art Center, 2001, 38

directly contradicts the aseptic structure of the volume's text, which only contains the interview transcripts and the speakers' names. Yet, the tone of many of the responses corresponds to the archival material by painting a familiar, colloquial mood, in which the friendliness and informality of the exchanges between the critic/interviewer and the artist/interviewee is apparent. Until its publication, the volume had been a work in progress, as can be seen by its selection of photos, some of which were of events in 1969, the same year *Autoritratto* was published.³⁴

Lonzi's voice does not control the structure of the conversation, nor is it patronizing toward the artists or the readers. As discussed by the Paris-based art historian Giovanna Zapperi in conversation with Berlin-based art critic Federica Buetti, Lonzi

“in composing *Autoritratto*, was looking for a way to escape the “inauthentic profession” of art criticism in favor of a participatory process that could be personally transformative. Throughout her book, Lonzi undoes the epistemic structures art history. The publication's dispersed, heterogeneous, and collective subjectivity challenges established notions of authorship; the adoption of a non-linear temporality created through editing and montage; and her rejection of formalism with its privileging of vision, as opposed to participation, dialogue and horizontality.”³⁵

Lonzi's voice is present in *Autoritratto*; she often plays the role of guide for the book's many conversations, while always *engaging* with the conversation from the inside instead of

³⁴ Iamurri, Laura. *Un margine che sfugge: Carla Lonzi e l'arte in Italia, 1955-1970*. Quodlibet, 2016, 194.

³⁵ Zapperi, Giovanna. “Finding Resonance with Carla Lonzi” Interview by Federica Buetti. Makhzin, April 1st, 2016.

commenting on it as an outsider.³⁶ Lonzi joins the volume's artificial symposium in approximately twenty different instances. As described by Zappieri, the natural flow of the exchange is another effect of the palpable comfort established among the interviewer and the interviewed. This relationship is implied by the manner in which many of the artists address Lonzi; they often use the second-person singular, which is an informal way of talking to someone in Italian and uncommon in formal or professional contexts. Lonzi did not try to only gather data in the interviews; she also strove to understand the lives and perspectives of the artists in order to understand the creative process and, consequently, art from their point of view. It is through Lonzi's direct approach to the conversation and through her willingness to discuss the artistic creative process with the artists themselves as her peers that Lonzi creates *Autoritratto*. These peculiar features of her art criticism show clear similarities with the methodology of the Workerism Movement.

³⁶ Baldini, Michela. "Le Arti Figurative all'Apporodo. Carla Lonzi: un'Allieva Dissidente di Roberto Longhi." *Italianistica: Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, Vol.38, No.3, 2009, 125.

Chapter 2

Political and historical background

Italy in the 1960s

Developed during the 1950s in Italy, Workerism signified a new way of thinking about class relationships within the communist party, which led to a fresh interpretation of Marxism. The theoretical roots of the movement were in the decentralization of the party's political power and a re-direction of its political action toward the conditions and activities of the proletariat based on an insider's perspective. Workerism intelligentsia interprets the struggle of the working class as *preceding and prefiguring* the successive re-positioning of capital, and it aimed to bring about a symbiotic dialectic between the workers and the party's theorists. The goal was to create a new approach to class theory that would constantly evolve and adapt to the dynamic relationship between theory and praxis.

This tendency started to develop as early as the late 1950s, in tandem with the growing phenomenon of students and intellectuals immersing themselves in the reality of the Italian workers. This change started within the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in the early 1950s, when the failure of the Italian Unions, which were under the PCI umbrella, to understand and protect the workers was becoming evident through a growing antagonism of the party toward workers' protests. The Party steadily but clearly began to side with national progress at the expense of individual workers' rights, especially in fields like metallurgy and factories like FIAT.³⁷ By the early 1960s, Italy had for the most part developed into a technologically advanced country, able

³⁷ Balestrini, Nanni, Primo Moroni. *L'orda D'oro 1968-1977*. Feltrinelli, 1997, 16.

to compete in Europe and the rest of the world; at the same time, the country's economy quickly shifted away from agriculture, which had sustained Italy before and during both of the world wars.³⁸ This shift was not slow or organic; it rapidly resulted from the Marshall Plan, an initiative passed in 1948 in which the U.S. offered twelve billions dollars in aid to help Western European countries rebuild their economies following WWII. One of the main consequences of the Marshall Plan was the implementation of neo-capitalist economies in many European countries, including Italy.

The sudden and rapid increase of production caused by these changes, along with a slower increase of salaries, was one of the many problems that the Italian institutionalized unions were not able, or willing, to tackle.³⁹ This inability to satisfy the workers' requests was part of the neo-capitalist direction adopted by the PCI. The Italian Communist Party *de facto* chose to support Italy's economic and technological progress and endorse capitalism at the expense of the working class, whose rights the party was supposed to protect.⁴⁰ As the PCI further alienated factory workers during the 1960s, intellectuals and students started to join the fight.⁴¹ They immersed themselves in the *realta' operaia*, with many working in factories for short periods of time and collecting first-hand experiences and oral histories from the workers. Workerism developed out of the tension between the PCI and the more militant, Marxist-Leninist factions, composed of both intellectuals and workers, who accused the party of neglecting the problems of the working class in favor of state-focused interests and capitalistic progress.⁴²

³⁸ Balestrini, Nanni, Primo Moroni. *L'orda D'oro 1968-1977*. Feltrinelli, 1997, 34.

³⁹ Ibid, 34.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 35.

⁴¹ [It is important to notice that the relationship between student and artist was not always one of support but also one of hostility. Cullinan, Nicholas. *From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam: The Politics of Arte Povera*. October, vol. 124, 2008, 19]

⁴² Balestrini, Nanni, Primo Moroni. *L'orda D'oro 1968-1977*. Feltrinelli, 1997, 35.

The first official outlet for this new approach to the plight of the workers was *Quaderni Rossi*, a magazine founded in 1961 by Raniero Panzieri, Mario Tronti, Romano Alquati, and Antonio (Toni) Negri.⁴³ Many of the founders became crucial members of the *Movimento Operaio*. Negri, for example, would become the founder of *Potere Operaio* and a leading member of *Autonomia Operaia*. *Quaderni Rossi* embodied a willingness to embrace an open dialogue between workers and the intelligentsia and provide intellectuals a platform to implement and participate in this dialectic.⁴⁴ Among the founding members, Panzieri deserves a mention as a trailblazer who acquired dialectic experiences at the FIAT and Olivetti factories.⁴⁵ With the aim of understanding the relationship between humans and machines, he conducted extensive field research. Panzieri used oral histories with factory workers as his primary research method because he believed it would allow him to better understand the cycle of production, which would then allow him to comprehend the needs surrounding workers' autonomy.⁴⁶

Such intellectual interest was not limited to political theorists, politicians, and journalists; it also intersected with various other fields. As the student movement quickly became closely connected with the Workerism Movement, their membership grew acquainted with guerrilla warfare and protests methods through the circulation of essays by Mao Zedung, Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara.⁴⁷ During this post-war period, the art world also intersected with the workers' movement.

⁴³ Balestrini, Nanni, Primo Moroni. *L'orda D'oro 1968-1977*. Feltrinelli, 1997, 33.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 37.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 33.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 136-7.

⁴⁷ [It is important to say that the student movement was not only fighting against the Marshall Plan. In Italy, from the late 60s to the late 70s there was a modernization of the country's costumes. Some of the most important fights were the Feminism, the attack on the institutionalized dogmatism and authoritarianism in school, families and church. - Ibid, 176]

The political nature of Arte Povera

Since its conception, the Arte Povera movement has been interwoven with its political and historical context. Often considered the father of Arte Povera, Celant imbued the movement with militancy through the manifesto *Arte Povera: Notes for a guerrilla war*,⁴⁸ which links the movement to the worker and student uprisings of the late 1960s.⁴⁹ The connection becomes clear just by the linguistic choices Celant made in the manifesto's text. Subtitled *Notes for a guerrilla war*—perhaps, a reference to the famous essay *On Guerrilla Warfare* of Mao Zedong—this text established a tense relationship with its context from the very beginning.⁵⁰

Celant participates in a tradition of appropriating guerrilla attitudes, the tone of protests, and the slogans that were typical of the *Sessantotto*, a tactic which was common among various student groups who often repurposed the language of political resistance, as exemplified by the infamous protest slogan “the university will be our Vietnam.”⁵¹ Students who were inspired by reading Marx, Mao, Castro, and Guevara identified their own struggles with those of the communist militia rebels and their resistance to American capitalism. Consequently, the Italian poet Nanni Balestrini defined the Latin American guerilla rebels as the Italian students' first allies.⁵²

⁴⁸ Celant, Germano. *Arte Povera, Notes for a Guerilla War*. *Flash Art*, no. 5, 1967.

⁴⁹ Cullinan, Nicholas. *From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam: The Politics of Arte Povera*. October, vol. 124, 2008, 10.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 18.

⁵¹ Ibid, 10.

⁵² Balestrini, Nanni, Primo Moroni. *L'orda D'oro 1968-1977*. Feltrinelli, 1997, 177.

Arte Povera was also born as a radical act of resistance against the new import of American culture, which quickly wielded a strongly influence over the Italian art world. Jaleh Mansoor, associate professor of modern and contemporary art at the University of British Columbia, concisely defines the Marshall Plan as a way for the U.S. government to fight the Cold War against the USSR on other fronts, specifically, an economic and cultural one.⁵³ Related to this, the U.S. secured Italy's alignment with its sphere of influence in 1948, thereby preventing the establishment of a pro-USSR government in Italy during the Cold War.

This process of Americanization of the Italian art world culminated in the victory of Rauschenberg at the 1964 Venice Biennale. Rauschenberg was the first American artist (and the youngest one to date) to receive the prize. The protests against Rauschenberg's victory were one of many instances during the late 1960s in which the student movement colluded with indignant Italian artists in denouncing the colonial approach of the U.S. toward Italian culture.⁵⁴ Most likely, Celant was closely affiliated with the student movement, or at the very least, he was aware of the intersecting protests of artists and students. Even though it is impossible to verify the level of his engagement with the student uprisings, it is safe to assume Celant was aware of the tensions at Italian universities, since he was only 24 when Rauschenberg won the Grand Premio at the Biennale and, probably, therefore either still in college or a recent graduate. The affinity between Celant and the student movement becomes clear when studying the Arte Povera manifesto.

⁵³ Mansoor, Jaleh. *Marshall Plan Modernism: Italian Postwar Abstraction and the Beginnings of Autonomia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, 7.

⁵⁴ Cullinan, Nicholas. *From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam: The Politics of Arte Povera*. *October*, vol. 124, 2008, 2018, 14.

The resistance of Arte Povera was not only present in the theorization of the movement, but also in its materiality. In 1967, Celant curated *IM-spazio*, frequently considered the first “unofficial” Arte Povera exhibition, in which he gathered artists from Rome and Turin who shared an affinity for primordial materials. The artists’ tendency to use elementary and “impoverished” materials (*povera* means “poor”) and to reject technology as an artistic tool should be read as a refusal of the methodologies associated with the American avant garde. According to Celant, Arte Povera members actively rejected the dogmatism and authoritarianism of Italian society, which imposed strict regulations and expected the individual’s total submission to those regulations. These artists also rejected consumerism as the main driving force behind creating art. Such a capitalist concept of art and the art market was often associated with the American art world in Italy.

Theorizing Arte Povera

Many do consider Lonzi as having directly taken part in the theorization of Arte Povera, especially since we know that she has close relationship with many of the members, among which Pino Pascali. Yet, in her book *Autoritratto*, even though she interviewed many of the members of *Arte Povera* a few years after the creation of the movement, it is noticeable that the movement is never mentioned. This absence is hard to explain, since it is clearly not dictated by the printing schedule of *Autoritratto* as proves by the fact that Lonzi added events that were contemporary to the years of publication, 1969.⁵⁵ However, regardless of the reasons behind the

⁵⁵ Iamurri, Laura. *Un che sfugge: Carla Lonzi e l'arte in Italia, 1955-1970*. Quodlibet, 2016, 189.

formal omission of the movement's name from *Autoritratto*, her radical methodology still had a radical impact on the Italian art world of the 1960s, especially younger artists, and arguably, she helped prepare the ground for the birth of the *Arte Povera* Movement. Lonzi could have also influenced the young Celant, as shown in his book *Art Povera: Conceptual, Actual or Impossible Art?* (1969),⁵⁶ in which he presents interviews with artists of the newly formed movement. Lonzi had previously used the methodology of producing art historical prose by transcribing artist interviews, often in her work for the art historical journal *Marcatre*.⁵⁷ Lonzi argues that using artist interviews in the prose of her writing and as the center of her scholarship allows for a deeper involvement of the art critic in the creative process and works as a means for critically understanding the art object itself. Celant, in his volume *Art Povera*, does not fully appropriate Lonzi's immersive methodology.⁵⁷ Compared to the neutral position Lonzi tries to achieve throughout *Autoritratto*, Celant's voice is predominant in his volume, particularly in its highly theoretical introduction and conclusion. However, although the volume contains an "introduction" and a "conclusion," he does not introduce nor recapitulate a linear narrative, making the volume more like a writing experiment than an art historical tone. Yet, it is Celant who is guiding the pace of the volume, as in the introduction and conclusion; it is here where Celant differs the most from Carla Lonzi, who would organically join the conversation instead of towering over it, as Celant in his *Art Povera* book.

Lonzi's influence on the *Arte Povera* is not limited to the work of Celant. Many of the artists she interviews in *Autoritratto* are linked to the *Arte Povera* movement, namely, Enrico Castellani, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Giulio Paolini, and Pino Pascali. Based on the

⁵⁶ Celant, Germano. *Art Povera: Conceptual, Actual or Impossible Art?* London: Studio Vista, 1969.

⁵⁷ Celant, Germano. *Art Povera: Conceptual, Actual or Impossible Art?* London: Studio Vista, 1969.

interviews, it is possible to infer that a closeness existed between the critic and the artists, especially the younger ones, with whom Lonzi seems to establish not only a professional connection but also a friendly relationship. This can be inferred by the informality of certain exchange, like when Lonzi answers to her friend Carla Accardi comments by saying “I would give you a kiss”.⁵⁸

It is possible to assume Lonzi played an important role in shaping the sensibility of this new generation of Italian artists, who were rebelling against the traditional hierarchy of the art world in parallel to the cultural revolution of 1968. Since she was the *enlightened* art critic, Lonzi belonged to this politicization of the new generation of artists and art critics, which strove to undermine the system from within. This type of relationship recalls the connection that developed between workers and the Italian intelligentsia in the mid-1960s and flourished later during *Sessantotto*. Similarly to the Workerism intelligentsia, Lonzi created her theories as she gathered intel from artists, whom, in a neo-Marxist conception, could be considered workers. Her interviews reveal a willingness to eliminate the isolated position of the art critic who interprets from high above. Instead, Lonzi wanted to become part of the *process of creation* similar to how the Workerism intelligentsia activists wanted to enter the factories to develop their theories based on the concrete experience of the workers.

It is also fair to infer that Lonzi was active and comfortable in the world of the artists due to her personal relationship with Consagra, which ended after the publication of *Autoritratto*, and also her likely more poignant relationship with Carla Accardi, with whom she continued to work closely even after “leaving” the art world. It is possible, then, to contemplate an intellectual

⁵⁸ Lonzi, Carla. *Autoritratto*. De Donato, 1969, 28.

affinity also with Kounellis, with whom Lonzi probably shared the same intellectual friend. It is interesting to compare the development of the work of Kounellis and Lonzi with that of Workerism as part of a larger cultural movement so radical that its push would be strongly felt even in the art world.

Chapter 3

Art and Workerism

Political influences on Kounellis and Lonzi

There is frequent speculation over the extent to which the historical and cultural context influences the production of art in a given time period. A reading of a work of art that fails to contextualize it often seems partial at best, if not unsatisfactory. It is difficult, however, for an art historian to know exactly how much the art directly reflects the historical context and to what extent the artist's individual taste and sensibility interferes with drawing a direct connection between the subject matter and the context. The late 1960s, ~~both~~ the temporal focus of this thesis and the peak time of contact between Kounellis and Lonzi, were also marked by incredible political activism in Italy that permeated most aspects of the country's cultural life, including its art communities.

While strong political and social stances characterize much global art production in the late twentieth century, there is more of a methodological affinity between Lonzi's *Autoritratto* and Kounellis' *Untitled (12 horses)* with the Workerism movement than a political stance taken in support of a political movement. In fact, this affinity more than mirrors the political or social context in which Kounellis and Lonzi were situated; it likely resulted from their shared belief in the ideology of Workerism and their engagement with the movement. Furthermore, the affinity between their work and Workerism developed when the two artists were in close professional contact, which suggests they might have influenced one another, a possibility supported by the fact that *Untitled (12 horses)* and *Autoritratto* were both produced in 1969. Moreover, to

understand the affinity between Kounellis's *Untitled (12 horses)* and Lonzi's *Autoritratto* with the Workerism Movement, it helps to consider the works together. When analyzed alongside *Autoritratto*, the artistic production of Kounellis of the late 1960s, specifically *Untitled (12 horses)*, reveals how the artist could have been influenced by the radical dialectic found in Lonzi's art criticism, which culminates in her magnum opus. The different careers of Lonzi and Kounellis, namely art critic and artist, assigned each to specific agents of the Workerism methodology. Lonzi's approach reflects that of the intellectual and while Kounellis's concerns that of the worker.

In the case of *Untitled (12 horses)*, but more generally of Kounellis as an artist, the installation recalls the situation of factory workers, who have been made aware of their situation and, as a consequence, focus their action toward breaking the system that stifles them. Kounellis, as the skilled producer of sellable product, has felt the changes on his work caused by the neo-capitalistic shift in Italian politics. Among the various attractions of a work like *Untitled (12 Horses)*, its disruptive nature is most widely recognized. The disruptive condition of the installation is not only desirable, but also *necessary*. Its strength derives from its combination of its dialectic action with the public and disruptive nature. It is in its dialectic action that the disruptiveness of the piece develops into activism. A dialectic action is also the basis of *Autoritratto*. However, in *Untitled (12 horses)*, the dialectic is developed outward, toward the context of the gallery, while in *Autoritratto* the dialectic structure is absorbed within the volume itself.

The activist essence of *Untitled (12 horses)* manifests itself similarly to the workers' protests of those years. This abruptly-breaking-the-system technique is typical of protests in Italy

after the 1950s and specifically with those related to the Workerism Movement more than with those organized by institutionalized collective. The workers would established a cycle of *strike* or *interruption* of their work as a way of resisting the system, often interrupting the work in the fabric with what is known as a “spontaneous protest”. This process mimics the disruptive nature of *Untitled 912 horses*) within the context of the gallery. Kounellis chose to *interrupt* the normal concept of gallery opening through *Untitled (12 horses)*, which was both *resisting* the commercialization of artistic production, since the piece was not to be sold. The timing the of exhibition is also similar to the Workerism protest, since it was abrupt and short, the exhibition lasted only three days.

Through the same process of affiliation, Lonzi’s position as an art critic allowed her to develop more of an affinity to the enlightened intelligentsia who were receptive to the workers’ situation, learning from it and developing a theoretical framework around it. *Autoritratto* resulted of this new dialectic and methodology, which the the young art critic appropriated and implemented within her practice. Lonzi’s book is a polemic resistant to the patronizing *modus agendi* of the institutionalized criticism that she believed contrived to interpret rather than understand art. According to Lonzi, only an open dialogue with the artist yields to the critic a richer understanding of artistic meaning and the creative process.

While it is difficult to prove Kounellis subscribed to the ideology of Workerism, it is possible to do so for Lonzi. *Un margine che sfugge*, a book Lonzi based on correspondence with her friend Marisa Volpi before she became a famous Italian art historian, includes a letter sent to Lonzi in the summer of 1956—an important time for the workers’ movement due to a violent protest by FIAT workers—which provides insight into the political reading group Lonzi founded

as a college student.⁵⁹ Lonzi had decided to develop her political knowledge by studying primary sources. Her reading group focused specifically on Lenin, Stalin, and Marx. The group includes Volpi, a close friend of hers, who would inspire Lonzi to move from Florence to Rome after college. Volpi was older and more politically involved than Lonzi, and she was also a strong influence in the art critic's development. In the letter, Volpi suggests that Lonzi attend to the more political aspect of the readings assigned to each group member, and that she should focus specifically on "Gramsci, the history of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and *the workers movement*."⁶⁰ It is safe to conclude that Lonzi not only shared an intellectual affinity with the workers' movement; her study of the movement itself was part of her education in the years that led to *Autoritratto*.

It is plausible that Kounellis was aware of the workers's situation during this period. In fact, since the artist had lived in Rome from 1956, it is likely he was involved or at least conscious of the precarious political situation. In 1956, all of the international communist community had to confront the speech Khrushchev made at the XX congress, in which he denounced Stalin's crimes.⁶¹ More specifically, in Italy, the late 1950s and early 1960s brought more violent protests, which led to the death of protester and gained national recognition. Furthermore, this period signified an important moment for political activism in Italy because of the merger between workers and non-workers activists, specifically, young students who became personally involved in the workers' fight. As a "producer," Kounellis would identify with the workers. Furthermore, Kounellis would often discuss how the new Italian art scene and the

⁵⁹ Iamurri, Laura. *Un margine che sfugge: Carla Lonzi e l'arte in Italia, 1955-1970*. Quodlibet, 2016, 27.

⁶⁰ Iamurri, Laura. *Un margine che sfugge: Carla Lonzi e l'arte in Italia, 1955-1970*. Quodlibet, 2016, 27.

⁶¹ Balestrini, Nanni, Primo Moroni. *L'orda D'oro 1968-1977*. Feltrinelli, 1997, 35

overall capitalist evolution of Italian's economy worked against his own profession due to a loss of a freedom as a result of an increased focus on production.

This type of conversation-based knowledge is at the root of Workerism, and it is referred to as *con-ricerca* (to research with). *Con-ricerca* is the method of research used by a branch of communist intellectuals who directed their focus on the actions of the proletariat instead of the activities of the party. Romano Alquati coined this term to describe an *in-situ* research methodology, such as spending time working or visiting factories, and developing a dialectic relationship with the workers.⁶² Danilo Montaldi, an Italian Marxist activist, writer, gallery owner, and collector, introduced *con-ricerca* to the art world. Montaldi's approach to art historical writing resembled the methodology of Lonzi. Galimberti argues that her exposure to the “intellectual milieu” of oral historians,⁶³ scholars who used primary oral sources as a central part of their work, might have exposed Lonzi to Montaldi's work and, consequently, the appropriation of Workerism by certain art historians.

It is then possible to find affinities between the relationship of Kounellis and Lonzi in the last years of the 1960s and that of a Workerism intellectual and a worker; both relationship present a similar dynamic. Lonzi, as an intellectual who is interested in formulating theories based on firsthand accounts of the artist's experience, recalls the work intellectuals of the Workerism movement who based their political theories on firsthand experiences in the factories. At the same time, Kounellis provided and entrusted Lonzi with his experience, actively creating

⁶² Balestrini, Nanni, Primo Moroni. *L'orda D'oro 1968-1977*. Feltrinelli, 1997, 37

⁶³ Galimberti, Jacopo, *Danilo Montaldi: Activist, Collector, Gallery-owner and Art Critic*, CIMA presentation, 2015, 7.

a dialectic with the art critic as a peer, not as an outsider. This approach is similar to that of the factory worker, who is welcoming the intellectual into his reality.

Untitled (12 horses), then, is a way in which Kounellis is strikingly against the system that oppresses his freedom by forcing him into a pre-figured creative process. *Autoritratto*, on the other hand, can be interpreted as a theoretical framework developed by gathering primary sources, which lead to the entrance of the art critic into the process of creation. In those years, Kounellis and Lonzi would have been also influenced in their work not only by the tense political climate but also by the type of theory that was circulating in the art world.

Theoretical framework

Dewey and Eco

To consider the dialectic aspect of art as a part of its essence was not radical in the twentieth century. On the other hand, this dialectic was often used in radical way to take a political stance in post-WWII art. Kounellis was a pioneer of creating raw and environmental engagement with his audience, as clearly exemplified by the sensorially-engaging *Untitled (12 horses)* and by his work in general. Similarly, Lonzi utilizes an immersive dialectic in *Autoritratto*, even though she develops it inwardly as a way to understand the artist's world by joining it. This can still be considered an environmental engagement, since Lonzi's aim is not only gathering oral interviews of artists, but also experiencing their creative process through them. Lonzi and Kounellis's insistence on creating a dialectic connection through their work is the result of their internalization of the sociological and political method of *con-ricerca*. At the same time, however, to understand the nature of the engagement with the contemporary cultural environment of Lonzi and, in particular, Kounellis, it is useful to analyze the work of Dewey and

Eco. In fact, Eco's *Open work* functions as a theoretical framework of Italian post–World War II art, and it is deeply influenced by *Art as an experience* by Dewey.

In her essay for the exhibition *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972*⁶⁴, Corinna Criticos ties the theoretical tendencies of Arte Povera to the American philosopher John Dewey and his work, *Art as an Experience*,⁶⁵ and to the Italian philosopher Umberto Eco and his work, *Open Work*.⁶⁶ Both volumes were published between the 1950s and 1960s, with Eco citing and directly reflecting on the words of the American philosopher. Dewey was active in the U.S. in the first half of the twentieth century, and Eco introduced Dewey's theories about aesthetic experience to the Italian art scene. In his famous book *Art as Experience*, Dewey focuses on the type of relationship that is created between an object and its audience⁶⁷. According to Dewey, the viewer, when experiencing a work of art by establishing a dialectic relationship with it, gains a type of knowledge, which the philosopher defines as *transactional*⁶⁸. Dewey uses the word *transactional* because he believes this knowledge results from an exchange of information that happens through a dialectic relationship between art and the audience, in which both agents have a direct and active role. This transactional exchange of knowledge is possible because of the ability of art to present a referential idea to viewers, who who in turn reflect on personal experiences recalled by their interpretation of the art.

⁶⁴ Flood, Richard, and Francis Morris.. *Zero to infinity: Arte Povera, 1962-1972*. Minneapolis: D'Argenzio. Walker Art Center, 2001, 68.

⁶⁵ Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, by John Dewey. New-York: Minton, Balch and, 1934

⁶⁶ Eco, Umberto. *Opera Aperta. Forma E Indeterminazione Nelle Poetiche Contemporanee*. Milano: Bompiani, 1962.

⁶⁷ Flood, Richard, and Francis Morris.. *Zero to infinity: Arte Povera, 1962-1972*. Minneapolis: D'Argenzio. Walker Art Center, 2001, 68.

⁶⁸ Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, by John Dewey. New-York: Minton, Balch and, 1934, 37.

This type of symbiotic relationship influenced Eco's ideas about *ambiguity* in art, a theory he fully develops in his book, *Open Work*. Eco's bases his definition of an *open work* on the inner ability of art to be interpreted by the viewer and on how much interpretation a particular work allows. The ambiguity of the work allows for the viewer to open up a dialogue with it, in which various interpretation come to life.⁶⁹ In the readings of both Dewey and Eco of this dialectic relationship, the work acts as a ambassador for the voice of the non-present artist, who is truly the one in conversation with the viewer. It is through the conversation itself that the various possible meanings of the art piece are created.

The position of Dewey and Eco contrasts with the outdated Croce-esque idea that connecting with art depends mostly on the viewer's ability to recognize and understand the iconography of a particular work of art.⁷⁰ According to this perspective, the viewers passively absorb coded information given to them, as though they *read* the preconceived narrative of the work instead of actively and directly engaging with it.⁷¹ An open work, which according to Eco was especially common in contemporary art, breaks from the canonical relationship between the viewer, the art, and the artist, and allows the viewer to become a part of the meaning of a work. These ideas, especially Eco's, were well regarded in Italy and internationally. It is then possible to think that not only Kounellis and Lonzi appropriated the methodology of Workerism, but also their dialectic approach to art and art criticism depended on this new wave of thinking, brought to Italy by Eco, in which art is open to a dialectic and able to create knowledge through it. We can assume that both Lonzi and Celant were fully aware of the theories of Eco and Dewey,

⁶⁹ Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, 6.

⁷⁰ Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, 25.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 3.

because of the theoretical education they received and the impact these thinkers had on the approach to contemporary art. It is also safe to say that Kounellis would have known of Eco, since he received a formal education at the Accademia in Rome. It is also possible to notice some type of theoretical affinity between Kounellis and Dewey, especially when the artist discusses the importance of concepts like *creative freedom* and *unity* in his artistic production. His definition of the concept of *creative freedom* and how it is connected with the idea of *unity* is found in an interview with Carla Lonzi, part of *Autoritratto*.⁷²

Kounellis

The Reconciliation of Artistic Freedom and Political Activism

As many prominent social art historians, like TJ Clark and Michael Baxandall have argued, there might not be such thing as *a-political* art since art emerges from a specific socio-political context, to which it can be in opposition or homologated to. The politicization of art became extremely common during the late twentieth century, when the Romantic notion of the artist *genius* was challenged by the rise of socially-minded, militant artists. More and more artists felt the necessity to use their sensibility and creativity to give voice to social and political problems, and Italy was not the exception⁷³. Celant, in discussing the oeuvre of Kounellis,

⁷² Lonzi, Carla. *Autoritratto*. De Donato, 1969, 147.

⁷³ Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-garde*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968.

defines this change in artistic sensibility as a “clash between the inner questions and civic projection.”⁷⁴

The idea of the political radicalization of art uses the Marxist concept of dialectical materialism and applies it to artistic production. When read according to the dialectic materialism, the superstructure, which in this specific case would be artistic production, is in a relationship of direct dependency on the structure, which encompasses the economic environment in which art is produced. This dependency of the superstructure is not pure passivity to the structure, nor a type of mirroring of the artistic production of the historical and cultural moment in which it is created. Instead, it is a dialectic process of the structure framing the superstructure and mutually engaging with it.⁷⁵ When considering the superstructure as actively engaging with the structure, artistic freedom is not limited but contained by the environment in which it is developed, tying the artist to a moment in history while allowing him for an unlimited amount of personal interpretations of that moment. Then, the definition of artistic sensibility of Celant sums up this dialectic connection between the artist and the context.

⁷⁶

The question of the socio-political context of art production was discussed among art historians like Renato Poggioli and Peter Burger,⁷⁷ and many artists as well were confronted with the issue themselves. Kounellis is among those who culturally and politically contextualize their work, as he openly discusses in an interview with Lonzi in *Autoritratto*, in which he unfolds his vision of creative freedom. *Un'azione libera* (a free action) is the real principle of true

⁷⁴ Celant, Germano. *Arte Povera: History and Stories*. Electa, 2011, 82.

⁷⁵ Solomon, Maynard. *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979, 33.

⁷⁶ Celant, Germano. *Arte Povera: History and Stories*. Electa, 2011, 82.

⁷⁷ Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-garde*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

creative freedom, Kounellis explains, and it is achieved only through a symbiotic connection with life. The fluidity of life and the possibility to tailor creative production and inspiration around it eventually allows for a unity to be achieved that does not limit the artist in his work, but rather enhances his possibilities.

Each time that the unity between the art and life is achieved, a free action can be taken and, consequently, the artistic creation can be free. Kounellis's idea of creative freedom is the ability of re-proposing one's self and one's art differently every day and adapting the creative process to different contexts. Kounellis clarifies his position on freedom in his artistic production when saying: "In my mind freedom can be produced not once and for all, it is not a static object that once reached becomes free forever but is it the constant action of reaching toward it."⁷⁸ In this quote, he defines freedom as a process of constant struggle, since it is not something that can be indeterminately achieved or owned.

When Kounellis connects the *unity* of one's practice and life to creative freedom, it is important to take into account that he specifically refers to the socioeconomic environment in which the artist is active, which, as previously discussed, both frames and intervenes in artistic creation, as the artist continues to incorporate it into his work. In the conversation between Lonzi and Kounellis, which was published in *Autoritratto*, the artist argues that:

I worked really hard on abolishing the idea of being professional artist [...] not in order to focus on a different career path, but to be a different man. So today one can create a specific object, while another day it may be essential to focus on a

⁷⁸ "La libertà io credo che si produce, non e' una cosa ferma che, una volta raggiunta, diventa libera per sempre, ma e' una cosa continuamente da raggiungere." Lonzi, Carla. *Autoritratto*. De Donato, 1969, 147.

painting, [...] this is a sign of freedom. Today society has created a distinction between life and work, through the development of various specialized paths, and now the unity is not towards life but towards *work*, [...] this is not an ideal world. [...] I believe Socialism can create unity with life [...] why do I say Socialism? Because [achieving unity with life] is harder in another type of society.⁷⁹

In his words, Kounellis makes it clear that he has given thought to how a context influences the artistic production. Moreover, he recognizes the possibility that a different economic structure can strongly impact the creative process, which suggests that Kounellis thinks of his work as in direct conversation with a specific historical moment and societal structure. Kounellis, however, does not only notes that context is an influence on his creative freedom. He also refers to his condition as an artist working within the urban tissue of an Italian city. In the next extract, Kounellis discusses how the newly formed capitalistic society imposes a different type of unity on his creative process, a unity that is not formed between artistic creation and the artist's life but between artistic creation and the artist's profession. These ideas are expressed in the not-for-sale nature of *Untitled (12 horses)*, which is directly criticizing the way capitalism has affected artistic production through a commercial feticization of the work of art.

⁷⁹ Lonzi, Carla. *Autoritratto*. De Donato, 1969, 147.

Noi abbiamo fatto di tutto per abolire il mestiere dell'artista [...] non per fare un altro mestiere, ma per essere un uomo diverso. Perciò oggi uno può fare un oggetto mentre domani può essere importante dipingere un quadro, [...] questo e' un segno di liberta'. Qui la società ha prodotto questa divisione tra vita e lavoro, e creato le specializzazioni e, adesso, e' diventato daccapo unitario, in senso *non* aderente alla vita, ma aderente all'immagine *dell'ufficio*. [...] Io trovo che questo mondo non e' un mondo ideale. [...] Credo che la realizzazione del socialismo può produrre un'unità di questo tipo, [...]perché dico il socialismo..Perché in un altro sistema e' molto difficile, no?

This way, the piece is not connected with Kounellis' profession as an artist, but with Kounellis's freedom to create art.⁸⁰

As previously discussed, the unity between the artist and his or her life is not supposed to be limiting; on the contrary, it should create a continuous flux of new influences and stimuli. To find *unity*, then, means to find the freedom to open one's creation to constant innovation and mutation, which consequently allows for one's practice to be malleable and hyper-receptive. The type of *unity* Kounellis aims to achieve eliminates constraints on the artistic profession, such as having to make work according to market demands or the expectations of institutions like galleries and museums. Due to the hyperspecialization created by neo-capitalism in Italy, the focus becomes repetitive work turned towards market needs instead of spontaneous experiences. Once artists enter the market or cultural institutions, their art becomes determined by factors other than artistic freedom. At the same time, paradoxically, an artist's profession loses its worth in a capitalist society if it does not join this new type of unity. Therefore, artistic activity is reconfigured according to the idea of *working* as an artist instead of *being* an artist. Such considerations led the young Kounellis, in his interview with Lonzi, to espouse about striving toward a utopian socialist society. He seems to point to socialism as one of the social structures that would allow for the artist to achieve unity with life and thus, liberate artistic creativity from the limitations of capitalism.

Kounellis's interest in finding *unity* as a part of his creative process is also reflected in the installation-based structure of his early projects, which were often site-specific. The idea of embedding his work into the space was present in Kounellis's first series, *Urban Signs*, which

⁸⁰ Again it is important to underline that Kounellis has received financial benefits from the fame he achieved through the show of *Untitled (12 horse)*, even if not from selling the piece.

reveals an interest in the Roman urban setting in which the artist worked.⁸¹ His concern for urban experiences is yet another reason to consider his work within its cultural and political context, since Kounellis took context into consideration. Although a theoretical reading of *Autoritratto* and the work of Lonzi can be more easily “proved” by her known interest in political theory, a reading of Kounellis’s work that does not take into account the controversies that took place in Rome during the the 1950s and 1960s would be extremely incomplete. Kounellis’s immersion in the reality around him was his way to find unity, which would consequently allow him to achieve the creative freedom toward which he proactively strived. This proactive approach is reflected by Kounellis in his interview with Lonzi quoted above. He uses such verbs as “to create,” “to move,” “to reach,” “to actualize,” which all imply a purposeful movement forward or an intentional break from something. Thus, Kounellis not only represents life or mirrors the reality of his context; he immerses his creative process in that reality and allows it to become one with it. His art equally represents the proactive relationship the artist formed with the reality around him.

Kounellis is not the only critical voice among contemporary Italian artists. In fact, this type of negative criticism toward capitalism is echoed by the Arte Povera manifesto:

The artist [...] is thus called upon to produce fine commercial merchandise, offering satisfaction to sophisticated palates. Once he has an idea, he has to live for it and on it. Mass production mentality forces him to produce a single object that satisfies the market to the point of saturation. He is not allowed simply to

⁸¹ Celant, Germano. *Arte Povera: History and Stories*. Electa, 2011, 82.

create the object and then to abandon it to its destiny. He has to follow up on it, justify it, introduce it into the channels of distribution, turning himself as artist into a substitute for an assembly line. Even though he rejects consumer society, he discovers himself one of its producers.[...] Freedom is an empty word.⁸²

This radical stance against the newly founded neo-capitalistic structure of Italian society, including its art scene, is a pillar of the Arte Povera movement. His peers echoed Kounellis's preoccupation with the societal structure of his time, a preoccupation that functioned both as a framework for his early artistic activity in Rome and as the basis of the Arte Povera movement. Furthermore, within the words of Celant we can read the seed of the connection between artists and workers that the capitalist system has created. This specific passage of the *Arte Povera* manifesto sheds new light on the meaning of the *Untitled (12 horses)*. In fact, if in the composition the horses represent the workers and their struggle, the horses also represent the condition of the artist. Like the horses which were tied to the wall, capitalism has chained the workers to production.

The Arte Povera movement aimed to directly oppose the the market dictating artistic production. Like Kounellis, many artists worried about how market demands would influence their ability to express themselves and their art freely, and their work; the kind of materiality chose by the artist of *Arte Povera*, represented this desire to escape this new structure. It is not a coincidence that, just a few years after the official creation of Arte Povera, Kounellis produced *Untitled (12 horses)*, which protested the new *modus operandi* of an Americanized Italian art

⁸² Celant, Germano. *Arte Povera, Notes for a Guerilla War. Flash Art*, no. 5, 1967.

world. The work is the expression of this critical approach to capitalism, because its characteristics—as smelly, alive, made of impoverished material⁸³, and unsellable—challenges the dictatorial art market.⁸⁴

It is in these stances taken by the artist that the affinity between the thought of Dewey and Kounellis can be found. Dewey believes that the innate, empirical essence of art is what allows for the dialectic between the artist and the viewer to develop, and Kounellis uses the rawness of reality in its entirety in work like *Untitled (12 horses)*. Dewey argues in favor of the continuity between human beings and their environment, a rhetoric that comes through the words of Kounellis as a concept of *unity*, and in the message of the Arte Povera manifesto. Germano Celant, in his article *Arte Povera :notes for a guerrilla war* defines the relationship between the art piece and its environment in this way:

The work of art [...] is a process of organization whereby personal experiences, facts, values, and meaning are incorporated into a particular material. [...] components of our experiences must fuse with qualities of the poem or the painting to cease being *extraneous* objects.⁸⁵

⁸³ This word choice is dictated by the way *Arte Povera* scholarship refers to the material choices.

⁸⁴ [It is important to notice that the infamous gesture of staging 12 Horses has lent cultural credibility to Kounellis's practice overall, helping to sell his work to an art-buying public, at least later on once Arte Povera was properly canonized (by Celant). This footnote ought also to acknowledge the restaging(s) of 12 Horses as a further reification/commoditization of that piece, even if it doesn't trade hands like a traditional work of art.

⁸⁵ Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, 27.]

These ideas were fully embraced by Kounellis, who defines his art as “truly dialectic” because in conversation with everything around it, starting from its location.⁸⁶ The raw power of Kounellis’ work, especially in installations like *Untitled (12 horses)*, lays in the fact that the iconography that he appropriates, like in this case the horses, is so widely recognized that the dialectic between the piece and the viewer is quickly and easily established. Even though the public might not realize the political implications of this work, they are embraced by its powerful presence, which leads to a critical engagement with it. Furthermore, in *Untitled (12 horses)*, just experiencing the work is the only possible option for the viewer since . The piece was not collectable, it could not be transported, and it could not be bought and reproduced privately.⁸⁷ As Eco and Dewey argue, the work of Art is not read passively, rather engages the audience actively with its powerful, meaningful ambiguity.

⁸⁶ Fuori Quadro, Youtube video, 2:22, Athena Produzioni, October 30, 2014.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqhOd_zKwDg&t=187s

⁸⁷ [I am using past tense because the piece has been re-proposed 5 times, and at least 2 of them entailed the use of live horses while in the other the photo of Abate was used in place of it.]

Chapter 4

Theory and Practice

Theoretical appropriation in *Untitled (12 horses)*

In 1993, a catalog titled *Odissea Lagunare* was published for a Kounellis exhibition in Palermo at the Reale Albergo delle Povere.⁸⁸ The catalog contains a collection of interviews, written works, and the artist's thoughts collected over several years. The catalog includes a conversation between Kounellis and Italo Moscati, an Italian screenwriter, film director, and writer, regarding the artist's participation in theater. In the article, Kounellis discusses how he grew interested in working with theater productions only when it became possible for him to disrupt its rules and standardized practices, in order to then recreate them.

In the interview, Kounellis discusses how materiality was an essential part of his involvement with theater. "My material choices do not aim to integrate with the space, but to take their own space" says Kounellis describing his theatrical work, where he would utilize materials geared toward challenging the scene, rather than blending into the production.⁸⁹ The interview between Kounellis and Moscati is followed by a photo of *Untitled (12 horses)*, the only image of the installation that appears in the volume. This choice of placement might imply that Kounellis used the same approach to the materiality of *Untitled (12 horses)* as he used in his theatrical projects. With *Untitled (12 horses)*, his main intentions was to disrupt the canonical function of the gallery, which is comparable to his approach to theatre collaborations. Similar to his theatrical projects, *Untitled (12 horses)* consists of a "material" that would not blend in its

⁸⁸ Kounellis, Jannis. *Odissea lagunare*. Palermo: Sellerio, 1993, 7.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 38.

environment. On the contrary, the horses' *live* materiality allows the installation to disrupt the environment, destroying the canons of the gallery in order to create them anew. By removing the horses from their usual environment, Kounellis affects the way the animals are perceived, gives their essence an artistic significance. However, by being so alive and present, the horses undergo a smaller change than that of their new environment, since the latter has the most radical repercussions in the way it is perceived. The horses develop a dual essence as both animals and art. The gallery, on the other hand, loses its original commercial purpose and becomes a horse stable. Similarly to his approach to theatre work, Kounellis's goal with *Untitled (12 horses)* was to challenge the concept of the gallery, and the materiality of this work was integral to its disruption.

The materiality of *Untitled (12 horses)* is not the only feature of the composition that implied political commentary. The artist's choice of horses as the content of the installation is crucial because of the ample use of these animals as a subject in the Western artistic tradition. The iconography of the horse is often connected to the concept of *condottiero*. The *condottieri* were Italian military leaders, and their portraits are common iconographical types of Western art history. In *Untitled (12 horses)*, Kounellis chooses to negate the status of men as *condottieri* and to relegate humanity to the position of observer. The historically subdued "tool"—the horse—is now elevated as both the protagonist and an artistic masterpiece, while humanity is limited to an outsider's position.

Kounellis was aware that his use of horses would nod to the Western tradition of *condottieri* portraiture. According to a reading of Kounellis's installation by Robert Lumley, an Emeritus professor of Italian Studies at the University College London, the use of horses

reimagines *condottiero* painting and aligns the artist's work with that tradition.⁹⁰ In his book *Arte Povera*, Lumley proposes a reading of *Untitled (12 horses)* that considers both the political implications of the composition and a connection between Western visual tradition and Kounellis's oeuvre, especially the work the artist produced during his early career.⁹¹ Lumley distinguishes parts of *Untitled (12 horses)* as political, for example its odor within the gallery, and others as an association with Western tradition, specifically the choice of horses as the subject. Lumley claims that in the case of *Untitled (12 horses)* and in his oeuvre in general, Kounellis chooses to "couple" tradition and politics together.⁹²

Lumley defines the use of horses in *Untitled (12 horses)* as a "reprise of the classical iconography of the equestrian statues," which he argues perfectly exemplifies the tendency in *Arte Povera* to create a clear connection with the Italian, or more generally, Western artistic traditions.⁹³ Through his use of horses, Kounellis purposefully positions himself in the Western tradition, but *Untitled (12 horses)* is not meant as a homage to this past. The artist does not take inspiration from this tradition; rather, he appropriates an iconographical type to challenge it. At the same time, he differentiates his artistic production from his American counterparts by refusing the non-referentiality and universality that had been imported to Italy.⁹⁴

The American influence on Italian art was a sign of the cultural conquest of Italy, initiated by the Marshall plan. During an interview in *Odissea Lagunare*, Kounellis goes so far as to describe the influence of great masters like Caravaggio and the heritage of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque as a whole as a means to "restore beauty" in opposition to the values

⁹⁰ Lumley, Robert. *Arte Povera*. New York City: Abrams, 2005, 33.

⁹¹ Lumley, Robert. *Arte Povera*. New York City: Abrams, 2005, 33.

⁹² Ibid, 33.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Cullinan, Nicholas. *From Vietnam to Fiat-Nam: The Politics of Arte Povera*. October, vol. 124, 2008, 17.

of the American avant garde, which adored “flat color” and “never believed in the revolutionary power of shadows.”⁹⁵ This statement makes clear his opinion that the tradition of the Italian Renaissance was one of the strongest available weapons against American colonialism. Interestingly, Kounellis’s criticism of many American painters comes across as more social than aesthetic as seen in an interview with Lonzi, which was published in *Autoritratto*. There Kounellis criticizes American artists, even though he admits he has never even seen their work.⁹⁶ This creates the impression that even if he had been pleased with the aesthetic results of work by American artists, he would not have changed his preconceptions of it. This aesthetic disinterest is very telling of this period and the politicization of artists like Kounellis, who were ready to undermine the intrinsic artistic value of work to make a political statement. The use of *condottiero* iconography is pivotal to the political stance taken by Kounellis with *Untitled (12 horses)*. By eliminating the presence of the *condottiero* and by multiplying the number of the horses, Kounellis is creating a choral narrative reminiscent of those used by the workers’ movement of the time, as noted by Celant in his book *Arte Povera*.⁹⁷ This *chorality* both appropriates and contrasts the singular, heroic narrative of the *condottiero*. In Lumley’s reading of *Untitled (12 horses)*, the British art historian rightfully understands that the work of Kounellis is both political and conversant with the Western tradition, but the critic’s separation of the two categories can be misleading since the line between aesthetic choices and politics is heavily blurred in *Untitled (12 horses)*.

⁹⁵ Kounellis, Jannis, Codognato, Mario, and Mirta. *Echoes in the Darkness*. London: Trolley Books, 2002, page 37.

⁹⁶ Lonzi, Carla. *Autoritratto*. De Donato, 1969, 33.

⁹⁷ Celant, Germano. *Arte Povera: History and Stories*. Electa, 2011, 87.

It is important to consider that the artist's appropriation of the iconography of the *condottiero* also had an impact on the Roman audience who visited the installation. Attendees to the *Attico* gallery consisted mostly of high middle to upper class visitors. As Lumley believes, Kounellis's intention hinged on the expectationS that the audience had when presented with the usual iconography of equestrian statuary; they would tend to identify themselves with the *condottiero*. Instead, in the case of this exhibition, they were presented with only the horses, tired, apathetic to their presence, and consigned to eating and defecating inside the gallery. It is possible that some imagined the installation as a conversation between all the horses of various *condottieri*, set in a stable far from the glamour of country villas, where all that remains of past battles are wounds and excrement, which, along with the warmth of the horses' bodies, make the air thick and hard to breathe, especially for typical gallery patrons unaccustomed to strong animal odors. The viewers experience this conversation and are forced to look at the unglamorous end of the fable, often untold, that begins once the hero leaves the picture.

It is also easy to imagine that the smell of horse could have made the gallery, for once, more inviting to poorer students or tired workers, who could (finally) relate to something happening between those white walls. The rawness of this marginalized reality, which in previous years had relentlessly made its way to the national front pages through escalating protest, now infiltrated the exclusive space of the gallery. Through the crude and sensorial brutality of *Untitled (12 horses)*, Kounellis offers the rawness of the workers' point of view to the bourgeois world. The bourgeoisie is not allowed to avoid this confrontation with the workers' experience. In fact, through the composition the audience is not only invited to join in a conversation; they are also asked to *experience* the reality of the work. In addition, the ability of

Untitled (12 horses) to re-structure the environment around it allows for the dialectic between the horses and the audience to be sensorially immersive. This sensory immersion of the bourgeoisie into the workers' experience prevents the dialogue from being dictated by the upper class, and establishes instead, a peer-to-peer, mutual exchange.

Through this dialectic experience, the audience can gain access to the workers' experience, which the intelligentsia of Workerism acquired by the understanding of the workers' conditions through firsthand experience of factory life and direct dialogue with the proletariat. The audience experiences the reality of the horses since their imposing presence surrounds the viewer, who feels sensorially overwhelmed by the unfamiliar odor in the gallery.

As theorized by Dewey, knowledge is formed through a dialectic, and in this case the viewer is lured in by the familiar iconography of equestrian statues, only to be overwhelmed by the confrontation posed by this installation. Through this transaction between the artist and the viewer, Kounellis breaches through the wall of class negligence, forcing the reality of the workers to be experienced by the upper classes. Part of Kounellis's appropriation of Workerism methodology becomes clear in this key concept: the idea of creating a direct contact between classes through firsthand experience for the purpose of generating new, truthful understandings. In addition, this installation's, specifically disruptive materiality, has other similarities with Workerism. Many workers who subscribed to the ideology of this movement engaged in what has been defined as spontaneous protests, which involved workers abruptly interrupting their labor upon hearing a specific noise or in response to a signal. This unexpected, disruptive action attacked the core of the factory. The raw and powerful materiality of *Untitled (12 horses)*

resembles the spontaneous protests, by annihilating the essence of the factory through its very presence.

Through both the dialectic created by *Untitled (12 horses)* and the installation's unrefined materiality, Kounellis places himself in conversation with the Workerism Movement, borrowing from its methodology while at the same time involving his art in the fight.

Theoretical appropriation in *Autoritratto*

Autoritratto seems to represent various events of the career and life of Lonzi. The volume is her last official art historical work, but at the same time it seems only the beginning of the change Lonzi wanted to implement in the field of art history. Even a superficial analysis makes clear this volume is in fact the result of Lonzi's experience with art criticism during her time at *Marcatrè*. For instance, Lonzi's *Autoritratto* collects interviews she had produced during this period, and seven of these pieces (two of which featured Kounellis) were initially sponsored by and published in *Marcatrè*.

Even though Lonzi's criticism of the art world developed out of her experience at *Marcatrè*, she officially debuted her polemic position against the methodology of academic and institutional art criticism in an article called "The solitude of the art critic," which was published in 1963 in the journal *Avanti*, which was known for its socialist undertones.⁹⁸ The article was a

⁹⁸ Lonzi, Carla. *The Solitude of the Art Critic*. *Avanti*, 1963.

direct response to a stance toward contemporary art taken by senior art critic Giulio Carlo Argan, who was considered to be among the most prominent art critics in Italy and involved in the Italian Ministry of Culture.

In 1963, Argan proposed a new “political and cultural” project to the Italian art world, during a convention on Programmed Art in Verucchio, which he had curated.⁹⁹ In this context, he discussed a new approach to the understanding of contemporary art, which was more concerned with art collectives than individual voices. Furthermore, the presentation seemed directed at the ministerial aspect of art and not toward the artists themselves.¹⁰⁰ In very national terms, Argan conceived of the new artistic modes of the 1950s, and he was inspired by German art collectives like the Zero Group. According to Argan’s proposal, artists should lose their personal artistic freedom in favor of an art form dictated by an expert, a *metodologo* as he defined it.¹⁰¹ Argan believed this approach to be the only way to create art intertwined with the sociopolitical landscape of Italy and to promote a national art movement. He was invested in this national project to such a degree that he believed that the political and social contextualization of art should be more important than the talent of individual artists.

Argan’s project for the advancement of Italian Programmed Art seems to consider success in terms of a large national movement supported through academic and ministerial means, but clearly, this would have led to the inability of art institutions to hear and respect the reality of the smaller, individual constituents of Italy’s art world. Argan’s approach mirrored that of the PCI during the 1950s, specifically its position on the realities of conditions in the factories.

⁹⁹ Dantini, Michele. *Una Polemica Situata E Da Situare. 1963: Lonzi vs. Argan*. Predella Journal of Visual Arts. N°36 vols. Predella, 2014, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 5.

¹⁰¹ Dantini, Michele. *Una Polemica Situata E Da Situare. 1963: Lonzi vs. Argan*. Predella Journal of Visual Arts. N°36 vols. Predella, 2014, 5.

Likewise, this party line favored national progress over workers' interests and prioritized national advancement as the benchmark of success over the improvement of the individual worker's situation.

In "The solitude of the art critic," Lonzi discusses how the figure of the Italian academic art critic is alienated from the artists' world. She argues this alienation directs the gaze of the art critic, which consequently works from the outside *into* the experience of the artist and relegates criticism outside the sphere of artistic creation.¹⁰² According to Lonzi, the methodology taught in Italian universities limits the work of the art critic, because it creates what she defines as a *false juxtaposition* of creation-criticism. This process in turn produces a vision of art as something to be *consumed*.¹⁰³ Lonzi further notices how the institution of art criticism works in the social realm, and consequently, approaches art as a something that lies outside the cultural realm created by the institution itself. This way, art can be either allowed into a culture or refused by it, since at its inception it exists outside of it. In other words, art criticism becomes an institutionalized cultural entity based on dogmatic authority instead of peer inquiry. Lonzi notices how this approach also fails to appreciate the innate ability of artists to produce art criticism and relegates them to the role of the producer. Lonzi argues that the ability of artists to produce criticism is facilitated by their creative practice and inward observation. However, since artists often do not have the stimuli to share their critique, they fail to make it socially effective. The failure to share it, though, is different from the ability to produce it.

The provocation of "The solitude of the art critic" derives from Lonzi's conviction that the faulty approach taken by art critics creates misunderstandings of the essence and the purpose

¹⁰² Ibid, 6.

¹⁰³ Lonzi, Carla. *Autoritratto*. De Donato, 1969, 13.

of art itself. Living and experiencing art in a condition of otherness deny the role of art as a meeting point, an invitation *from* the creator to the viewer to engage. Lonzi began challenging the institutional conventions of art criticism once she realized they limited her access to artistic creation. She was, in fact, at ease when surrounded by artists, and she had meaningful relationships with many of them.

It was only through the realization of being an outsider that she began the process of moving into the artistic process. In her book *Autoritratto*, Lonzi not only proposes a solution to this problematic approach to art criticism; she also starts to address and challenge it. Her aim, Lonzi explains, is to negate the repressive and controlling power institutionalized critics wield over art and artists, and to push critics to explore the creative process from the perspective of those directly involved in this process. The concept of joining *in* the creative process was quite unorthodox for the time, which might explain Lonzi's qualification that examining the creative process from the inside does not make the art critic an artist, but someone with the tools and consciousness to understand artistic creation.

In fact, when Lonzi introduces *Autoritratto* she argues:

“The conversations gathered here were collected.. to initiate myself to an activity and a humanity which I found attractive, while at the same time finding ridiculous the demands of the University to criticize a humanity and activity which did not belong to me. Seeking belonging to them and witnessing to the collapse of the role of the critic were one and the same pursuit.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Lonzi, Carla. *Autoritratto*. De Donato, 1969, 13. - I discorsi qui raccolti non sono stati fatti ... per iniziarmi a un'attività ed a una umanità verso cui mi sono sentita attratta, nello stesso tempo che trovavo ridicola la pretesa dell'Università di fare il critico di un'umanità e attività che non mi appartenevano. Cercare di appartenervi e vedere crollare il ruolo del critico ,e' stato un tutt'uno.

Autoritratto poses a refusal to understanding art through an outside evaluation but rather as the human responsibility of actualization. Only when art critics are able to be a part of the artistic creation their criticisms become complete and veritable.

As previously mentioned, part of the process Lonzi proposes prescribes accepting the innate critical ability of the artist and proposing a direct dialectic between critics and artists, leading to a better understanding of the work. Throughout *Autoritratto*, Lonzi proposes a restructuring of the role of the art critic as someone who creates a peer-to-peer and symbiotic relationship between the art critic and the artists in order to understand their artistic expression from their own perspective. In the book, she establishes a dialectic relationship with and (artificially) among the artists, which is based on the gathering of oral interviews and aided by the interview subjects' impressions and their retelling of specific creative experiences. The affinity of Lonzi's newly patented approach to art criticism with the methodology of the Workerism Movement is visible not only through the oral dialectic between the intellectual and the artist, but also through the awareness that theory needs to generate from an honest encounter with the realities of artistic practice and not from an outsider's observations.

This emphasis on the artist's own experiences as a source for understanding the creative process and its products shows a correlation between Lonzi's methodology and Dewey's theory of *unity*, which she further developed by remodeling the essence of art criticism to take into account the art critic ability to experience of the process of creation as well, when a conversation with the artist is developed. Specifically, Lonzi's support of a type of art criticism—one based on the critic learning from the artist's experience and the critic becoming a part of the creative

process to fully understand it—implies that her idea of criticism is based on the experience of becoming an insider in the artistic process. Therefore, Lonzi avoids the patriarchal approach of annihilating the artist's presence by judging work from the critic's own removed, personal perspective, which inevitable produces an incongruous and incomplete argument.¹⁰⁵ This can be seen in the way Fabro addresses Carla Lonzi during their conversation, destroying the division between him as an artist and Lonzi as a critic by saying “when I talk to you and you talk to me it is not like you are critiquing what I am saying, or [it would mean that] if I now talk to you then I am a critic of your words.”¹⁰⁶

Similarly, the intelligentsia of Workerism attempted to develop theories related to class based on a direct relationship with the workers. Lonzi's disapproval of the practice of art criticism would bring her, through the years, to develop a negative opinion of the practice itself. She eventually concluded that her way of practicing art criticism would be impossible to actualize in the society in which she lived. Much of Lonzi's early work involved a process of her becoming conscious of the values that led her to assume a political stance within Italian feminism and a separation from the profession of art criticism. In fact, *Autoritratto* was Lonzi's last official piece of art criticism. Even though she did not completely abandon the art world, this choice was a moral decision, since Lonzi was unwilling to contradict her own beliefs to pursue a career she could not follow according to her wishes. After 1969, she chose to become fully devoted to the feminist struggle, a battle in which she did not have to bend her morals or compromise her standards.

¹⁰⁵ Lonzi, Carla. *Autoritratto*. De Donato, 1969, 82.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 81.

Conclusion

It is possible to observe methodological affinities between *Untitled (12 horses)* of Jannis Kounellis, *Autoritratto* of Carla Lonzi and the practices and agenda of the Workerism Movement of the 1960s. *Con-ricerca* becomes the methodological approach of the Workerism intellectuals, from whom a peer-to-peer dialectic between the intellectuals and the workers was necessary to shape the theoretical direction of the movement around real life experience of the workers' reality. In 1969 the relationship that is created between the Workerism intellectuals and the workers mirrors the relationship of Carla Lonzi and Jannis Kounellis with their art historical and artistic production.

This dialectic interaction between art and politics was typical of the twentieth century, but in Italy it was particularly focused on the workers' struggle. The contact between Workerism, Kounellis, and Lonzi happened during the period of transition from Sessantotto and the Years of Lead, a moment of Italian history when factory workers were the political focus of the nation. To understand the relationship between Workerism and art is also to analyze the translation of factory concerns into the artists' reality of the newly neo-capitalistic Italian society. Kounellis and Lonzi, then, were not stretching outside their world when they were appropriating the methodology of Workerism, since the same concerns of factory life can apply to art production.

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Claudio Abate, I cavalli per l'installazione Dodici cavalli vivi di Jannis Kounellis mentre vengono condotti all'interno della galleria, galleria L'Attico (via Beccaria), Roma, 14 [?] gennaio 1969, fotografia b/n. Da Claudio Cintoli, "Se sono cavalli sono Kounellis", Cartabianca, maggio 1969, 37.

