Living Differently, Seeing Differently:

Carla Accardi’s temporary structures (1965–72)

Italian second wave feminism and its legacy has been the subject of renewed critical attention across a number of disciplines in recent years. Among the most significant contributions have been studies examining the influence of women’s’ groups across Italy to both national and regional political discourse.[[1]](#footnote-1) Beyond this focus, efforts have also been made to rewrite a more global history of Italian second wave feminism by underscoring the relationship between national and international women’s movements in the postwar period.[[2]](#footnote-2) At the same time, there has been a growing interest in the writings of key Italian feminist theorists, as testified by the republication of the entire art-critical output of Carla Lonzi, as well as the publication of writings by women associated with the Italian feminist-autonomist tradition, such as Silvia Federici, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa and Leopoldina Fortunati.[[3]](#footnote-3) Through campaigns known internationally as *Wages for Housework*, and coordinated in Italy by the Padua-based Lotta Femminista (Feminist Struggle), which counted Federici and Dalla Costa amongst its numbers, these women have been committed to the restructuring of reproductive labour; foregrounding the domestic in their attempts to rethink the nature of work in capitalism.[[4]](#footnote-4)

That this discourse has enjoyed something of a revival in the last decade, not least within artistic practice, suggests the relevance of Italian feminism to a discussion of the relationship between art, feminism and the domestic, and the timeliness of revisiting this question now.[[5]](#footnote-5) I want to reflect on this relationship as it relates to the practice of the artist Carla Accardi during a period that encompasses her involvement in the collective Rivolta Femminile (Feminine Revolt), from the summer of 1970 when the group published their *Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile*. One of the first separatist feminist collectives to appear in Italy, it would serve as a model for similar groups across the country in subsequent years.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Despite Accardi’s founding role, her relationship to Rivolta Femminile and its legacy remains marred by what were irreconcilable differences with her co-founder Lonzi, leading to a split within the group in 1973. This was in part based on a fundamental conflict in their perspectives on art’s place within feminism.[[7]](#footnote-7) Lonzi regarded the two as ultimately incompatible. In an entry in her diary *Taci Anzi Parla: Diario di una Femminista*, Lonzi reflects back on the experience of writing *Autoritratto* (1969), the book that marked her departure from the circuits of artistic production.[[8]](#footnote-8) She writes of the fourteen artists who had been her interlocutors:‘what disturbed me was that they viewed me as a spectator… perhaps they thought, I was more intelligent, more sensitive, better at recording, certainly more honest, but that is as far as it would go, an ideal spectator.’[[9]](#footnote-9) As the feminist philosopher Maria Luisa Boccia has pointed out, there is an analogy to be made here between the ideal spectator referred to by Lonzi, and woman’s role in society as mere passive spectator not active participant.[[10]](#footnote-10) Her refusal of art was in part a refusal of its reliance on a spectator as an intrinsically gendered role.

In contrast, and throughout her involvement in Rivolta Femminile, Accardi continued to practice as an artist. After Rivolta Femminile disbanded she even went on to establish the Beato Angelico Cooperative in Rome between 1976 and 1978, whose express aims were to unite art and feminism. In subsequent decades she would, however, renege on any association of her practice with feminism and most adamantly so with reference to the series of temporary ‘home’ structures she made between 1965 and 1972.[[11]](#footnote-11) It suggests a rather complicated relationship on the part of the artist with her own involvement in the history of Italian feminism. Despite Accardi’s distancing from that milieu, these works seem to want to reimagine the domestic in ways that suggest at the very least a cursory engagement with feminist debates. In what follows I want to read these works a little against the grain given her later statements to ask in what ways Accardi posed the relationship between art, feminism, and the domestic. Specifically, I want to explore in what ways her commitment to art, in contrast to her co-founder Lonzi, could speak to a utopian possibility for feminism. Beyond Accardi’s own ambivalent statements about her work and in light of the current interest in Italian feminism, which resonates now not for exactly the same reasons as in the 1970s but has been taken up and retooled, perhaps artistic practice made in that same context should be approached in a similar fashion?

I begin with a photograph from a series taken in the countryside around Alba in 1965 (Fig. 1a). Standing between Lonzi and the artist Luciano Fabro, Accardi assumes a tongue in cheek pose that unmistakably refers to a shelter of sorts, a pose replicated in Fig. 1b. These photographs were taken at a time when Accardi was making *Tenda* (1965–1966) (Fig. 2), a work that has since been claimed as the first art environment to have been made in Italy.[[12]](#footnote-12) Accardi went on to make three further environments by 1972: *Ambiente Arancio* (Orange Environment) (1966–8) (Fig. 3), *Triplice Tenda* (Triple Tent) (1969–71) (Fig. 4) and *Cilindrocono* (Cylindercone) (1972) (Fig. 5). If, at first sight, they appear as a heterogeneous body of works—a tent, a yurt, a large cylinder and an installation comprising what Accardi described as ‘nearly the contents of a room’—they are all made from the same transparent Sicofoil material, a derivative of acetate and together, they mark a striking phase in the artist’s practice, registering a decisive shift into three dimensions.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Connecting these works explicitly to the question of habitation, the critic Laura Cherubini asks Accardi if ‘the idea came… to be your own architect […] [as] the form is that of a house [?]’[[14]](#footnote-14) *Tenda* also has the secondary meaning of curtain, which literally evokes the idea of homemaking and connects the work to a broader conception of textile as the first architecture put forward by Gottfried Semper in 1851.[[15]](#footnote-15) If in recent years Accardi has made works that directly reference the home and the furniture traditionally found in those spaces, then the artist has nevertheless been reluctant to label her work in this way. Referring to her environments of the 1960s Accardi would say ‘tear down walls … I can’t stand houses.’[[16]](#footnote-16) More recently, she has restated this claim, describing a dislike for the modern home of that time which she found to be ‘ugly’ and ‘heavy’, as she put it, further explaining: ‘I had been an admirer of the Bauhaus, but I saw that people lived in houses that were tacky.’[[17]](#footnote-17)

Particularly notable is that, despite her rejection of the notion that the structures straightforwardly reference ‘home’, Accardi has consistently spoken of them as offering a different ‘way of living’. Summing up her practice in 1972, Accardi explained:

The objects that I made recently are, broadly speaking, tents […] [they] hold a certain fascination for me; they interest me because they represent a way of living [that is] symbolically different—[a] life lived in the open, in contact with nature, with air and light, free and without the superstructures of civilisation.[[18]](#footnote-18)

On another occasion, Accardi reiterates this when she recounts that ‘behind’ *Ambiente Arancio* ‘was the drive to push one towards something unknown that could become a different kind of living.’[[19]](#footnote-19) Far from the idea of living in any conventional sense of the term or according to prevailing social sexual norms, Accardi’s reference to ‘superstructures of civilisation’ reads as an unmistakable complaint against patriarchy. It connects the domestic more directly to the family and specifically a rejection of its bourgeois nuclear model. At the same time, the choice of the term ‘superstructure’ is intriguing as it is also worth remembering that the family was a particularly live issue within feminist interpretations of orthodox currents of Marxism and psychoanalysis where the inadequacy of the way the family was addressed became a main preoccupation.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Despite these allusions, Accardi’s statements remain largely rhetorical; after all, she hardly offers a comprehensive blueprint for an alternative existence, but this of course was partly the point. Rather than simply dismissing the statements made by Accardi as merely rhetorical, I want to ask how this utopian thinking might play out on the site of the work at a material as well as conceptual level. What does it mean for Accardi to remake her home as a tent, and specifically to do so out of plastic? Most obviously here the domestic not only becomes charged but is altogether transformed into a problem about how to live. I want to ask both what made it possible, necessary even, to speak in these terms of alternative existence, and how this rhetoric might indicate what was at stake for Accardi in reformulating the lived experience of the home into another mode of living entirely? As Frederic Jameson put it in his response to the view that any utopianism could only ever be ‘hostage to our own mode of production’, in fact ‘the best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment; and […] therefore the best Utopias are those that fail most comprehensively.’ [[21]](#footnote-21)

Accardi rejects the motif of home and by extension the domestic in favour of utopia, something that is ultimately unattainable. The trade off is revealing; Accardi risks everything for a future unknown and a promise which she ultimately fails to deliver on beyond what might be described as a ‘maquette’ or model for living through her tents. This approach connects with the utopian strategy adopted by Federici in *Wages Against Housework*. Hers is effectively an impossible demand, a revolutionary struggle whose fulfillment would signal the end of capitalism, would ‘break capital’s plan for women.’[[22]](#footnote-22) The point is that such demands need to be understood as a provocation to imagine possible alternatives rather than a concrete vision.[[23]](#footnote-23) Indeed for this reason it is so difficult to discern what Accardi meant by the idea of ‘living differently’; the artist was only ever able to define it in the most provisional of ways or in negative terms — most obviously as *not* a home understood in terms of conventional domestic architecture.

Living differently is of course living against the norm but what are the utopian tropes that Accardi is working with here and moreover, how might this relate to feminism? It is of course hardly surprising that she should couch her environments in these terms. The desire to live ‘differently’ chimed with the moment of their making, capturing the imagination of a mid-sixties generation. It took shape through attempts at communal living and redesigning architecture that challenged notions of the home and domestic as fixed, known sites.[[24]](#footnote-24) In fact the rhetoric of alternative existence to which Accardi refers is perhaps best encapsulated by the image of the ‘hippie’ commune, or the intentional community, as this has been called, and enshrined in the form of the nomadic shelter.[[25]](#footnote-25) While communal societies have a long history extending beyond the period under consideration, the moment when Accardi began to make her temporary structures has been described by commentators as one gripped by ‘communal fever’.[[26]](#footnote-26) Accardi’s notion of living differently is not reducible to the idea of collective dwelling. Nevertheless the image of the commune belongs to a broader imaginary whose visual vocabulary and makeshift logic Accardi taps into through her work. For her exhibition in 1968 at the Marlborough Gallery in Rome, she made a series of small maquettes of her environments that were shown together in the corner of the room and on the floor (Fig. 6). A drawing by Accardi from 1970 further evokes this idea of communal living and suggests that her temporary shelters were conceived or at least subsequently imagined as a body of work (Fig. 7). The drawing offers a vision of a pre-industrial community, a sparse landscape in which *Tenda*, *Triplice Tenda*, and *Cilindrocono* each feature.[[27]](#footnote-27) Such visual tropes raise the question of how Accardi’s utopian horizon was bounded? If her visual vocabulary might hint at a so-called primitive communism, to what extent was the artist’s vision of a future based on non-western or seemingly ancient models?

Certainly René Grousset’s major study on nomadism *Empire of the Steppes* gave the lives of nomadic and semi-nomadic people a currency at this moment when it was republished in 1970, but perhaps the point here is that this drawing comes to stand for an archetypal community, one of so many that were formed throughout this period, and which together have come to stand as a symbol of protest and resistance against what was viewed as the dominant form of society—or at the very least an expression of dissatisfaction with the status quo. In this respect, Italy would take its cue from the American Beatniks, with an underground press and diverse communities appearing throughout the country.[[28]](#footnote-28) One of the most famous of these communes in Italy and closely connected to *Mondo Beat*, the first journal founded by the underground press in Milan in 1966, would be the scandal of the short-lived tent city, *Tendopolis* or ‘New Barbonia’ (a conflation of the derogatory Italian word for the homeless (‘Barbone’) and Babylon (‘Babilonia’)) as it came to be called by the hostile press of via Ripamonti in the outskirts of the city in 1967 (Fig. 8).[[29]](#footnote-29)

Accardi was not alone amongst her contemporaries in couching her work in these terms. Experiments in this period within architectural design would come in the form of a wide range of inflatable, tensile, lightweight, and temporary structures.[[30]](#footnote-30) Similarly, throughout the 1960s, artists in Italy were appropriating the form of the hut or temporary shelter through visual as well as conceptual references. *Tenda*, which Accardi had begun making as early as 1965, predates many of these examples and has even been suggested as something of a prototype for works by artists such as Mario Merz and Luciano Fabro.[[31]](#footnote-31) Accardi’s *Tenda*, *Ambiente Arancio* and *Triplice Tenda* all take the image of home as a starting point but they also resolutely reject sedentary dwelling. In this way, the artist obviously speaks to the context of nomadism, a subject of renewed scholarly attention in this period.[[32]](#footnote-32) The forms her environments take are a central theoretical trope in the 1960s; coinciding with a moment in which anti-architecture offered political, intellectual and material possibilities within post-war artistic practice and more broadly within a post-war Europe. That these temporary structures and by extension the provisional and alternative modes of existence they suggest have proved fertile ground in philosophical and ideological narratives of the period is implicitly acknowledged by the artist.[[33]](#footnote-33) When asked whether her environments specifically engaged with the idea of nomadic existence, Accardi points to interpretations that had already been offered by Germano Celant and Achille Bonito Oliva.[[34]](#footnote-34) The reference to ‘mobility’ is invoked repeatedly by Celant in discussions of Accardi’s environments, as when he writes: ‘it is true that Tenda, the big umbrella, the bed, respond to the desire for a precarious space, a temporary and mobile architecture, a tipi or a tent that can be easily moved by the individual to accommodate their way of life.’[[35]](#footnote-35)

However, Accardi seems wary of any over-determined readings of her work in this way.[[36]](#footnote-36) If the nomadic shelter had once been articulated in terms of a cult of origins in architectural thinking or elsewhere in terms of fantasies of a lost plan, then Accardi’s tents can also be understood as registering a broad shift away from this conception in the 1960s with the temporary shelter reconceived as a matter of design.[[37]](#footnote-37) Despite the straightforward connection with the image of the nomadic shelter and the overstated associations of her work with nomadism, there remains much that is compelling about this body of works. Accardi rejects the idea of home understood in terms of fixed domestic architecture, and in doing so she is able to appropriate the utopian rhetoric of living differently associated with these forms. I want to argue that this rhetoric is made to speak to her artistic practice, and to the possibility of artistic renewal.

Of particular importance is the fact that Accardi’s environments are made almost entirely of transparent plastic material. Although this aspect of Accardi’s practice has not gone unnoticed in the literature, it has not been adequately examined alongside the utopian rhetoric with which Accardi framed these works.[[38]](#footnote-38) The artist used this transparent material almost exclusively throughout the second half of the 1960s and in subsequent decades, and it is a choice that she foregrounds repeatedly in statements made about her environments and her working practice. These concerns can be understood within the context of a broader debate about a new way of seeing that developed in the post war period in the US and which was subsequently taken up in Europe within artistic as well as architectural practice and urban theory. As Letizia Modena explains, these debates comprised nuanced discussions on the urban environment as site of aesthetic experience, quality of life and social welfare.[[39]](#footnote-39) One of the key threads of the debate focused on the phenomenology of the urban setting and the role of art and architecture in revitalising the imagination of city dwellers. Central to the debate were the writings of theorists within the field of Gestalt psychology — most notably Gyorgy Kepes, which were widely read in the US and Europe throughout the 1960s and 1970s.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Within architectural and urbanism discussions from the 1960s onwards in Italy, critical assessments of utopia were often focused on conceptualising utopia in relation to the imagination (including this new way of seeing) and visual perception. Crucially, lightness played a fundamental role in the interdisciplinary field of utopian studies and numerous analyses were devoted to the intricacies of visual perception, imagination and cognition and significantly lightness of materials.[[41]](#footnote-41) Accardi appropriates this lexicon and makes it speak to her own condition of working as a woman artist. By considering Accardi’s practice alongside statements the artist made about her temporary dwellings, I want to ask how this material signalled a new way of working and what new possibilities it offered for transforming her practice, before considering how the artist aligns this new way of working to her own feminist project.

**How to make a home**

That Accardi should turn to plastics to make her alternative homes is hardly surprising. It does, however, rub against those images of a pre-industrial community invoked by the artist, hinting at an altogether different utopian horizon: the techno-utopia of post-war consumer-capitalism. It was precisely in this period that new housing typologies were delivered in this material. The first all-plastic house had already appeared in 1956 in France designed by the architect Ionel Schein, with subsequent competing models produced in the US and Russia underscoring a global belief in this material’s potential to fulfil the utopian dream of a new domestic architecture.[[42]](#footnote-42) By the time Accardi began making her first environment in 1965, plastics had long been advertised as a new wonder substance heralding the house of the future in a post-war plastic world; manufacturers promoted plastic in largely utopian terms as a means of offering a radically different existence; one in which housework could be virtually eliminated through labour saving materials and objects destined for use in the home.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Accardi, however, was keen to reject any connection to this consumer-orientated world despite the obvious associations of her temporary homes with the world of fashion and interior design for which Italy had, by this point, become famous. If the artist had couched her environments in utopian language then she had expressly described how she had not wanted to create ‘false things to dupe people.’[[44]](#footnote-44) If this latter was proclaimed as the material capable of imitation par excellence then the artist had somehow wanted to recuperate it from its connotations with mass production, and reclaim the potential for it beyond the merely derivative. Accardi’s use of plastic had initially elicited some criticism but she would defend her choice, explaining in an interview with Lonzi that she had wanted to ‘ennoble’ plastic.[[45]](#footnote-45) Such comments on the part of the artist betray a concern to distinguish her art from other kinds of production (when visual and material distinctions were no longer possible), and the artist from other kinds of roles (such as art critic or designer). Perhaps the point is that Accardi’s temporary homes seem to draw from a range of contradictory historic and contemporary references as she works through the complex question of how it might be possible to even begin to conceive an alternative existence?

Crucially, reimagining the idea of the domestic in this material also went hand in hand for the artist with what it meant to rethink the transformative potential of her work. As I want to argue, it was the way that Accardi would conceive of the import of this possibility and its significance for painting that suggests a utopian promise for feminism. When Accardi began to make *Tenda* in 1965, it signalled an important transition in scale from the individual panels the artist had been painting prior to this. Accardi had spoken about *Tenda* as the first work she made that could be walked into.[[46]](#footnote-46) Her practice did not, however, alter significantly when she began making her first environment. Rather, the move into three dimensions ultimately constituted an expansion of her painting practice. As Accardi explains it:

The tent is not an object because if I wanted to make an object I would have had to make one that was intriguing, invented, new, I would have had to try to astonish people; no, for me the tent was an obvious thing, I had thought of it as an extension of painting.[[47]](#footnote-47)

*Tenda* is constructed out of thirty-six painted panels, whose assorted shapes—triangular, rectangular or trapezoidal—together form *Tenda*’s A-Line structure, anticipating the shaped canvases that the artist would go on to make in later years. Each panel of *Tenda* is made with two sheets of Sicofoil fixed within a Perspex frame. Sicofoil resembles plastic film and resists absorption so the speed and force with which each brushstroke is made is registered on its surface. Accardi had applied water-based fluorescent colour to the reverse sides, all over and monochromatically, with hot pink or acid green waves. These lines of different thickness run perpendicular to each other so that when placed back to back within a single panel they overlap and appear to interact in a rippling effect, creating a wave-like pattern that befits the supple quality of the material (Fig. 9) with vertiginous results (Fig. 10).[[48]](#footnote-48)

Accardi’s experiments with transparent plastic had begun as early as 1964 when the artist turned to Perspex and then to Sicofoil, which she used exclusively thereafter.[[49]](#footnote-49) Two years later in an interview with Lonzi, Accardi had referred to that moment as a turning point: ‘I had a crisis, which had its origins in the way I had lived.’[[50]](#footnote-50) Accardi describes her way out of this crisis in terms of a release from the traditions of post-war painting. Crucially, here Accardi conflates her work with her life — the crisis in painting is defined in terms of a crisis in the way she had ‘lived’. Accardi’s temporary homes become shorthand for the way in which she conceives of her practice in this period, where visibility, transparency and lightening came to stand for a certain openness, liberation and freedom in art but also in life. In this context, the refrain ‘living differently’ can be seen as part of an on-going avant-garde project in the sense that it carries forward familiar utopian cries to unite art and life. But it also takes a distinctive turn—a domestic turn, which is quite at odds with that legacy.

In the same interview Lonzi describes how Accardi had needed to find a way of distancing herself from painting.[[51]](#footnote-51) According to the critic, *Tenda* offers a way of doing this, and adds that it had allowed the artist to reflect on the conditions of painting.[[52]](#footnote-52) For Accardi, the solution to this crisis would come through the discovery of transparent material and the possibilities this presented for ‘lightening’ her work. At the time Accardi had put it in this way:

[I had been] mistaken about those preconceived ideas […] those post-war canons, believing with good faith in everything that others had said […] at the time I took it out on my work […] I had said ‘it doesn’t matter, it’s worthless, it isn’t important.’ After that moment, I can truly speak about lightening my work […] it comes from having been through a kind of trauma, from having uncovered all those mythologies connected to painting.[[53]](#footnote-53)

The ‘lightening’ that the artist had sought to achieve is rendered both palpably and figuratively with Sicofoil, ‘the inspiration…the start of it all’ she calls it, explaining how she had ‘wanted to make everything …transparent… so [as] to unveil the mysteries of art. It was the sixties.’[[54]](#footnote-54) Transparency is foregrounded in Accardi’s origin story as it takes centre stage in her conception of a new way of working. When she speaks of transparency, she equates it with being contemporary; ‘it was’, after all, ‘the sixties’. There is on-going tension in statements such as these between the search for an alternative way of life and Accardi’s desire to be absolutely contemporary as if the artist were interrogating how far these two overlap or how far they might be a way of saying the same thing. Similarly, when asked to reflect on her use of colour in an interview with Maurizio Calvesi for *Marcatrè*, she writes: ‘I […] have always been aware of the fact that today no landscape exists without neon and fluorescent lights and it is for this reason that I arrived at these colours.’[[55]](#footnote-55) By drawing on her contemporary environment for her palette and material, Accardi seems to want to ask how far the material and social conditions of the present could offer utopian possibilities for the future and implies that being contemporary in the right way might in fact deliver a means of living differently.

Additionally, when Accardi speaks of ‘unveil[ing] the mysteries of art’, the properties of plastic offer an antidote, in a literal sense, to the perceived encumbrances of painting. As she puts it, ‘you could see the frame’. Her choice of language to describe her work in terms of ‘lightening’ speaks closely to the logic of subtraction, echoed throughout this period within artistic practice.[[56]](#footnote-56) The significance of ‘lightening’ in Accardi’s work extends to her notion of living differently as premised on ‘contact with nature, air and *light*, free from civilising structures’.[[57]](#footnote-57) As already mentioned, this vocabulary allies her work to a widespread debate prevalent across the disciplines in Italy on the relationship between lightness and utopia, perhaps the most famous examples of which were elaborated later by Italo Calvino in *Invisible Cities* (1972)and *Six Memos* (1988) in close dialogue with the architectural and urban theory of the preceding decades.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Moreover her attempt to ‘unveil the mysteries of art’ would be echoed in later years by Rivolta Femminile. In a statement published in 1971, they put it in the following way: ‘The artist expects woman to mythicize his gesture [;] until a process of liberation occurs.’[[59]](#footnote-59) Anticipating Rivolta Femminile’s criticism that the mythologisation of art was symptomatic of female repression, Accardi’s notion of lightening offers an initial response to the form that liberation would need to take. This process whose aims were to ‘unveil the mysteries of art’ involved putting her work in dialogue with the surrounding space. *Rotoli and Coni* (*Rolls and Cones*) (Fig. 11) are some of the first experiments that emerge from this development anticipating the larger scaled environments, which Accardi started making soon after.

A photograph taken in the Rome studio in 1966 reads almost like a production manual for these works; the *Rotoli* and *Coni* dispersed around the room offer themselves as clues for the likely transformation of the flat sheet in the centre, suggestively curled at one end (Fig. 12). A material more closely associated with commercial packaging than with art-making, Accardi would buy it at the local stationers, Vertecchi, where, as she explains, ‘it was normally used for shoe boxes, it was sold by the roll and … I used to buy [the] entire roll.’[[60]](#footnote-60) If the form of the *Rotoli* recall those rolled units of Sicofoil’s mass production, then the effects are quite unlike those that might be expected of modular, geometric sculpture in this period as it came to be associated with industrially produced materials. *Rotoli* have none of that monumentality to which their column-like structure would seem to refer. Difficult to define, they share a vocabulary with sculptural and painterly practices but the results elude both these categories. At once, they release sculpture from its associations with volume and weight, and painting from its adherence to a ground.

Accardi explores the fullest flexibility of this plastic material—and the kinds of visual lighting-effects, metaphorical anti-gravitational effects, as well as the range of colours that could be produced on its surface. Certainly, the installation shots taken of *Rotoli* and *Coni* outdoors seem to recall this effect, where dispersal and concentration of light deflected off the curvilinear surface project an array of patterns and colours onto the surrounding floor space, producing what seems like an animated surface (Fig. 13). The same light effects that permeate and deflect off the shiny, pliable surfaces of *Rotoli* and *Coni* are also visible in *Tenda* and would be replicated in the other environments that Accardi made between 1965 and 1972. In ways that resonate with the provisional nature of Accardi’s temporary homes, and which she had hinted at when she had spoken of ‘tearing down walls’— another veiled allusion to patriarchy — the notion of demystifying the work of art went hand in hand with a physical and material challenge to existing borders alluded to by the tent motif.[[61]](#footnote-61)

The artist presses the transparent surface to its limits, in ways that bind her practice to a knot of concerns around optics and identity. Indeed, Accardi’s practice might be better understood through metaphors of visibility. The artist emphasises the protective, decorative and interactive possibilities of surface in ways that redefine the relationship between the work and its surroundings, and additionally, the way that those surroundings come to be viewed through the work. This distinctive aspect of her practice did not escape the attention of critics at the time; for example in 1966 Lonzi described Accardi’s brushstrokes as signs ‘belonging to the unity of our visual experience.’[[62]](#footnote-62) The critic offers a structuralist reading of Accardi’s environments in which she insists that the painted signs that characterised the artist’s practice and that here appeared to float in space, had begun to assume a significance in relation to their surroundings.[[63]](#footnote-63) Lonzi seems to be saying that the meaning of Accardi’s painting would be determined by this relationship. Liberated from their frames, the painted panels that comprised the work can no longer claim to occupy a separate or autonomous space but rather seem to want to ask what it might mean to live with art differently, in a more interactive way. The all-over painting typical of the artist’s practice in the 1950s comes, with the arrival of Sicofoil, to resemble camouflage or animal markings, pressing these concerns around vision further: the logic of camouflage, after all, traces a line between identity and concealment but also of the possibility of adapting to a given environment.[[64]](#footnote-64) Sicofoil dramatises these possibilities of interaction with the surrounding space. It also blurs the boundary between material and skin that had long informed Accardi’s practice.

If Accardi’s temporary environments can be understood as short hand for the idea of living differently then this, I argue, is premised on a different way of seeing. This takes on a variety of meanings in relation to Accardi’s practice from her search to uncover the mythologies of painting, to ‘see the frame’ as Accardi had put it right through to redefining the encounter between the viewer and her work.[[65]](#footnote-65) This also connects to the political stakes of seeing differently and the practice of *autocoscienza* (consciousness raising) whose aims were in part about the possibility of a new vision of the world. Accardi’s experiments with optical effects take on an additional meaning in her environments as they relate to privacy and shelter.[[66]](#footnote-66) She had referred to her environments as ‘transparent tents’ and the drawing that dates to 1970 suggests a model of dwelling at odds with the notion of privacy. But a work like *Triplice Tenda* also has the effect of closing up the space, a space that Accardi had conceived as entirely pink despite its diaphanous quality. It was described as ‘labyrinthine’— to borrow the words of Anne-Marie Sauzeau-Boetti from 1975, who had wanted to conjure a bodily, specifically uterine, space — created by the three pink tents nestled together in decreasing size, one inside the other (Fig. 14). The inner and outer panels of each tent interact in such a way so as to transform the painted wave-like pattern on their surface into a lattice. It suggests the different ways in which transparency could be made to work — here as a form of enclosure, and to disorientating effect. If Accardi offers a model of living differently, then it is proposed as an idea of unsettled, unfixed space. Accardi had spoken about this before Celant would famously articulate it in terms of acculturation, conflating an idea of alternative dwelling and an anti-masculinist impulse by explaining that she had wanted to make something ‘destructible […] in opposition to a traditional masculine taste for the immutable, the imperishable.’[[67]](#footnote-67)

Additionally, her environments, and particularly *Tenda*, speak to the aesthetic tropes of psychedelia of this moment — mind-altering experiences and fluid environments — which hailed the body as being one with the surroundings and liberated from the constraints of the physical world.[[68]](#footnote-68) The use of bold, contrasting colours achieves the kinds of disorientating effects associated with Op Art, effects that Accardi appears to welcome as when she says: ‘I’ll say straightaway that I begin by putting the viewer in front of a work that is unstable and precarious […] they should abandon themselves entirely to a kind of hypnotic state, where they are suspended in time.’[[69]](#footnote-69) The point is that the artist wants to challenge the viewer, and thereby transform the role of the spectator by creating works with no fixed point of view in ways that might be understood as a response to Lonzi’s grievances over the ultimately passive role of the spectator. By expanding her painting practice into the surrounding space, and putting it in dialogue with architecture, Accardi rethinks painting’s limits, and in doing so allows for the possibility of new forms of interaction.

By enfolding her way of working and seeing with her way of living, Accardi accords equal status and urgency to art as to life. That she does so betrays a concern to distinguish her art from other kinds of production, and concerns over the role of the artist, which had dominated debates in the postwar period in Italy.[[70]](#footnote-70) Crucially it also hints at Accardi’s faith in the utopian possibilities of art. Her aim to transform optics in painting was to assume a social and political scope beyond the canvas. In so doing, Accardi set out to dismantle what would later be articulated by Rivolta Femminile as the patriarchal and hierarchical structures of art. Through her transparent Sicofoil tents, Accardi proposed her practice as offering a model—and at the very least an imperative—to carry out that same critical project in life as in art.

**Living differently, seeing differently**

Accardi remakes a model of home guided by the imperative to figuratively and materially ‘lighten’ her environments and, by extension, the dwelling space. This was literally achieved through the use of Sicofoil and, as the artist was at pains to point out, through a lot of hard work. But what were the implications of this move and more specifically how did this speak to the utopianism with which she framed these temporary shelters? For the artist this choice of material was explicitly connected to a new way of working, one defined in terms of a process of stripping back, anticipating the entirely transparent works that Accardi began making in the 1970s. Accardi sums up this way of working when she explains that it had allowed her to ‘take away, take away, take away’.[[71]](#footnote-71) The concept of lightness that underpins this attitude takes on a further significance as it is couched by Accardi in two key terms that would be elaborated through Rivolta Femminile with which she was involved as founding member from the 1970s: ‘authenticity’ and ‘liberation’. As Maud Anne Bracke explains, these terms took on a pronounced meaning in Italy both inspired by the cultures of 1968 and the ‘year zero’ impulse as well as the influence of black liberation for Italian feminism, and were central to the project of defining sexual difference.[[72]](#footnote-72) This is how Accardi put it in 1966:

[T]aking everything away, might also have left nothing. But, perhaps, if a person has a certain attitude, takes a certain amount of care in trying to understand, yes, to see things in a new way, emptied out, in the end taking everything away will not result in nothing, something remains: for me it was an experience that I liked, that I enjoyed […] I have the right to do something in whichever way I choose, the simplest way, to experiment, and if by making and trying to live each day in a way that was not vulgar, to remove everything, this thing remains […] I risk making empty things, I risk losing things, unable to make works because an element is missing. But I don’t think so.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Of the four environments that Accardi realised, *Triplice Tenda* is the most ambitious, and she describes making it as a ‘slow process’, as ‘two years of difficulty’ both ‘with the material and its [*Triplice Tenda*’s] production’.[[74]](#footnote-74) Importantly in the artist’s conception, the material lightening of the ground was never at the expense of technical difficulty. Accardi describes it here as meticulous work and elsewhere she has spoken about the ‘huge problem’ involved in making *Triplice Tenda*.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Accardi made much of the effort involved in working on the floor. *Ambiente Arancio*, made with seven wooden stretchers that have been wrapped in Sicofoil sheets and arranged flat on the ground, makes a feature of the floor in a distinctive way just as Accardi’s own approach to painting had by 1953 become floor-bound and distinguishable by its repeated all-over patterns. She described making *Tenda* as a summer spent ‘working on the floor, painting all these panels by hand with the overlapping pink and green’.[[76]](#footnote-76) A series of photographs by Ugo Mulas taken of the artist in her studio in Rome in 1966 (Fig. 15) show Accardi at work on her hands and knees; she literally builds her temporary homes from the floor upwards. In another photograph from this largely unpublished series she appears as if literally scrubbing the floor as she negotiates the unwieldy panels that compriseher plastic environments. Accardi works directly on the ground but with none of the heroics associated with the Abstract Expressionists as they have come to be read. And while these photographs of Accardi by Mulas exhibit nothing of the theatrics enshrined in photographs by Hans Namuth of Jackson Pollock’s drip paintings, she does share in the anti-heroic and anti-humanist tradition that might be associated with their working practice—connected as it was with the ground, rather than with something that stands upright.[[77]](#footnote-77) By working on the floor in ways that evoke the kind of labours of homemaking —that is as if she were literally scrubbing the floor— it is as if Accardi were trying to domesticate her gesture.

When Accardi speaks about her own practice she echoes the ambivalence and often troubled relationship with which female domestic work had come to be regarded in the 1970s as both ‘trivialised and degraded categories of “women’s work” outside of the fine arts’, but also as an ‘arena for self-expression in the face of oppression’.[[78]](#footnote-78) Accardi writes: ‘we know that women work with repetition. My paintings took a long time to make. I would make them on the floor like a rug. Repetition is an inherent fact of oppression […] but it needs to be revived, to be recovered and made into a liberatory gesture.’[[79]](#footnote-79) She takes a mode of working, long associated with the conditions of female oppression, and declares it a distinctive feature of her own practice. Moreover, she claims to transform those repetitive operations into something ‘liberatory’. To borrow from Candance West and Don Zimmerman, it is as if Accardi were appropriating the gestures of the domestic, only to refuse the activities of a life connected to that space and by extension the subjectivities constructed through those roles.[[80]](#footnote-80)

The artist’s practice has from the outset elicited multiple interpretations.[[81]](#footnote-81) By the mid-seventies, the politics of Accardi’s tents would be recognised and claimed as a feminist critique by both Lonzi and Anne Sauzeau-Boetti.[[82]](#footnote-82) In an important though little-known contribution to the narrative of post-war women’s art in Italy, Sauzeau-Boetti makes a case for a productive space on the margins. She reads *Triplice Tenda* through the lens of psychoanalysis, in pre-Oedipal terms, writing in 1976: ‘at the time she had a vision of primordial existence and feminine desire […] the mother, love before castration and the involvement of the rival father.’[[83]](#footnote-83) Framed by Accardi’s own participation in consciousness raising groups, Sauzeau-Boetti describes a turning point in the artist’s practice in the following way: ‘the end of the 1960s represented a moment of intense introspection for Carla, the search for her own historical condition, the immersion in the dream/sign’ and continues, ‘Accardi’s feminine sign […] [is] a move through a certain appropriation of culture […] a different way of being in the world.’[[84]](#footnote-84) Sauzeau-Boetti evokes the spatial organisation and formal logic of *Triplice Tenda* to read its pink labyrinthine space as a psychic metaphor and the temporary structure as symbolic resistance to civilisation referring specifically to the ‘law of the father’.[[85]](#footnote-85) This association of civilisation in masculine terms was not of course limited to feminist discourse, though it was famously articulated explicitly in these terms by the Milan-based radical feminist collective Demau (Demistificazione dell’autoritarismo) which held meetings jointly with Rivolta Femminile throughout the 1970s.[[86]](#footnote-86) Their focus was turned towards the experience of women in patriarchal society, and they called for a politics outside of its civilising and explicitly masculine norms.

Informed by these early feminist readings of Accardi’s environments, Leslie Cozzi has recently analysed Accardi’s ‘quasi-domestic’ structures as prototypes for the kind of anti-institutional spaces proposed by organised feminism and appropriate to the consciousness raising groups with which Accardi was involved as member of Rivolta Femminile.[[87]](#footnote-87) At stake in Cozzi’s analysis is the desire to foreground the significance of Italian feminism amongst women artists in this period. She argues that *Tenda*, *Triplice Tenda* and *Ambiente Arancio* are the artist’s response to the aims of that movement as they unfolded in Italy. Cozzi claims that Accardi’s environments and the institutions of Italian feminism were predicated on the notion that ‘a new consciousness could be facilitated if a separate institutional structure were provided to nurture it’.[[88]](#footnote-88) This later became a central tenet of Italian feminist thought and Cozzi’s argument is premised on this particular point.[[89]](#footnote-89) Accardi’s environments are understood as occupying a space somewhere between the private, as it was called for within feminist thought, and the public, as autocoscienza became an ‘active political tool’.[[90]](#footnote-90) To parse Cozzi’s argument, Accardi’s environments trace a shift within her own development of feminism from individual to group endeavour. *Triplice Tenda* marks the transformation of this development as a communal space and a prototype for those alternatives established by Rivolta Femminile.

Cozzi is right, I think, to connect *Tenda*, *Ambient Arancio* and *Triplice Tenda* to the aims of radical design, which was also committed to offering alternative ways of living in this period. In this way, Cozzi proposes a much-needed reading of Accardi’s environments that binds these works to social and political concerns and sees them as visual instances of the call for an alternative existence—and after all these environments do overlap chronologically with Accardi’s involvement in Rivolta Femminile. Accardi, however, has expressed ambivalence in recent years towards these kinds of interpretations that foreground her involvement in feminist politics. She has repeatedly stressed her departure from the politics of organised feminism. Two decades earlier, Accardi claimed that her transparent objects and environments preceded her interest in feminism and that her involvement with feminism only coincided with her grey works of the 1970s.[[91]](#footnote-91) The point perhaps is that to read her works strictly through the lens of her political involvement fails to acknowledge the importance of aesthetic concerns as they were foregrounded by the artist and the question of how those aesthetic concerns might themselves be able to speak to politics. How might it be possible, then, to examine her political involvement with *La Rivolta Femminile* through the lens of her artistic practice rather than the other way round?

If *Tenda*, *Ambiente Arancio* and *Triplice Tenda* could offer another way of living, then this, I argue, was principally played out through Accardi’s way of working, and the concomitant experience of viewing her work. For Accardi, as already noted, this is predicated on a different way of seeing. Sicofoil offers a distinctly new way of working—and transparency is literally and symbolically equated here with that new approach of peeling away or stripping back. Elsewhere, and perhaps in a way that seems at odds with the repeated brushwork technique and resulting dense wave-like patterns that distinguish her environments, Accardi affirms ‘to me it was more important to take away than to add’.[[92]](#footnote-92) For Accardi this attitude also carried with it a moral imperative.[[93]](#footnote-93) She describes her new approach as underpinned by ‘the right attitude’ and as working with the right degree of ‘care’.[[94]](#footnote-94) Furthermore, it is underscored by the need to try ‘to understand things properly’, and crucially, ‘to see in a new way, by emptying out’.[[95]](#footnote-95) Accardi seems to be saying that understanding things properly or seeing things in a new way becomes possible through an emptying out.[[96]](#footnote-96) Crucially, Accardi seems to want to explore what remains as a result of this process — whether the effect of stripping back could reveal something radical or fundamental. This thinking informs the way Accardi conceives of artistic production, which she couches in terms of authenticity, but also as redefining an everyday existence though it obviously also connects closely to the aims of consciousness raising, not necessarily as an organized practice but the idea of a political consciousness based on a process of stripping away, a revelation.

This process of taking away extends to the viewing encounter. It is as if the artist wants to elicit a similar set of responses in the viewer when she writes: ‘In front of the things I make the viewer could feel a kind of lack and emotional poverty’.[[97]](#footnote-97) Accardi literally removes the obstacle posed by the canvas, making works whose constituent elements are all visible. In an interview with Marisa Volpi she reiterates this when she explains: ‘My works are almost entirely aesthetic, visual objects: the tents, the umbrella, the sunbed have a lightness for those that look at them, if the [viewer] looks at them in a straightforward way, and wants to liberate [themselves] from the heavy and conventional objects which surround us.’[[98]](#footnote-98) As mentioned above, one of the crucial differences between Lonzi and Accardi’s perspectives was the role of art in feminism. For Lonzi the two were incompatible precisely because art replicated the patriarchal structures of society by relying on the role of spectator. Accardi’s response seems to want to redefine those roles, as when she claims: ‘I wanted to understand what lay behind it [art] and I wanted for people not to feel stuck in front of a work. I found that to be too automatic a position. I wanted the audience to be shaken.’ [[99]](#footnote-99)

Certainly the viewing encounter is transformed with transparent plastic, as Accardi explores what it means to view an object and to have the object negotiate the terms of the encounter for the viewer. Looking at something is of course different to looking through it and these environments transform that process. But if Accardi had ambitions to make everything transparent, then how did the use of plastic transform those relations?

Sicofoil animates the dynamics of vision; it implies alternative points of view with works that can literally be seen from all sides and it insists that art has to speak to that space around the work. It also interrogates the act of looking, and the different aspects that impinge on that experience. The effects of this move are far-reaching. Accardi not only physically situates her environments in relation to the surrounding space but also makes them a function of viewing that space. It is this, above all else, that seems to take on a political significance in Accardi’s practice of this period, anticipating rather than directly mapping on to the way in which these concerns would subsequently be articulated through *La Rivolta Femminile*. For the artist, this renewed interest in a politics of vision went hand in hand with what it meant to be a woman artist, as when she writes: ‘already in ‘64 I began a study … to lighten … especially to demystify the picture and for me this demystification had a feminine content.’[[100]](#footnote-100)

Another way that Accardi negotiates the experience of space is through recourse to memory, weaving these works into her own life-story (she speaks of having dreamt of *Tenda* as a child).[[101]](#footnote-101) But she also does this by locating these works in the imaginary, insisting that *Tenda* ‘is a thought’, perhaps in the same way that utopia is not a place.[[102]](#footnote-102) With reference to *Ambiente Arancio* Accardi insists, ‘before anything, it was a fabrication of my imagination.[[103]](#footnote-103) Accardi seems to be describing a different kind of interaction with the viewer, one that relies on a conception of the work as *mise-en-scène* rather than immersive environment. In her account of the different kinds of viewing encounter that emerged with installation art in the 1960s, Claire Bishop characterised the dream/fantasy divide as a way of distinguishing between installations that function more like tableaux—that is, where the viewing subject is indirectly solicited to imagine being part of the work, in contrast to installations where the viewer is immersed in an environment. Accardi flirts with these distinctions: *Ambiente Arancio* seems to address itself directly to the viewer, in a way that appears to function like a dreamscape, but by describing *Ambiente Arancio* as ‘rarefied’ she relies on a conception of the work as tableau or *mise-en-scène* as well as a space or place in which to project those rêveries. In doing so Accardi seems to suggest not only that the locus of this alternative might be found in an attitude—a particular perspective taken in relation to things—but also that the ability to conceive of an alternative existence might be just as important as its realisation.

As the complex and inherently paradoxical experience of remaking home testifies, the domestic becomes a site of an impossible utopia in this period as Accardi grapples with the question of how you might ever begin to start living differently. Accardi highlights the floor-based and repetitive labour involved in remaking her temporary homes while at the same time emphatically refusing to take part in productive labour. Rather, she speaks of ‘taking pleasure in making a useless object’, rejecting means-end rationality. In doing so, she wants to advance an altogether different model of working, transforming the kind of labour normally associated with oppression in the home into something liberatory. If her artistic practice has anything to say about the relationship between feminism and the domestic it is this. Her alternative homes signal new possibilities for both her practice and the experience of viewing the work. With the same stroke she unmakes home and undoes painting; asking both of her work and her life what it might mean to think of an alternative. Through her emphasis on transparency and commitment to lightening, she materially and metaphorically finds a way of challenging myths of art as masculine and by extension, the domestic structure of female oppression. In doing so she raised the question of what the utopian possibilities of feminism might be without giving clear-cut answers. Instead through her practice she offers a set of guiding principles and suggests an ethical approach to her work that, if adopted, could form the basis for thinking and working otherwise, through the formation of alternative models for living.

Captions:

Fig. 1a: Carla Lonzi, Carla Accardi, Giulio Paolini and

Luciano Fabro and Luciano Pistoi in Alba, 1965, black and white photograph. (Photo: Anna Piva. Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome)

Fig. 1b: Carla Accardi, Giulio Paolini and Luciano Fabro in

Alba, 1965, black and white photograph. (Photo: Anna Piva. Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome)

Fig. 2: Carla Accardi, *Tenda*, 1965–6, paint on Sicofoil, 215 x 220 x

140 cm. Private Collection, Turin. (Photo: Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

Fig. 3: Carla Accardi, *Ambiente Arancio*, 1966–8, paint on Sicofoil and mixed

media, 251 x 337 x 441 cm. Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporaine, Strasbourg. (Photo: Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

Fig. 4: Carla Accardi, *Triplice Tenda*, 1969–71, paint on Sicofoil, 270.9 x 451Ø cm. Musée Centre Georges Pompidou. (Photo: Giorgio Colombo. Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

Fig. 5: Carla Accardi, *Cilindrocono*, 1972. Paint on Sicofoil mounted on

Perspex, 120 x 130 cm. Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome.

Fig. 6. Carla Accardi, *Untitled* (Maquettes), 1968, paint on

Sicofoil and wood, variable dimensions. Now lost. (Photo: Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

Fig. 7: Carla Accardi, *Untitled*, 1970, pencil on paper, unknown dimensions. Studio Carla Accardi. (Photo: Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

Fig. 8: Tendopolis, via Ripamonti, Milan, 1967. Press cuttings.

Fig. 9: Carla Accardi, *Tenda* (detail), 1965–6, paint on Sicofoil, 215 x 220

x 140cm. Private Collection, Turin. (Photo: Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

Fig. 10: Carla Accardi, *Tenda* (detail), 1965–6, paint on Sicofoil, 215 x 220 x

140cm. Private Collection, Turin. (Photo: Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

Fig. 11: Photograph of the Carla Accardi’s studio in Via del Babuino, Rome, 1967. (Photo. Giancarlo Mibelli Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

Fig. 12: Photograph of the Carla Accardi’s studio, 1965. (Photo: Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

Fig. 13: Carla Accardi, *Rotoli e Coni*, 1966, paint on Sicofoil, variable dimensions. (Photo: Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

Fig. 14: Photograph of Carla Accardi making *Triplice Tenda*, 1970. (Photo: Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

Fig 15: Photograph of Carla Accardi in her studio in Rome, 1966. (Photo: Ugo Mulas. Courtesy Studio Accardi, Rome).

1. See for example Molly Toynbee, *The Lost Wave, Women and Democracy in Postwar Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Maud Anne Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political* (London: Routledge, 2015) and Ruth Glynn, *Women, Terrorism, and Trauma in Italian Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Wendy Pojmann, *Italian Women and International Cold War Politics, 1944–1968* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the following edited by Lara Conte, Laura Iamurri and Vanessa Martini: *Autoritratto* (Milan: Et Al., 2010); *Taci Anzi Parla: Diario di Una Femminista* (Milan: Et Al., 2011); *Vai Pure. Dialogo Con Pietro Consagra* (Milan: Et Al., 2011); *Scritti sull’arte* (Milan: Et.Al., 2012). On the writings of Italian feminist-autonomists see for example, Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, *Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland California, CA: PM press, 2012); Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *The Work of Love: Unpaid Housework, Poverty and Sexual Violence at the Dawn of the 21st Century* (New York; London: Autonomedia; Pluto, 2008); Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labour and Capital* (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Reproductive labour encompasses the unwaged domestic and affective labour that enables waged labour to take place. See Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, *Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland California, CA: PM press, 2012), p. 6. See also the following for a discussion of ‘immaterial’ labour to which these debates have problematically been connected in recent years: Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 261. For analyses of the developments of Autonomia (or ‘Autonomia Operaia’ as it was initially known) from its origins in ‘Operaism’, see Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2000), esp. pp. 64–77. See also Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy Politics and Architecture within and Against Capitalism* (New York; Enfield: Princeton Architectural, 2008), p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A number of books, conference and symposia have taken the contested relationship between art and immaterial labour as a point of departure in recent years including ‘Art and Immaterial Labour’ held at Tate Britain on 19 January 2008. This was followed by ‘Untitled (Labour): contemporary art and immaterial production’ also held at Tate Britain on 17 March 2012. In 2013 Auto Italia organised a series of talks, workshops, texts and online contributions under the heading: ‘Immaterial Labour Isn’t working: Digital Culture, Digital Work, Digital Insurrection’ (20 April–12 May, 2013). See also Ina Blom et al., *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human Figure in Semiocapitalism* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011); John Roberts develops a critique of ‘immaterial labour’ in The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade (London: Verso, 2007) as does Stewart Martin, ‘Artistic Communism – A Sketch’ in Third Text, vol. 23, issue 4, July 2009, pp. 481–94. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Bracke, *Women and the Invention of the Political*, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. On this subject see Marta Seravalli, *Arte e Femminismo a Roma negli anni settanta* (Rome: Biblinki editori, 2013), chaps 1 and 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto* (Bari: De Donato, 1969) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Carla Lonzi, *Taci, anzi parla: diario di una femminista* (Milan: Et Al., 2010), p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Maria Luisa Boccia, *L’io in rivolta* (Milan: Tartaruga edizioni, 1990), p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Rosma Scuteri, ‘Carla Accardi’ *Flash Art*, no. 152, October–November 1989, pp. 63–7, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Claudio Cerritelli (ed.), *Accardi: Opere 1947–1997* (Milan: Charta, 1998), p. 33. This account omits obvious precedents in the history of environment art in Italy most notably Lucio Fontana’s spatial environments, which he began making over a decade earlier. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Quoted in Danilo Eccher (ed.), *Carla Accardi* (Rome: MACRO, 2004), p. 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Laura Cherubini in conversation with Accardi in Vanni Bramanti (ed.), *Carla Accardi* (Ravenna: Essegi, 1983), pp. 33-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, trans. by Harry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Michèle Causse and Maryvonne Lapouge, *Écrits, Voix d’Italie* (Paris: Des femmes, 1977), p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Hans Ulrich Obrist, ‘Carla Accardi, To Dig Deep’, *Flash Art* (International Edition), vol. 41, no. 260, June 2008, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Maurizio Vallarino, ‘Luminous marks’, in *Art and Artists*, June 1972, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Obrist, ‘Carla Accardi, To Dig Deep’, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See for example Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972), p. 3. See also Lonzi et.al. *Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile*, Rome, 1970, n/p. ‘Feminism has been the first political instance of historical criticism of the family and society.’ Il femminismo è stato il primo momento politico di critica storica alla famiglia e alla società.’ For a discussion of the way in which these debates have been historicised in the recent literature, see Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political*, pp. 34–44. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, [2nd ed.] (London: Verso, 2007), p. xiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Federici, ‘Wages Against Housework’ in *Revolution at Point Zero:* *Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. On this subject see Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2011), chap. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Felicity Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2007), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p. xiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. In interview with Lonzi Accardi refers to the following nomadic culture as one of the sources of inspiration for her tents: ‘the tent derived from an idea that came to me when you showed me those images of the Turkish tents from the Museum in Krakow. It made me think that those Turks took those beautiful tents on their war travels, and set them up at moments that I imagine must have been very difficult.’ Lonzi, *Autoritratto*, p. 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For a discussion of Ettore Sottsass’s role in bringing the ‘Beats’ to Italy see Catharine Rossi, ‘From East to West and Back Again: Utopianism in Italian Radical Design’ in Andre Blauvelt et al., *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia* published on the occasion of the exhibition held at the Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis 24 October 2015– 28 February 2016, pp. 58–67; See also Gianni De Martino, *Capelloni & Ninfette: Mondo Beat, 1966–1967* (Milan: Costa & Nolan, 2008); for an overview of the journals and publications associated with the underground press see Matteo Guarnaccia, *Underground Italiana: gli Anni Gioiosamente Ribelli della Controcultura* (Milan: Shake, 2011), pp. 192–208. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For an overview of the way that the commune in via Ripamonti was established and subsequently demolished see the first hand account given by De Martino in De Martino, *Capelloni & Ninfette*, p. 8, 9, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See Marc Dessauce and Architectural League of New York, *The Inflatable Moment: Pneumatics and Protest in 1968* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. # Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev ‘Art Povera: Conceptual, Actual or Impossible Art (1969)’ in *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 2001), p. 26.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Larry Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960–1970* (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT, 2007), footnote 37, p. 55. See also Jacques Berque, *Nomades et Vagabonds* (Paris: Union Générale d’Éditions, 1975); Gilles Deleuze et al., *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 1988); Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 69–81. Most recently on this subject within the Italian context see Silvia Bottinelli, ‘The Discourse of Modern Nomadism: The Tent in Italian Art and Architecture of the 1960s and 1970s’, *Art Journal*, vol. 74, no. 2, 2015, pp. 62–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Bramanti (ed.), *Carla Accardi*, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Bramanti (ed.), *Carla Accardi*, p. 34*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Germano Celant, in *La Repubblica*, 19–20 March 1978 quoted in Claudio Cerritelli, ‘Carla Accardi. Le infinite risorse del segno1947–1997’ in Cerritelli (ed.), *Carla Accardi*, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Bramanti (ed.), *Carla Accardi*, p. 34; Obrist, ‘Carla Accardi’, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Hanno-Walter Kruft, *A History of Architectural Theory: From Vitruvius to the Present* (London: Zwemmer, 1994), pp. 152–4, 201; See also ‘The Cult of Origins’ in Mari Hvattum, *Gottfried Semper and the Problem of Historicism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), chap. 1; Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam’s House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 13, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See for example Adachiara Zevi, ‘Painting Versus Canvas’ in *Carla Accardi* (catalogue of the exhibition held at Haunch of Venison 10 May–26 June 2010)(New York: Haunch of Venison, 2010), pp. 15–16; Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, *Carla Accardi* (catalogue of the exhibition held in Paris, 17 January–3 March 2002) (Éditions des musées de la ville de Paris: Paris, 2002), p. 5; Bramanti (ed.), *Carla Accardi*, pp. 28–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. On this context see Letizia Modena, *Italo Calvino’s Architecture of Lightness* (New York; London: Routledge, 2011), p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. On this subject see Gyorgy Kepes, *Language of Vision* (Chicago: P. Theobald, 1944); Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago: Theobold, 1947); Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception:* *A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954); and Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: Technology Press and Harvard University Press, 1960). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Modena, *Italo Calvino’s Architecture of Lightness*, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Stephen Phillips, ‘Plastics’ in Beatriz Colomina et al., *Cold War Hothouses: Inventing Postwar Culture from Cockpit to Playboy* (New York: Princeton Architectural; London, 2004), chap. 4; Beatriz Colomina, ‘Unbreathed Air 1956’, *Grey Room*, vol. 15, 2004, pp. 28–59; Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), chap. 6. Also on this subject, see Esther Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Stephen Phillips, ‘Plastics’, chap. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi: Carla Lonzi e Carla Accardi’, *Marcatré*, vol. 23–5, June 1966, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. See also Anne-Marie Sauzeau-Boetti, ‘Negative Capability as Practice in Women’s Art’, *Studio International*, vol. 191, no. 979, 1976, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Adachiara Zevi, ‘Carla Accardi: Segni Galleggianti’, *L’Architettura: Cronache e Storia*, vol. 38 1992, p. 888. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. These effects have been subsequently suppressed in recent restoration initiatives where the Sicofoil has been secured between sheets of Plexiglas creating the appearance of a rigid structure rather than a supple canopy. See Luisa Mensi and Mariano Boggia, ‘Le Opere Di Arte Ambientale Di Carla Accardi’, in E. Di Martino (ed.), *Arte Contemporanea. Conservazione e Restauro. Atti Del Convegno Internazionale* (Turin: Allemandi, 2005), p. 224. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Daniel Soutif has carried out the most exhaustive technical research into Accardi’s use of Sicofoil. Daniel Soutif, ‘La Vie en rose—Carla Accardi, *Triplice Tenda*, 1969–1971’, *Les Cahiers du Musée National d’Art Moderne*, vol. 98, winter 2006, pp. 47–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Carla Accardi and Puglisi Cosentino Fondazione, *Carla Accardi: Segno e Trasparenza* (Milan: Silvana, 2011), p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. See Maurizio Calvesi, ‘Intervista con i pittori’, *Marcatré*, vol. 8–10, June 1964, pp. 219–20. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. For a discussion of this tendency within the Italian context see Alex Potts in ‘Disencumbered Objects’, *October*, Special issue on Postwar Italian Art, vol. 124, Spring 2008, pp. 169-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Vallarino, ‘Luminous marks’, in *Art and Artists*, June 1972, p. 33. My emphasis. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Modena, *Italo Calvino’s Architecture of Lightness*, chap. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Rivolta Femminile, ‘Assenza della Donna: Dai Momenti Celebrativi della Manifestazione Creativa Maschile’, Milan, March 1971, n/p. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Lorenzo Benedetti, ‘Conversazione con Carla Accardi’ in Università degli studi di Roma, La Sapienza, *Forma 1 e i Suoi Artisti: Accardi, Consagra, Dorazio, Perilli, Sanfilippo, Turcato* (Rome: Gangemi, 2000), p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Causse and Lapouge, *Écrits, Voix d’Italie*, p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. ‘Carla Accardi’ in *Catalogo della mostra*, (Turin: Galleria Notizie, 1966). Lonzi is the first to frame Accardi’s practice in semiotic terms. See for example Udo Kultermann, *The New Painting,* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 44. Corrado Levi (ed.), *Una Diversa Tradizione* (Milan: Clup, 1985), pp. 140–5; Bramanti (ed.), *Carla Accardi*, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. There is a wide body of scholarship on the subject of camouflage. Among some of the more interesting examples are Roger Caillois and John Shepley, ‘Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia’, *October*, vol. 31, Winter 1984, pp. 17–32; David Lomas, ‘Artist–Sorcerers: Mimicry, Magic and Hysteria’, *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2012, pp. 363–88. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Accardi and Puglisi Cosentino Fondazione, *Carla Accardi: Segno e Trasparenza*, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. This has been connected to the politicisation of the private sphere by Leslie Cozzi in ‘Spaces of Self-Consciousness: Carla Accardi’s Environments and the Rise of Italian Feminism’, *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2011, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Causse and Lapouge, *Écrits, Voix d’Italie*, p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Timothy Leary (et.al), *The Psychedilc Experience* was published in Italy in 1964. See ‘Acid Visions’ in Scott*, Architecture or Techno-Utopia*, pp. 187–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Accardi, *Carla Accardi*, pp. 83–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Flavio Fergonzi, ‘La Critica Militante’, *La Pittura in Italia Il Novecento 2, 1945–1990* (Milan: Electa, 1993), pp. 569–90; G. Guercio and A. Mattirolo (eds), *Il Confine Evanescente. Arte Italiana 1960–2000* (Milan; Rome: Mondadori Electa, 2010), pp. 263–309. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political*, p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Sauzeau-Boetti, ‘Lo Specchio Ardente’, p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Sauzeau-Boetti, ‘Lo Specchio Ardente’, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Accardi, *Carla Accardi*, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. It is specifically the association with the works on the ground that I claim can be understood as ‘anti-humanist’. There are numerous examples in the literature that align Pollock’s practice and more broadly that of the Abstract Expressionists with humanism. See for example, Caroline Jones, *The Machine in the Studio* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), chap. 1; Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (London: Yale University Press, 1997)and Peter Selz, *New Images of Man* (London: Forgotten Books, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), pp. 491–524. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Causse and Lapouge, *Écrits, Voix d’Italie*, p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Candance West and Don Zimmerman, ‘Doing Gender’ in *The Social Construction of Gender* edited by Judith Lorber and Susan A Farrell (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1991), p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Maurizio Fagiolo dell’Arco, *Le Arti Oggi in Italia* (Rome: Mario Bulzoni, 1966), reprinted in Levi, ‘Carla Accardi’, in Corrado Levi (ed.), *Una Diversa Tradizione*, p. 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193; Sauzeau-Boetti, ‘Negative Capability as Practice in Women’s Art’, *Studio International*, vol. 191, no. 979, 1976, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Sauzeau-Boetti, ‘Carla Accardi’, *Data*, vol. 20, 1976, p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Sauzeau-Boetti, ‘Carla Accardi’, p. 73*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Sauzeau-Boetti, ‘Carla Accardi’, p. 73*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Patrick Hanafin, *Conceiving Life: Reproductive Politics and the Law in Contemporary Italy* (Ashgate: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013), p. 30, footnote 13; Monica Threlfall, *Mapping the Women’s Movement: Feminist Politics and Social Transformation in the North* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. This is, to my knowledge, the only English-language scholarly work that exclusively examines Accardi’s environment—an aspect of Accardi practice that Leslie Cozzi describes as obscure. See Cozzi, ‘Spaces of Self-Consciousness’, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Cozzi, ‘Spaces of Self-Consciousness’, p.76. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Cozzi, ‘Spaces of Self-Consciousness’, p.76. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Cozzi, ‘Spaces of Self-Consciousness’, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. See Rosma Scuteri, ‘Carla Accardi’, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Accardi was not alone in her thinking. Piero Gilardi put it in similar terms in a recent interview when he explains: ‘To dedicate oneself to a minimal output compared to that of consumer society was intended to be a metaphor for a new way of seeing things, a new way for the individual to create.’ See Piero Gilardi and Claudio Spadoni, *Piero Gilardi* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1999), p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. See Marisa Volpi, ‘Intervista a Carla Accardi’, *Marcatrè*,vol. 42, May 1968, Milan. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Sauzeau-Boetti, ‘Negative Capability as Practice in Women’s Art’, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Causse and Lapouge, *Écrits, Voix d’Italie*, p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Causse and Lapouge, *Écrits, Voix d’Italie*, p. 393*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. See Lonzi, ‘Discorsi’, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Obrist, ‘Carla Accardi’, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)