

The Gendering of Men: Masculinity and Countercultures in the Work of Sottsass, Baruchello and Echaurren

Abstract

Since the mid-1990s, scholars active in North America and the United Kingdom have pioneered the integration of masculinity studies into the art history of the twentieth century. In Italy, however, the exploration of the male gender from a historical perspective has taken longer to gain purchase in academia. As a result, art historians have thus far hesitated to engage with the insights offered by the research conducted within this area of study. This article seeks to remedy this lacuna, aiming to open new vistas onto topics that currently occupy a blind spot in the history of Italian art. In particular, the analysis concentrates on the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s as a social space that, for all its foibles and unresolved contradictions, allowed for a collective critique of what sociologist Raewyn Connell has defined as “hegemonic masculinities”. Conceptual tools derived from gender and masculinity studies are here deployed in order to shed light on the work of two artists deeply influenced by 1970’s countercultural milieus, Gianfranco Baruchello and Pablo Echaurren, as well as the architect/designer Ettore Sottsass, who shared with them a pronounced interest in, and a sustained dialogue with, countercultural groups, especially in the 1960s. Through a focus on the motif of domesticity (in its material and imaginary dimensions) and a careful examination of the visual, medial and intellectual environments within which these three men operated – from 1977 fanzines to *Rosso* and from the Beat generation to the gay movement – this research will highlight semantic strategies, intellectual shifts, differences and similarities in the work of three artists whose production partly responded to the powerful and unsettling emergence of the second wave of feminism.

“The women’s movement was the only really interesting and significant revolutionary force at that moment. [...] For me it was an epiphany, a very powerful and somewhat painful epiphany.”¹

“Women cause us distress, but in real life, not in theory. [...] The worst of ourselves emerge: aggression, need for reassurance, the will to power. 1975: couples are in turmoil, our homes are rearranged; women are with women, men with men.”²

In the late 1970s, Bifo (the alias of Franco Berardi) was one of the Italian activists who located their intellectual research at the threshold where far-left politics and counterculture met. Although he had joined the revolutionary organisation Potere Operaio in 1969, his interest in the proto-punk aesthetic, rock music and avantgarde literature increasingly distanced him from the austere ethos that characterised many components of the early 1970s far left. In 1975, he launched *A/traverso*, a periodical that blended the graphic design of zines with Marxism and the analyses of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Shortly thereafter, he helped launch the independent radio station Radio Alice.³ For much of the 1970s and 1980s, Bifo and his partner lived in a collective household, a commune in Via Marsili, Bologna. The satirical magazine *Il Male* devoted a tongue-in-cheek double page (fig. 1) to this apartment, feigning to feature a section on “the most beautiful houses in the world.” Adopting the inflated rhetoric of glossy lifestyle publications, the unknown author presented the flat as an exquisite work of art and the expression of Bifo’s unique personality, an “intellectual, artist, politician, postmodern; in short, a complex character, multifaceted in both perspective and pursuits.”⁴ The tone of this unlikely report, which gave an excellent rating to the flat’s interior design but a poor score to its hygiene, would later inform the 1991 medium-length film by Renato de Maria titled *Il trasloco* (moving house).⁵ Made when Bifo and his peers were forced to break their lease, this documentary approximated a biography of the apartment. In the film, the rooms that accommodated two generations of students, student-workers, activists and thousands of guests framed a polyphonic story retracing a collective adventure. Former inhabitants and guests reconvened to recount the stories they associated with the flat while two surly manual workers moved out the furniture. A glimmer of leftist melancholia punctuates Bifo’s remarks, but the film narrative is not one of *riflusso*; that is, of a political demise compounded by a withdrawal into the private sphere. Many urban communes in Italy were becoming flat shares after 1977, and the commune of Via Marsili was among this number.⁶ However, as *Il trasloco* explains, a more transnational and younger generation of activists arrived there in the 1980s – from a German hippie to an Iranian Maoist – breathing new life into the household when 1977ers began quitting it.

In this cultivated milieu, where Vladimir Mayakovski, Mao and William Burroughs cohabited, the advent of the second wave of feminism was not without its conflicts. The sole female narrator of *Il trasloco* evokes the women-only meetings in the house and describes the chaotic atmosphere of the kitchen, along with the commune’s bland diet. The woman’s presentation of the space and the “maternal” apprehension that inflects her critique of the food suggest an intimate bond between her gender and the practical and emotional activities

1 Baruchello/Martin 1983, p. 50.

2 *L'erba voglio* 1976, p. 8.

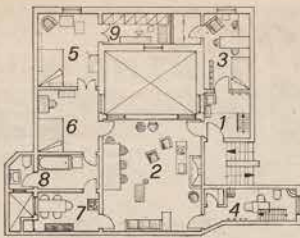
3 Galimberti 2019.

4 *Il Male* 1981, pp. 8–9.

5 De Maria 1991.

6 *Re Nudo* 1978, p. 20.

LE PIU' BELLE CASE DEL MONDO



Un rapido confronto tra lo stato preesistente e quello attuale rivela l'entità delle modifiche rese necessarie dalla "radicalità" dell'intervento. La superficie di 440 metri-quadri è stata ridotta alla soglia ottimale di 150, per ottenere questo obiettivo la sala quadrata è stata trasformata in una corte centrale. L'altezza degli ambienti è stata ridotta da metri 3 a 4,20 consentendo così il comodo alloggio degli ospiti in una stanza-più di 30,00. L'unità spaziale che ruota intorno alla corte si trova, così, ad essere isolata e sconosciuta dal caos cittadino.

POSTMODERNO A BOLOGNA

LA CASA DI FRANCO BERARDI (BIFO) NEL CENTRO STORICO

Ancora un'altra espressione di piccola casa che, ben si addice a Bologna, a questa incantevole parte d'Italia, dove ogni esperienza architettonica sente l'obbligo di adattarsi alla esiguità del posto che riunisce e riassume gli estremi di atmosfera padana, città, qui una breve parentesi di storia ha inizio di neoclassicismo. Qui non c'è l'intervento dell'architetto Bifo inteso l'abitare emancipato dal progetto, ma una rinnovata qualità della vita lo ha spinto alla ristrutturazione di una casa vissuta in precedenza come puro intervallo rispetto alle attività lavorative e politiche che avvenivano altrove. Mutate le condizioni circostanti Bifo si accorge personaggio multifaccettato: intellettuale, artista, politico, postmoderno, inaspettato un personaggio complesso, dalle mille sfaccettature. A partire da questa premessa, anche l'abitare deve concorrere a rappresentare questa ricoperta pienezza. Dall'interno bolognese, superato ogni dilemma stilistico, Bifo approda ad una costruzione metafisica in cui estetica e funzionalità coesistono in una fitta trama di luoghi momentanei colti nel loro divenire. Scartata l'ipotesi di una villetta rustica, affrancata dalle facili suggestioni del restauro integrale, Bifo ha lasciato che l'humus bolognese caratterizzasse la sua casa, integrandosi in una tradizione di oggetti testimoni di un passato parimenti inquieto. L'originale funzione pubblica dell'edificio, fino al 1968 vi venivano ospitate le quotidiane sedute della borsa valori di Bologna, non ha scoraggiato la certezza di dover comunque alterare una struttura preesistente, quando non è dato luogo affine. Uomo postmoderno tra ispirazione dagli oggetti quotidiani, dal cronismo delle stagioni e dal succedersi dei sentimenti. Autentico, quindi, perseguibile solo con l'accostamento casuale dei materiali della propria esistenza.



LETT01. Un appartamento contraddizione: la bianco scolorito e l'opere-più della "Macchina per Abitare" ripropongono il fascino dell'arroganza di Wiener-1960: comodo salotto di un'ultima utilità possibile, la crinale essenziale del brando: letto-letto-più.



SOGGIORNO Una porta sovrapposta agli innovativi del soggiorno pasticcino, questa conferma della novità dell'ingresso, ricomincia l'azione del "Movimento Moderno". Living, dinanzi, come pluridirezionale, intorno un centro secondo uno schema non estraneo alla suggestione "Wrightiana", si susseguono e si organizzano i tempi dell'abitare. Tempo libero o lavoro il risultato nel progressivo adattarsi alle necessità contingenti: post-divano in numero pari agli abitanti della casa.



LETT02. L'affaccio sulla corte caratterizza questa stanza. Migliore proporzionalità della finestra si specchia nel muro prospiciente e si dilata nella porta laterale. Solo il letto (Moderna branda di 1,30 per 1,68) risulta di primario valore nuovo e paragonabile al grembiù e un lavinetto (struttura in lamiera e pannello compensato) sono ricolti in un'unità: la tentazione di un vuoto-presente di un'ora che, distribuisce, si dispensano nel mistico.



post lavoro in numero accidentato. Le originali penne-pila di sedia Thonet, sono scappate in posizione postmoderna a testimonianza dell'averuta scissione tra funzionalità e decoro ma anche allusione ad un uso che si annuncia temporaneo. Completano l'ambiente un impianto stereo a valvole, una banqueta ribaltabile con moquette del mondo, tavoli e tavolino di vari formati, mensole e mensole. Le pareti contengono esclusivamente le aperture: tre porte e due finestre.



LETT03. Il coraggio della tradizione: moquette verde e tappezzeria tabacco: tavolo o mensola perfetta (cattivo) ripropongono nell'accostamento scortato la presenza trascurabile dell'arroganza. Il tempo del riposo e del letargo, un affettoso romanticismo all'incanto: con la notte.



L'INGRESSO con l'elemento scudo, immediatamente di fronte alla porta, che contiene, da una parte appenninici e portapanni, il compensatore (dalla altri giardini), mentre nel vano molto offerto dai primi trovano alloggio valigie e Beauty-case, un'agile mensola per poudangere un capiente sovrapposto abito a soggiorni imprevedibili.



LA STANZA DI BIFO Vista e propria casa nella casa, resa autonoma dalle cortigialità all'ingresso ed all'ingresso riprodotto gode del panorama dell'intera città, dalle torri alle spoglie dell'adriatico. Un senso libero protegge il letto dalle altre funzioni. Al tavolo di lavoro Bifo, che volge lo sguardo liberamente al panorama e all'ingresso.



IL BAGNO. Due volumi funzionali: all'ingresso WC e il posto vasca. Due modi di appoggiare favoriti dalla ruvidezza intima di pavimento-più in ceramica color fucina. Un'imprecisata mensola, tra coppi e gancini, incalza, tra soggiorno, cucina e letto.



LA CUCINA. Anche ed essenziale cucina: nello sfondo da della parete le dinamiche e i bruciati strutturalistici. Mante microbolle, necessaria presenza: nulla, ma solo suggerisce modestità e il buon vecchio lambiccato per un'abitare in compagnia.



RIPOSTIGLIO. L'ambiente riprodotto è stato ricavato dalla chiusura definitiva delle finestre sulla strada. Qui non c'è nulla da vedere. Tutto è catalogato perfettamente con un ordine quasi maniacale. Alle, cassero e mensole, inatteso da e vinto le altre stanze in flusso imponente e continue di massime: abiti, souvenir, carteggi, ricami, costruzioni ed anche oggetti in attesa di un'irrinunciabile realizzazione - critica. L'unico scampolo, è provocato dalla ricettività.

	IGIENE	LUMINOS	DESIGN	CONFORT
ZONA GIORNO	5	6	8	9
ZONA NOTTE	6	—	5	9
CUCINA	7	8	23	9
SERVIZI	8	6	8	8

1 Anonymous, "Postmoderno a Bologna. La casa di Franco Berardi (Bifo) nel centro storico", *Il Male*, 32 (1981), pp. 8-9

performed in the kitchen. By the same token, in De Maria's film, the launch of Radio Alice (whose meetings often took place in the flat) is framed as a male venture. A former guest of the flat provided a clue for this perceived masculine connotation. He revealed that the transmitter used for the independent radio station had originally come from a tank. This comment inserts the radio into a technical-military environment made of transistors, engineering and science that would have implied, from a 1970s social perspective, the relative extraneousness of women. It seems fair to assume that, for all their antagonism towards a stereotypical gender division of roles, the inhabitants of the house inevitably reproduced aspects of traditional gender polarisation.

A similar oscillation between the unintentional reiteration of "bourgeois" behaviours and so-called deviant standpoints also informed the division of artistic work in the underground scene. The people frequenting the flat marshalled the ideal of a coalescing of art into everyday life, contesting the professionalisation of the art world.⁷ Indeed, one of the leitmotifs of *Il trasloco* is the creative expression of those who were living and visiting the flat, an impulse that resonated with the "diffuse creativity" praised by the Metropolitan Indians and with the cross-dressing performances of the transsexuals active within the movement.⁸ Admittedly, aspiring (male) artists were more likely to be found in Traumfabrik – a communal household and Bologna's main artistic hub for the underground

7 *The Golden Horde* (1988) 2021, pp. 513-586; Eco (1977) 2021; Calvesi 1978.
8 Zundel 2022; Echaurren/Salaris 1999; Marcasciano 2019.

scene. Yet the commune of Via Marsili also left some room for creative experimentation. As the central photograph of *Il Male*'s double page shows, one of the female residents hung Thonet chairs on the living room wall. What was the rationale behind this eccentric display? Did the hanging chairs signal the “post-modern” break with the dialectic of “form and function,” as *Il Male* quipped? Or were they to be seen as the props of an ongoing performance of a non-conformist lifestyle?

This article explores some of the thematic threads of *Il Male*'s “lifestyle” report and *Il trasloco*, but it shifts the focus from a commune to the art world. This helps shed light on the work of two artists deeply influenced by the 1970s counterculture, Gianfranco Baruchello and Pablo Echaurren, as well as the architect/designer Ettore Sottsass, who shared with them a pronounced interest in, and a sustained dialogue with countercultural groups, especially in the 1960s. In particular, this article examines the ties of their work to countercultural forms of masculinities, and probes how real or fantasised forms of domesticity constituted a locus for these three artists to negotiate male identities from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s. Drawings and paintings, including artist books and zines, will be examined. Baruchello, Echaurren and Sottsass straddled genres and embraced media cherished by activists, espousing (or mimicking) their ideal of diffuse creativity. In this context, the focus on the three artists' exposure to the counterculture is all the more revealing. The hippie movement, the beats, and segments of the Autonomia movement – the strands that most impacted their work – all played a role in stripping what sociologist Connell has described as “hegemonic masculinity” of its undisputed legitimacy.⁹

This notion does not designate what powerful men are or how they appear, but rather the practices sustaining their dominance and the persuasive power of their attractiveness. Indeed, men can embrace aspects of hegemonic masculinity (independence, strength, willpower, heterosexuality, etc.) when it is desirable to do so, but they can also strategically distance themselves from its normativity – a notable example being when the traits of hegemonic masculinities undergo profound changes and flexible adaptation proves more apt than conformity to outdated standards in securing men a position of mastery.¹⁰ In this respect, countercultural instantiations of masculinity can be highly ambivalent; in fact, they can be viewed as conducive solely to a superficial questioning of the imperatives of manliness. In her book on masculinity in *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Anne Söll highlights a paradox. Instead of making the performativity of gender roles manifest, thereby contributing to a shift, painters such as Otto Dix and Christian Schad adopted forms of “transformative masculinity.”¹¹ In other words, their attitudes did not aim to erode the hegemonic masculinities of 1920s Germany; instead, they ultimately reinforced the gender relations of power. Did a similar gambit pervade the 1960s and 1970s work of Sottsass, Baruchello, Echaurren?

Over the past three decades, social scientists and historians, such as Sandro Bellassai, have examined masculinity in twentieth-century Italy.¹² In particular, the exacerbated virility of the Fascist regime's official discourse has attracted scholarly attention.¹³ However, when it comes to artists and architects, the literature available on Italy is more limited, and very little has been written on the triangulation between artists, 1960s–1970s counterculture, and the domesticity proposed here. For instance, Silvia Bottinelli's insightful *Double-Edged Comforts. Domestic life in Modern Italian Art and Visual Culture* analyses the house's interior

9 Connell 1987; Connell 1995.

10 Wetherell/Edley 1999.

11 Söll 2016, pp. 19–26; Judd 2010.

12 Bellassai 2011.

13 Ben-Ghiat 2005; Wanrooij 2005; Spackman 2008; Benadusi 2012.

spaces in the 1960s and 1970s, but the volume does not devote ample attention to the topic of manliness.¹⁴ In North America and the United Kingdom, the emergence of gender studies gave rise to a spate of studies on how male artists engaged with masculinity. Amelia Jones's 1994 groundbreaking study *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp* or David Hopkins' *Dada's Boys* are a case in point.¹⁵ In Italy, where masculinity studies began gaining purchase slightly later and remained a relatively niche area, similar investigations have rarely been conducted on visual artists.¹⁶ While the research of scholars such as Giovanna Zapperi, Maria Bremer, Laura Iamurri, Raffaella Perna, Francesco Ventrella and Teresa Kittler, among others, have allowed for a much more nuanced understanding of the relationship between Italian female artists, feminism and the 1960s–1970s dwelling culture, the same cannot be said for Italian male artists.¹⁷ Thus, this study cannot be anything but exploratory, aiming to open new vistas on topics that currently reside in a blind spot of Italian art history while also being increasingly relevant to society. The third wave of feminism, to reference Cinzia Arruzza's periodisation, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic have reconfigured the social perception of the house as a locus of remote work but also of heightened domestic violence, and are gradually redefining the place of men, and male artists, within its confines.¹⁸

Home and the Gendering of Post-War Men in Italy

In *Art and the Home*, art historian Imogen Racz has maintained that “the home both contains us and is within us. The overall scale of the dwelling, its thresholds and internal spaces are all related to the scale of the body. [...] Any alteration of these relationships is felt both physically and mentally.”¹⁹ Indeed, domestic space can be considered one of the most prominent sites where anxieties immanent to the male gender have been enacted. But even without invoking such an organicist parallel, social, and cultural dynamics largely account for the reasons why the home captured the imagination of male artists active in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s.

In his history of domesticity, Michel McKeon argues that the separation (not the distinction) between the public and private spheres, along with the frequent assignation of the female gender to the latter, only became widely intelligible in some parts of Europe between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁰ Two hundred years later, this dyad had acquired such prominence that extensive plans contrasting women's relegation to the house were implemented. These often emanated from socialist and communist administrations that framed their endeavours as an attempt to design dwelling spaces along more egalitarian and “efficient” lines. Consider, for instance, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's Frankfurt kitchen for Ernst May's social housing project New Frankfurt, or the communal kitchens of the Narkomfin building in 1920s Moscow. In contrast, Italy, did not have anything comparable on this scale. If fascism strove to recast older notions of femininity and “nationalised” female bodies (although its modernisation efforts at times undercut conservative ideals of womanhood), the 1950s and 1960s upheld the house as the place of women.²¹ These decades, largely dominated by

14 Bottinelli 2021.

15 Jones 1994a; Hopkins 2008; for Duchamp see Zapperi 2012; Zapperi 2007; for a Marxist and feminist perspective on artistic masculinities, see Dimitrakaki 2013, pp.183–207.

16 Ventura 2013.

17 *The Unexpected Subject* 2019; Perna 2013; *Feminism and Art* 2020; Kittler 2017; Bremer 2021.

18 Arruzza 2018.

19 Racz 2019, p. 2.

20 McKeon 2009.

21 De Grazia 1992.

the Christian democrats' agenda, even strengthened women's domestic sequestration. In this way, it was very much like the cult of privacy, which partly responded to the "indecorous" overcrowding of the spaces that accommodated displaced people in the aftermath of World War II.²² What is more, unlike most European countries, the share of women in the labour market significantly decreased in Italy between 1959 and 1973.²³ While the economy witnessed an unprecedented expansion of the industrial sector, the data indicates that this trend hides a parallel process of "housewification" that remains neglected in mainstream narratives. Women doing piecework from home, but also those working in agriculture and the service industry began moving with their families from the south to the north of the country and, owing to their husbands' increased purchasing power, further into the realm of the household, becoming full-time "housewives" (a term that therefore did not bear the same middle-class connotations as in other countries of the Global North). This epochal shift turned the nuclear family and the working-class home (often with three or more children) into the "hidden abodes" of Italy's baby boom and the country's economic boom.

As a result of this widening gender divide, with the attendant dichotomy between private and public and its projection onto social spaces, the features that mainstream Italian culture associated with the home (comfort, discretion, care, and the like) were routinely praised as defining the "natural" virtues and motherly vocations of femininity until the late 1970s and beyond. An unintended consequence of this alignment of the private and the feminine was that, well into the 1970s, the domestic space represented one of the few contexts where the *angelo del focolare* ("the angel in the house"; literally "of the fireplace"), and not the breadwinner, supervised and exerted authority. To be sure, in a country where spouses were not legally equal until 1974 – before then, only men were recognised as "heads of the family" – and where until 1968, adultery was only a crime if committed by a wife and not a husband, female sovereignty was by proxy. And yet, the homes of the 1960s and 1970s remained the only widely accessible domain where men often had to justify their presence. This generated "gender troubles" that at times surfaced in the work of Sottsass, Baruchello and Echaurren on domesticity.

If the gender division of spaces was reinforced by Italian industrialisation, feminism increasingly questioned the reassuring "familiarity" of the house from the mid-1960s. As Bellassai has demonstrated, each major wave of feminism elicited a corresponding reaction in the social perception of male identity.²⁴ Surges of feminist protests led to a "gendering of men"; in other words, to a renegotiation of the conventions surrounding the appropriate forms of masculinity. In these moments of change, one of which is arguably ongoing, the act of being or becoming a man shifts away from being a transparent condition and is revealed as a complex process induced by socialisation. During this phase of relative anomaly, the attributes of hegemonic masculinity can be reaffirmed or attacked, but they can no longer be taken for granted. In 1970s Italy, the "second wave" of feminism forced a portion of the male population to see virility not as the direct result of having male sex organs but rather as a social construct – and a fragile one at that – as illuminated by Marco Ferreri's timely films *L'ultima donna* (The Last Woman, 1975) and *Ciao Maschio* (Bye Bye Monkey, 1978).

Admittedly, the concept of "gender" was not included in these earlier debates, but an incipient denaturalisation of gender roles was already underway in the 1960s. Five prominent publications, to which this text will return, epitomise

22 Zeier Pilat 2014; Bottinelli 2021.

23 Ginsborg 2003, p. 448.

24 Bellassai 2011. A different and by now "classic" history of how manhood evolved can be found in Kimmel 2006.

the growing criticism of “Italian” masculinity between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s. In 1965 *I sultani* (The Sultans) appeared in print and was promptly translated into English.²⁵ This was a pioneering anthropological research project conducted by Gabriella Parca on the inveterate sexism of the “Italian man’s mentality” across social classes. Four years later, at the dawn of the second wave of the feminist movement, Giuliana del Pozzo launched a journalistic enquiry that laid bare the “toxic” masculinity (to use a contemporary term) of many leftists. Her articles, which were destined to leave a scar on the political milieu, were published in several issues of *Noi Donne*, a monthly feminist magazine and an outlet of the institutional Left.²⁶ In 1974, the young sociologist Laura Grasso pursued this strand of analysis with a more thorough investigation into working-class nuclear families who were located politically on the left.²⁷ Just as bosses exploited male workers, Grasso argued, workers exploited their unwaged wives, whom they were prompted to see as an appendix of the house and its functions. Furthermore, Grasso noticed, the devouring devotion to the working-class cause typical of male activists, and their consequent absence from home, often worsened the conditions of their wives in relation to housework and childrearing. Responding to a growing malaise in the Italian Left, some men drew upon consciousness-raising practices of feminists to launch men-only groups in the mid-1970s. Their experience was documented in magazines located between underground culture and political radicalism such as *Re Nudo* and *Katù Flash/Vogliamo tutto*.²⁸ It was a fringe and short-lived experiment, to be sure, but the widespread interest in masculinity ushered in two important books (both published in 1977), edited by men who were persuaded that “one is not born a man, but becomes one.”²⁹ *L’Antimaschio. Critica dell’incoscienza maschile* (The Antimale. A Critique of the Male Lack of Self-awareness) compiled translated texts from Italy, the USA, the United Kingdom and West Germany.³⁰ In *L’ultimo uomo* (The last man), left-wing publisher Savelli presented the “confessions” of four anonymous men (a politician, an intellectual, a “comrade” and a teenager), who discussed their experience of being a man caught in the dilemma brewing between the “crisis” of this role and a strenuous defence of patriarchy.³¹ In the introduction to the volume, the cover of which was designed by Echaurren, Marco Lombardo-Radice argued that it was time for leftist men to stop waiting for feminists “to show the way” of liberation from the oppressive aspects of manliness; “we need to stand on our feet”, he claimed.³² How this question was framed and addressed in the work of Sottsass, Baruchello and Echaurren will constitute the focus of the next sections.

Sottsass’ Pink and Pacifist Virility

Ettore Sottsass was born in 1917; his father was an architect. He grew up in Turin but spent most of his professional career in Milan. Coming of age during the brief existence of the Italian Empire (1936–1943), Sottsass was exposed to the cult of virility typical of fascism, with its antifeminism (gender parity occasionally being defined as “social homosexuality”) and its race-based pro-natalist policy

25 Parca 1966.

26 Del Pozzo 1969.

27 Grasso 1974.

28 Valcarengi 1973. For the conscious-raising sessions of gay men, see also Levi 1972; Levi 1973a; Levi 1973b; and Levi 1974.

29 *L’Antimaschio* 1977, p. 9.

30 *L’Antimaschio* 1977, pp. 37–161.

31 *L’ultimo uomo* 1977.

32 *L’ultimo uomo* 1977, p. 19. For an interesting example of how some gay men who were part of the movement questioned masculinity around 1976–1977, see Pescatori 1979.

(including a bachelor tax imposed on unmarried men), as well as the State's racism against Jews, African populations and the "Slavs".³³ In the aftermath of World War II, during which he served in the military as a lieutenant, Sottsass evolved into an unwavering pacifist. His reaction, therefore, could not be more different from the militaristic manhood abhorrent of affection that pervaded the "fantasies" of the men-of-steel veterans in the aftermath of World War I (the generation of Sottsass's father), as famously analysed by Klaus Theweleit.³⁴

Almost concurrent with the establishment of his architecture studio, in 1949, Sottsass married Fernanda Pivano, who was born into a wealthy family in 1917. During their relationship (which ended around 1971), Pivano and Sottsass did not have any children. Pivano studied in Turin, where she befriended Primo Levi and Cesare Pavese; the latter, in particular, mentored her in the study of American literature, which had been hindered during fascism. A cultivated and unprejudiced socialite, Pivano would go on to become the most renowned Italian translator of American literature and its major advocate from the late 1950s until her death. Notably, she built solid bonds of friendship with the writers of "the Beat Generation". Whether or not she had a feminist sensibility, however, remains open to debate. Although she was aware of the "alpha male" mentality of writers with whom she was acquainted (Ernest Hemingway, for example), Pivano seems to have sought complicity with them, even with the least feminist ones.³⁵ Consider her account of her first encounter with William Burroughs, who had killed his second wife, Joan Vollmer, in 1951. Burroughs had been convicted of manslaughter *in absentia*, but the circumstances of Vollmer's death – possibly a "William Tell act" while Burroughs was drunk – were never clarified. In her diary, Pivano writes that they first met in London in 1968. She was thrilled to finally talk to one of her favourite writers. In order "to break the ice", Burroughs said, "As for me, I would kill all women", to which Pivano replied, "So would I." Burroughs then smiled, and Pivano quipped, "We became friends forever."³⁶ This type of camaraderie – which would be fiercely denounced by feminists such as Carla Lonzi and Lea Vergine in the 1970s – also informed Sottsass' works, where Pivano's presence is key to his performance of masculinity.

For Sottsass, the 1950s and 1960s were marked by a twofold adhesion: to Olivetti's corporate, if enlightened, capitalism and to the incipient counterculture. This unusual marriage complicates narratives, such as that elaborated by Fred Turner, retracing the genealogy of the Silicon Valley ethos in 1960s American counterculture.³⁷ In the case of Sottsass, countercultural ethos and Olivetti's cutting-edge mainframe computers overlapped and fed on each other. Indeed, his engagement with the former began as early as 1956 when he participated in the International Movement for an Imagist Bauhaus, which was launched by Asger Jorn and would lay the groundwork for the foundation of Situationist International. Like Jorn and his associates, Sottsass criticised Max Bill's claim of reviving the spirit of the Bauhaus through the foundation of the Ulm School of Design. Sottsass reacted to what he perceived to be Bill's short-sighted functionalism by championing the need for architects to re-enchant modern households.³⁸ In Sottsass's view, dwelling spaces should house journeys of the mind and stage rituals reconnecting the private to the cosmos.

Sottsass's tendency towards spirituality and Pivano's heightened interest in the work of Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs influenced the

33 Benadusi 2012, p. 8

34 Theweleit 1987–1989; for Sottsass' father and fascism, see Sottsass 2010, p. 66.

35 See, for example, her account of her relationship with Hemingway Pivano 1985.

36 Pivano 2008, p. 1030.

37 Turner 2006.

38 Sottsass (1956) 2002.

couple's travel destinations in the early 1960s, including India and Myanmar that would soon become cult places of hippie culture. Sottsass' idealisation of Burmese and Indian girls and women was a recurrent topic of the travelogues he published in *Domus*.³⁹ His descriptions of their supposedly numinous quotidian gestures tended to be couched in Orientalism. Even if World War II marked a break in Sottsass' biography, stereotypical, if not imperial, conceptions of "exotic" femininity did not suddenly disappear from his cultural horizon. Nonetheless, his tentative departure from contemporary performances of masculinity cannot be overestimated.

In order to understand how Sottsass' work was foiled against images of manhood that pervaded his generation and acquaintances, some remarks on how the 1950s and early 1960s countercultures contrasted with hegemonic masculinities are necessary here. Not only were members of the Beat community openly gay or bisexual, but their challenges to mainstream manliness targeted the very core of post-war Western society, the nuclear family nest. It has been argued that the Beat community, comprising mostly North American men, emphasised nomadism and figures such as the hobo to anchor its resistance to the Cold War imperatives of attached sexuality and suburban life in the American mythology of male outlaws.⁴⁰ With their promiscuity and drug abuse, the Beats' opposition to the post-war "American dream" – predicated on religious mores, sedentary living and stern, patriotic, heterosexual fatherhood – may have encapsulated a subversive anti-bourgeois masculinity, but it was not proto-feminist. In fact, it invites a comparison with the countercultural manliness proposed by the magazine *Playboy*, as analysed by Paul B. Preciado and others.⁴¹ The Beats' endless natural landscapes and the hyper-technological pad of the debonair urban bachelor, upheld by *Playboy*, articulated two different escape routes from the same oppressive gender role of Cold War America and Western Europe – that of the family man.

In some of his 1960s and early 1970s work, Sottsass' performance of masculinity was ostensibly at odds, both with the models of *Playboy* and the male community of the Beats' epos. The artist's identity as a heterosexual man was partly enacted through references to his feelings for his wife. "Nanda" was mentioned by name in important exhibition catalogues. For example, in the catalogue of the 1972 MoMA show, *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, Sottsass' text was titled "To Nanda, who explained everything to me."⁴² But a more thorough articulation of a sensitive, if sexually active masculinity, surfaced more clearly in two works from the mid-1960s: *Camera da letto* (bedroom) and a book made with Pivano titled *Le belle ragazze* (The beautiful girls). Here Sottsass, approaching the age of 50, staged his marriage as the locus for the elaboration of a countercultural idea of a man on a par with his wife, who was in turn presented as a "partner in crime".

Camera da letto displayed a bedroom within the framework of the 1965 Biennale of interior design under the title *La casa abitata* (the inhabited house). The curators asked a number of Italian architects to explore the possibility of "composing the tensions" between, on the one hand, the looming threats of "industrial civilisation" and, on the other, the emotional and economic necessities of a "standard family."⁴³ Not only was the president of the Biennale Giovanni Michelucci, a catholic architect who had designed several churches, but the exhibition had been planned under the administration of Giorgio La Pira, who had served as a Mayor of Florence from 1961 to 1965.⁴⁴ La Pira was one of the most

39 Sottsass (1962a) 2002, pp. 106–109; Sottsass (1962b) 2002, p. 125.

40 Elmwood 2008; Cresswell 1993.

41 Preciado 2019; Sanders 1996.

42 Sottsass 1972, pp. 162–163.

43 *La casa abitata* 1965.

44 *Giovanni Michelucci* 2009.



2 Ettore Sottsass, *Stanza per fare l'amore* (Room to Make Love), as exhibited in *La casa abitata* (The Inhabited House), Florence, 1965, model by Michela Cortellazzi and Chiara Uboldi. Milan, Archive of the Politecnico di Milano (photo Politecnico di Milano)

devout members of the Christian Democratic party and was known as “the saint” because of his ascetic lifestyle (he lived in a convent) and religious fervour. In this pious and chaste context steeped in the Church’s social doctrine, Sottsass presented a room (fig. 2) modelled on the ideal house described in the third chapter of the *Kama Sutra* and transcribed as such in the catalogue. This Sanskrit text is a guide to living a pleasure-oriented and fulfilling life, yet it has been largely perceived to be simply a sexual manual.⁴⁵ In Sottsass’ installation, the bed is at the centre of the room; rather than reflecting the needs of the “standard family”, its position reflects those of a couple aiming to reinstate sex at the core of everyday life. The biographic dimension of the piece was discreet but nonetheless apparent. In the catalogue, Sottsass published a deliberately maudlin drawing of a heart with the word “Nanda” inscribed in the middle. The room could not be any more different from the patriarchal masculinity sanctioned by law that was described in *I sultani*, the anthropological research (mentioned above) published in 1965. Via a rather childish expression of feelings and the staging of a married couple’s sexual appetites, Sottsass dismissed the stereotype of the “quiet grandeur” that historian George L. Mosse has described as a mainstay of Western bourgeois masculinity.⁴⁶

Camera da letto choreographed the ideal of parity between two partners under the aegis of carnal pleasures as an imaginary space for a fictive couple. Yet, the room should also be understood as a conscious attempt, on Sottsass’ part, to interrogate the bourgeois idea of privacy and decorum, but also, crucially, the internalised forms of macho-posturing inherited from previous generations. This is confirmed by the contemporary comments he made about *Self-portrait*, the newly published autobiography of Man Ray (b. 1890). According to Sottsass, the only “real” pages of the volume were those where the artist recounted the endings of long-term relationships with his female partners. In these passages, “the story is no longer abstract, ineluctable, accidental, and useless, it becomes real located in time and space [...], it is a story where Mr. Man Ray becomes a man.”⁴⁷ By mocking “Mr. Man Ray’s” purported self-restrained virility, Sottsass suggested that becoming a man was neither “accidental” nor “ineluctable” but rather an emotionally situated process, one that arose out of a mature dialogue

45 Sottsass (1965) 2002, pp. 153–155.

46 Mosse 1996, p. 56. For a more recent account, see Le Mens 2019.

47 Sottsass (1964c) 2002, p. 137.

con grandi occhi un po' sorpresi, un po' delusi, ma sempre pieni di una strana ansia, come se aspettassero qualcosa: pareva che anche loro si aspettassero che in qualche modo noi avremmo fatto succedere qualcosa a tirarle fuori da una situazione che per molte era soltanto transitoria. Non dicevano mai «ballare», dicevano sempre «danzare»; provavano ogni giorno, ci dissero, perché i passi della danza vanno conservati in esercizio. Una di loro, una bella ragazza bruna, fissò tutto il tempo la macchina fotografica, in un'attesa un po' aggressiva, quasi drammatica; un'altra invece la macchina fotografica non la guardò mai, in un'indifferenza ostinata, troppo ostinata per essere artificiale.

Erano brave ragazze un po' patetiche che lavoravano molto e guadagnavano poco, senza ambizioni presuntuose, soltanto col desiderio di continuare a lavorare molto e guadagnare poco, magari col desiderio di lavorare un po' meno e guadagnare un po' di più. Mentre giravo fra i camerini vuoti, durante lo spettacolo, su un tavolo vidi una lettera incominciata. Era scritta con una calligrafia un po' troppo grande, maldestra; e prima di rendermi conto che stavo compiendo un

gesto indiscreto e villano, da quella deformata professionale che sono mi chinai a leggerla. Era indirizzata a una madre; la ragazza le diceva che le dispiaceva di non averle potuto mandare i soldi la settimana prima ma era stata malata e certo i soldi li avrebbe mandati questa settimana; ma non voleva che la mamma pensasse di lei che era una cattiva figlia per questo, perché lei alla mamma ci pensava sempre e anche alle sorelline, che potessero andare a scuola.

Poi mi resi conto che quella lettera non avrei dovuto leggerla e mi vergognai: il mio modo di chiedere scusa alla ballerina fu di non cercare di individuarla quando il balletto tornò tra le quinte. Naturalmente quel balletto e quegli attori non li vidi mai più; forse soprusi e intralazzi sono finiti e stanno lavorando alla televisione: forse lettere alla *Cuore* le ragazze della compagnia non devono scriverne più, forse quella ballerina ansiosa è riuscita ad arricchirsi in qualche striptease.

Ma non credo. La scelta della barca in cui navigare non è sempre casuale e i destini a volte non sono predisposti. Vi pare?

Belle ragazze ad Antibes

Quando decidemmo di andare col nostro Topolino B di seconda mano a vedere l'albergo descritto da Fitzgerald in *Tenera è la notte*, dopo un numero incalcolabile di ore ci trovammo ad Antibes e andammo a nuotare alla Garoupe, un giorno che era deserta e la sabbia era davvero d'oro sotto il sole e il mare era dolce come per noi non lo sarebbe stato mai più.

Quel giorno feci un'indigestione indimenticabile di salade niçoise e piena di cibalina e bicarbonato fui trasportata di peso a Juan Les Pins. Tramortita com'ero mi guardavo attorno cercando di riconoscere l'albergo che Fitzgerald aveva descritto con due grandi palme all'ingresso, e ogni volta che vedevo delle palme mi batteva il cuore: quando vidi il *Tea room* di Butler con la sua palmetina davanti mi trovai in cima alla scalletta a chiocciola prima che qualcuno mi potesse fermare. C'era Butler e siccome Fitzgerald non era ancora di moda, neanche in Francia (in Italia incominciavo allora a sputtarlo, per dirla come un certo funzionario editoriale) e Butler si commosse un po'; si

mise a raccontare, Fitzgerald negli anni di *Tenera è la notte* andava lì quasi ogni giorno. Poi mi disse che quella della palma all'ingresso è una coincidenza ma l'albergo esisteva ancora e mi spiegò dov'era.

Quella notte non chiusi occhio, naturalmente, e l'indomani mattina eravamo lì a fingere di fare il bagno al padiglione costruito accanto alla spiaggia dove Gerald Murphy ogni giorno montava e smontava il suo capanno di tela e Fitzgerald mangiava con Zelda i tramezzini di pomodoro fresco. La spiaggia non c'era più, ma il vialone che conduce all'albergo era intatto: col bosco di eucaliptus e mimose ai due lati, le due siepi di rosmarino lungo i marciapiedi, l'enorme cedro in cima a destra e proprio alla fine le due palme, non così grandi come le ricordava Fitzgerald, per la verità, ma un po' solenni come gli erano parse, vastamente simboliche dei luoghi che videro la sua felicità e la sua autodistruzione.

In cima al vialone l'albergo era sempre lo stesso: con la facciata rosa pallida in una gara di civetteria col tramonto, le persiane



3 Untitled image published in Fernanda Pivano, *Le belle ragazze*, Milan 1965, [n.p.]

(or conflict) with female partners, and resulted in the problematisation of the supposed qualities that a “true” man should possess – a process of self-questioning that here has been called the “gendering of men”.

In ways similar to *La camera da letto*, the 1965 book *Le belle ragazze* also conjured a countercultural relationship of equality within a married couple. Three hundred copies of the book were printed by East 128, a publishing house established by Sottsass and Pivano that brought together underground tenure and high-brow authors.⁴⁸ The book is predicated on the interplay of Pivano’s text “Le belle ragazze” and a series of photographs taken by Sottsass. Partly relying on the couple’s trips, Pivano described female figures associated with eroticism such as belly dancers in Egypt, sex workers in Karachi, the image of a “vestal-whore” from ancient Babylonia, stripteasers and burlesque performers in Milan, and naked participants in a happening in Paris. Sottsass, for his part, selected his photographs of “beautiful girls” that most engaged with his wife’s texts, including the image (fig. 3) of a woman wearing a bikini who is seemingly unaware of his camera. *Le belle ragazze* is presented as the joint venture of a conspicuously married couple: the wife (Pivano is the book’s author) encourages her husband to capture visual manifestations of men’s heterosexual desire, which is ubiquitous in Pivano’s descriptions. The reverse of this – Sottsass inviting Pivano to describe the erotic desire of a heterosexual woman in one of his books – would hardly have been imaginable, thereby revealing the gender hierarchy subtended to the publication. Yet, *Le belle ragazze* should not be belittled as the snobbish and sexist amusement of two complicit intellectuals, as the volume gave voice to the

48 Colomina/Buckley 2010, pp. 87–88.

countercultural undertones of an otherwise sanctimonious Italy. In this instance, much like in *La camera da letto*, Sottsass' model of masculinity was not non-conformist per se but rather only in the context of provocative conjugal behaviour.

Sottsass' voyeuristic picture of a woman in a bikini could be interpreted as an objectifying gaze that has long defined the motif of the male artist with "his" muse. However, this contrasts with the artist's promotion of women's creative agency in the 1960s. In a text observing the rapid success of pop art – from countercultural insolence to the private collections on Park Avenue (New York) – Sottsass commented on the aristocratic appearance of the "collector's wife" (probably Ethel Scull), whose photographic portrait had been published in a lifestyle magazine. He hypothesised that the mastermind behind the sophisticated private art collection – an entity located in the liminal space between domesticity and high society – was precisely "the wife", whom the article relegated to the decorative role of a stylish wealthy woman. "Her legs in the nylon are nice. But her brain is the most nicely shaped thing she has", Sottsass wrote, "it is a perfect brain that made hundreds of thousands of decisions, and ordered hundreds of thousands of gestures that proved right and correct. In the same way, the idea of locating such a fabulous [pop art] collection in the extraordinary rooms of her flat in Manhattan was right and correct."⁴⁹ In Sottsass' view, creative agency did not solely belong to women whose decision-making capability was ensured by their affluence. He also registered subtle semantic abilities in the exuberance of schoolgirls storming a clothing shop in Paris. In a 1964 article, he acknowledged that what he endeavoured to achieve with his variegated furniture – such as his *Superboxes* covered in red-and-green striped plastic laminate – had already been achieved, and without much effort, by contemporary girls through their taste for saturated industrial paints, glinting "white PVC boots" and "multicoloured stockings with stripes, squares and polka dots."⁵⁰ Sottsass did not state that he found inspiration in contemporary youth, which would have merely proven the open-mindedness of a 50-year-old man towards new trends. Rather, the crux of his remark was to upend three unspoken presumptions shoring up 1960s masculine discourses: the hierarchy between men and women, the patronising superiority of male adults with respect to girls, and the prominence of male "creations" over "applied arts" inventions, such as embroidery, attributed (at best) to women, when not trivialised as a domestic pastime.⁵¹

In the latter part of the 1960s, an Italy-based beat movement emerged. The social composition of this countercultural milieu, which coalesced around the magazine *Mondo Beat*, differed from the itinerant community described by Ginsberg, Kerouac and Gregory Corso, which was by that time internationally acclaimed. Often aged between 15 and 20, and occasionally with proletarian and sub-proletarian backgrounds, Italian beats lacked the literary skills of their putative fathers but shared their criticism of the moral coordinates of 1960's society, with its religious bigotry, consumerism and, especially in Italy, lingering fascist tendencies.

In 1966–1967 the Italian mainstream press began discussing the phenomenon of male *capelloni*, "longhairs", and their female peers, *ninfette*, "little nymphs", a fin-de-siècle term laden with sexual innuendos.⁵² In particular, the bourgeois newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* and several tabloids closely followed the vicissitudes of the "tent city" erected by Italian beats on the outskirts of Milan in a legally rented field in the spring of 1967.⁵³ The camp, possibly housing no more than 30 people, was denigrated as *barbonia* ("city of tramps", but also a pun on *Babilonia*, Babylon)

49 Sottsass (1964a) 2002, p. 143.

50 Sottsass (1964b) 2002, p. 141.

51 In relation to this, see the "classic" study, Parker 1984.

52 De Martino 2008; Casilio 2013.



4 Ettore Sottsass and Fernanda Pivano at home, 1969 (photo Getty Images)

and presented to priggish readers as a filthy hellscape where couples celebrated “sacrilegious weddings.”⁵⁴ With a pretext, the authorities resorted to eviction, after which the field was disinfected with a pump. Like most hippies (who appeared slightly later), Italian beats were not alien to *maschilismo* (male chauvinism), and for all their repudiation of authority, some charismatic leaders soon began to display a maniacal abuse of power and tyrannise their peers.⁵⁵ Yet, gender stereotypes were questioned in this rebellious environment; in fact, the style of Italian beats had a direct political “meaning” (to quote Dick Hebdige’s groundbreaking book) and staged an oppositional form of masculinity.⁵⁶ Consider their proclivity for androgynous clothes, with both women and men wearing jeans and t-shirts, or their embrace of what was regarded as feminine adornments such as long hair, bold colours and decorative fabrics. By the same token, Sottsass’ late 1960s self-fashioning (fig. 4) – a long mane, languid poses, a necklace with the peace symbol – along with his showy design objects might look innocuously hippie by today’s standard. However, it carried effeminate and even “unmanly” connotations at the time, for it undermined the pared-down masculinity that dominated Italian interior design as much as the poised public persona of celebrated architects.

The relationship between Sottsass and Pivano and the first Italian beats was marked by mutual fascination, even if plagued by cultural and class differences.⁵⁷ In 1967, the couple launched *Pianeta Fresco*, a zine that published two issues and represented a unique attempt to privilege an encounter between intellectuals and the inchoate Italian underground culture. *Pianeta Fresco* included

texts by Ginsberg, Burroughs and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and contributions by artists and architects (Michelangelo Pistoletto, Piero Gilardi, Archizoom and Jan Dibbets), but also photographic portrait nudes of the young Milanese beats evicted from the “tent city” in the summer of 1967. Sottsass curated the graphic layout of *Pianeta Fresco*. His art nouveau motifs and elaborate inking, featuring the rainbow colours symbolising the hippie movement and only later the LGBTQ+ community, tapped as much into the contemporary work of Jon Goodchild for *Oz* and *San Francisco Oracle* as it did into the graphic inventions of Russian and Italian futurists.⁵⁸ Only 300 copies were printed, and the zine quickly became a collector’s piece. It was distributed by Angelo Pezzana, who ran the bookshop Hellas in Turin and would become a prominent leader of the gay movement in early 1970s Italy.⁵⁹

53 For the image of the tent in 1960s and 1970s Italian design and architecture, see Bottinelli 2015.

54 Pivano 1976, pp. 106–109.

55 De Martino 2008, p. 139, n. 106; Hodgdon 2014, p. 31.

56 Hebdige 1979.

57 Pivano 1976, pp. 87–105; De Martino 2008, p. 65.

58 Echaurren/Salaris 1999, pp. 81–87.

59 According to Alfredo Cohen, a prominent figure of *FUORI!* and Pezzana’s partner in the 1970s, the Italian homosexual movement was launched in Pivano’s apartment in May 1971. It is, however, unclear to what extent Sottsass participated in these discussions when his relationship with Pivano was deteriorating. Rossi Barilli 1999, pp. 48–49.



PARTY

Qualche mese fa a San Francisco c'è stato un concerto di Bob Dylan, il poeta-cantante che si è conquistato la stima dei letterati d'America con i suoi versi di protesta e l'ammirazione degli intenditori di jazz per la sua fusione del rock and roll con la canzone popolare americana.

Dopo il concerto si andò tutti in una casa, dove ciascuno venne subito fornito di un bicchiere con un po' di whisky e cominciò a muoversi come meglio poteva in cerca di qualche fucina conosciuta. Il modo di attaccare discorso era: «Chi è il padron di casa? Dov'è?»

Quello che si vantava di essere il padron di casa (chissà se poi lo era davvero) era un tale che faceva inchieste di carattere sociologico per un ufficio comunale (non ricordo se una statistica degli anal-fabeti o degli alcoolizzati o dei disoccupati): la casa in realtà era soltanto il suo «studio», ma in una stanza c'era per terra un materasso con una coperta e un cuscino e in cucina c'era un frigo-

riero che conteneva un cartone di latte vuoto e un pomodoro acerbo. La porta del frigorifero era decorata a graffi, e sulla tavola si accumulavano presto fiasconi di vino vuoti, lattine di birra sfondate, bicchieri di plastica da buttare in spazzatura.

Era tutto molto provvisorio e le persone che si aggiravano col loro bicchiere di whisky non avevano l'aria di sapere granché da dove venissero e dove andassero: erano davvero come il protagonista della canzone di Boy Dylan che chiede a Mr. Tambourine di suonare per avere qualcosa da fare a seguirlo, lui che non ha dove andare, non ha sonno e ha solo le scarpe per camminare.

C'erano ragazze molto belle, coi lunghi capelli lisci sciolti sino alla cintura e le labbra struccate sotto gli occhi carichi di ciglia finte e di rimmel: una aveva una calzamaglia nera e, sopra, una vestaglia di velluto nero lunga, abbottonata fino al collo ma sbottonata dall'ombelico in giù; una aveva un grande cappello a cloche bianco e un cappotto bianco e rimase tutta la sera sdraiata per terra con la

45 *Domus* 436, marzo 1966

5 Fernanda Pivano and Ettore Sottsass, “Viaggio a Occidente nr. 1: Che cosa fanno lì dentro?” (Journey to the West no. 1: What are they doing in there?), in *Domus*, 436 (1966), pp. 42–48

The Milanese beats frequenting Pivano’s and Sottsass’ salon in the elegant Via Manzoni admired their work but knew that it would be impossible to bridge the gap between their “far-out” ethos and the couple’s social standing. By the same token, Sottsass was cognisant of the inexorable distance separating an affluent professional from the material cultures of drop-out communes. With his impressive writing skills, he authored bittersweet pages about his indirect participation in the intellectual milieu that was gentrifying the Village (New York) in the 1960s and dislodging its bohemian communities.⁶⁰ This admission notwithstanding, Sottsass placed great expectations on hippies and lauded their dwelling culture in articles (accompanied by his photos) (fig. 5) documenting, for example, a San Francisco household that Sottsass explored with the curiosity of an amateur anthropologist.⁶¹ In Sottsass’ no doubt idealised view, hippies lived in flats unscathed by the plethora of commodities typical of 1960s middle-class

⁶⁰ Sottsass (1969) 2002, pp. 194–195.

⁶¹ Sottsass (1970) 2002, pp. 206–207.



6 Hippy audience at Sottsass's exhibition *Menhir, Ziggurat, Stupas, Hydrants & Gas Pumps*, Sperone Gallery, Milan, 1967, in *Sottsass*, ed. Philippe Thomé, London et al. 2017, p. 213.

households.⁶² In the bright clothes and extravagant decorations of male “longhairs” in particular, Sottsass probably saw a reverse of what dress historians have called “the great masculine renunciation” of the late eighteenth century; in other words, the time when eccentric garments ceased to be a sign of nobility and instead became markers of gender difference.⁶³ Indeed, hippie masculinity can be regarded as symbolically challenging the sobriety of male formal attire, which had remained virtually unchanged for almost two centuries in the Global North, corroborating the deceitful idea that masculinity is a self-evident natural feature located outside of history.

Sottsass was caught between frustrated attraction and the serene awareness of a disjunction between his upmarket objects and the “real” counter-culture. All the same, he deemed it legitimate to associate his production with beats and hippies to infuse it with an underground aura. Notably, he had some of them pose as models for the jewels he designed to choreograph a sprawling “laid-back” public (fig. 6) at his 1967 exhibition of ceramic objects at Sperone Gallery titled *Menhir, Ziggurat, Stupas, Hydrants & Gas Pumps*.⁶⁴ In the gallery, onlookers walked among freestanding, totem-like ceramic columns mounted on pedestals. These hieratic pieces of furniture evoked the objects and buildings mentioned in

the exhibition's title. Yet, they also articulated what Amelia Jones defined as an “exaggerated display” of the phallus; in her view, it is “by performing the normative attributes of masculinity that these attributes are played out as contingent rather than inherent.”⁶⁵ Indeed, Sottsass gave his caricatured phalli individual titles (“Shitty Monument to the Fatherlands [*patrie*]”, Power Distributor”, “Too Chic an Urn [*urna*, also meaning “ballot box”] for the ashes of political parties”) that unequivocally signalled his praise of anti-militarism and anarchy, as well as his satire of masculinity as being intrinsic to authoritarianism.

In 1971, Sottsass drew a similar analogy between the symbol of the phallus and obnoxious forms of oppression in the magazine *In*, where he published a sequence of drawings and photomontages that referenced his “tantric ceramics”, a collection of monochromatic stoneware he had exhibited in 1969.⁶⁶ The series initially opened with emancipatory figures, namely, with depictions of fictional memorials dedicated to male figures Sottsass held in high esteem, ranging from Ashoka (the Indian emperor who spread Buddhism across Asia in the third century CE) to the abolitionist John Brown and the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. On subsequent pages, an illustration of an acid-pink flowerpot – a pop revisionist (manufactured as a ceramic vase) of the phallic-shaped *lingam*, an aniconic representation of Shiva in the Hindu tradition – was placed in a photograph of male members of the elite (fig. 7), and also in a photograph of what, in all likelihood, was a “people’s trial” during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (fig. 8).

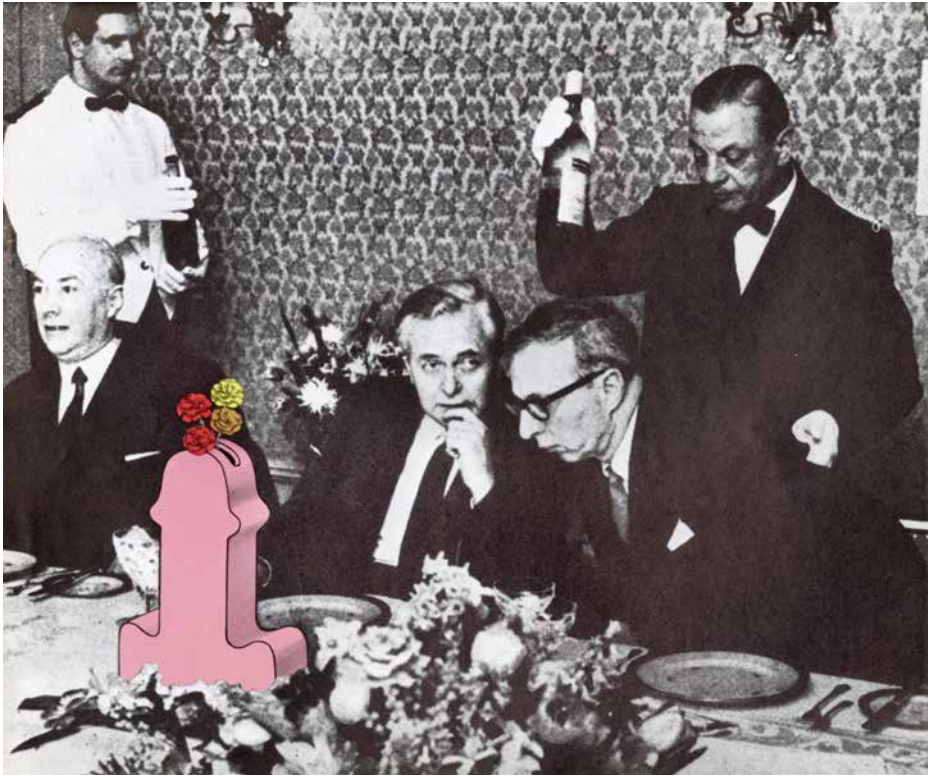
62 Sottsass (1967) 2002, p. 176.

63 Flügel 1930.

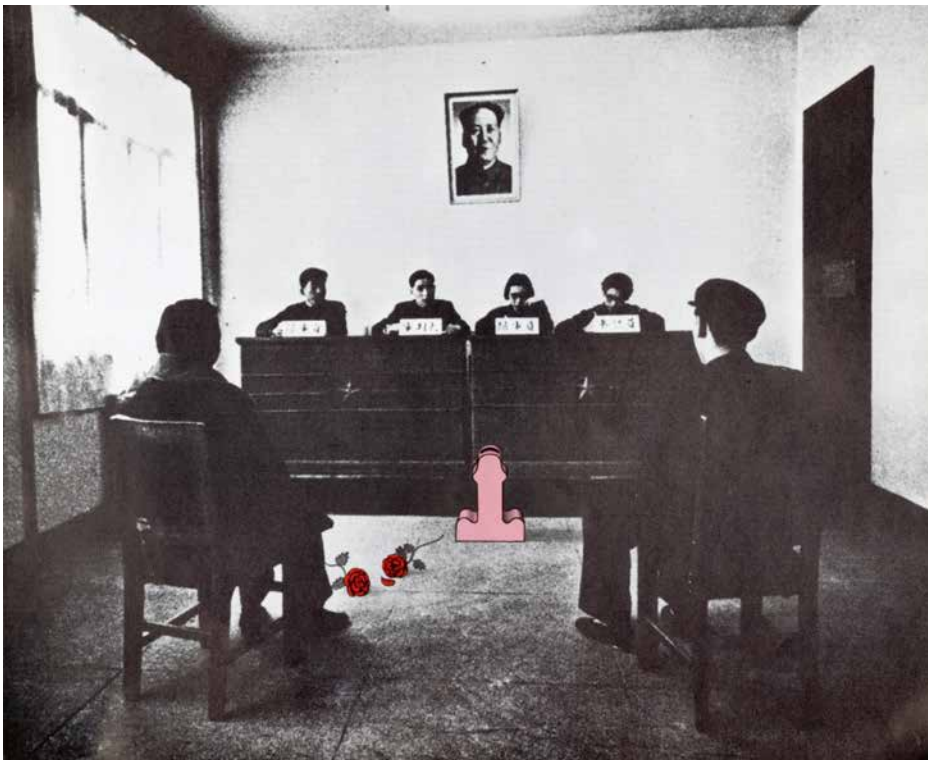
64 Sottsass (1968) 2002.

65 Jones 1994b, p. 547.

66 Sottsass 1971, pp. 34–40.

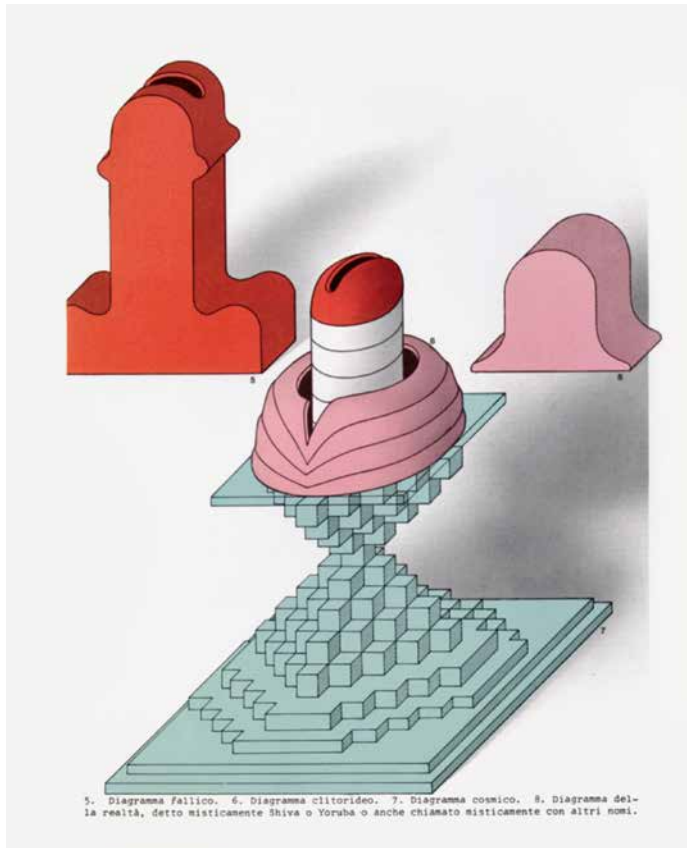


7 Ettore Sottsass, “Proposta di Ettore Sottsass”, *In*, March–June 1971, p. 37



8 Ettore Sottsass, “Proposta di Ettore Sottsass”, *In*, March–June 1971, p. 38

With the Italian political landscape increasingly polarised between Right and Left and with the feminist movement in full swing, Sottsass debunked “phallocracy” regardless of its political allegiance, even if his pot also provocatively relied on the longstanding imagery of the phallus as a universal (not gendered) icon of fertility. Yet, this identification was complicated on another page (fig. 9) of the *In* series, where this same ironic *lingam* was labelled “Phallic diagram” and accompanied by the “Clitoridean diagram” (on the top right of the image) with which it conflated to form, in Sottsass’ words, the “Diagram of Reality (mystically called Shiva, Yoruba, or otherwise)” at the centre of the image. The “Diagram of Reality”



9 Ettore Sottsass, “Proposta di Ettore Sottsass”, *In*, March–June 1971, p. 39

embodied a Sottsassian interpretation of the combination of a *lingam* and a *yoni* (the aniconic representation of the goddess Shakti), which signifies the cosmic union of the feminine and the masculine in Hinduism. However, the pink vulva-shaped object and the protruding cone easily could have also symbolised coitus or “intersexuality” to the vast majority of *In* readers, who were unfamiliar with Hinduist cosmogony. The hippie- and anarchist-minded criticism of the phallus that Sottsass had first articulated at Sperone Gallery persisted, but it was now supplemented through syncretic imagery – merging the feminist eulogy of the clitoris with Hindu votive objects – pointing to a mystic (if still very pop) unity of the sexes.

Sottsass’ writings and production were immersed in the sexist Italian culture of the 1960s. However, if his endeavours are not merely cast as an uncritical prelude to contemporary standards of gender equality but rather seen as a response to the scripts of the male gender of his time, something different emerges. In this light, Sottsass’ attempts to question hegemonic masculinities seem distant from the heteronormative universe of *Playboy* with which Preciado unduly associated Sottsass’ 1970s phallic symbols.⁶⁷ While largely alien to feminism, the aspects of Sottsass’ oeuvre that were most indebted to the countercultures contributed to a re-definition of the social expectations placed upon men and male architects/designers. Aside from his flamboyant design

pieces and camp pinks, Sottsass sought to erode masculine models derived from previous generations through references to his wife and ally. The couple’s depiction of gender parity under the aegis of eros, as well as Sottsass’ deliberately “embarrassing” expressions of love feelings in high-toned exhibition catalogues, embodied an idea of “mature man” that defied appealing models of manliness available in Italy in the mid-1960s. Sottsass shaped a figure that was not a patriarchal *capofamiglia*, not a principled family man, not an urban bachelor, not even a narcissistic “creator” focused on his artistic pursuits and overshadowing his indulgent partner. Nevertheless, the class privilege of Pivano and Sottsass cannot be overlooked when considering the “gendering” of the latter and the framework that facilitated the critique of hegemonic masculinities inherent to the couple’s persona. Punctuated by trips to Asia and America, and by encounters with intellectual celebrities, Pivano’s autobiographic diaries lay bare that the “double burden” of women who have a job and yet shoulder housework was hardly an issue for the couple, who outsourced its housework in the 1960s. In 1962, back from their trip to Asia, where Sottsass had fallen seriously ill, Pivano immediately employed two *domestici* (the masculine word for “servants”, suggesting that the employees were men) to tidy up the flat and prepare the room accommodating her husband.⁶⁸

In the early 1970s, Sottsass left Pivano, and his interest in contemporary countercultures faded. This was due to a number of personal reasons, but also to the fact that, in Italy, the flowers of the hippies gradually lost ground to a less pacifist counterculture, which appreciated the peace pipe but also harboured a fascination for the machine gun, as epitomised by the logo of the magazine *Re Nudo*, one of its first and main outlets. It was this contradictory mid-1970s counterculture that most impacted Baruchello’s work on domesticity and masculinity, to which the analysis will now turn.

67 Preciado 2019, p. 192.

68 Pivano 2008, p. 802.

Baruchello's Hermaphrodites and Unicorns

Baruchello was born into a prosperous family in 1924. His father was a lawyer, a university professor, and a prominent figure in the General Confederation of Italian Industry (the Italian employers' federation and national chamber of commerce). Baruchello studied French and English, read Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* when he was 14, and nonetheless received, as a *balilla* (a young member of the fascist youth movement), a typically fascist education. This inculcated him, he recalled, with "the virus of heroism, sacrifice, of the cult of military honour".⁶⁹ Baruchello stayed with a family member working at the Italian Consulate in Odessa (USSR) for most of the war, when the German forces occupied the city. Upon his return to Italy, he enrolled in the army of the Italian Social Republic (a German puppet state in the North of the country) and joined the Decima Flottiglia MAS. This was an elite naval unit famous for the prowess of its commando assault warfare, which involved pioneering and highly dangerous operations such as sinking warships and merchant ships with manned torpedoes charged with explosives. After the armistice of 8 September 1943, the "Decima" was disbanded. However, Prince Junio Valerio Borghese, a "war hero", revived these units, but now they were primarily deployed in anti-partisan actions on land. This article exposes, for the first time, Baruchello's enrolment in these units, some of which had participated in civilian massacres (suspected of being or helping partisans).⁷⁰

It is unknown to what extent Baruchello, then aged 20-21, subscribed to the anti-communism and "blood and soil" ideology of the Decima Flottiglia MAS, which has been defined as one of the most persistent projects to forge the fascist "new man".⁷¹ Although Baruchello kept a diary during wartime, no trace is left of his months in the "Decima", possibly because the artist himself destroyed some documents. Unlike Borghese, who plotted a US-backed neo-Fascist coup in 1970, Baruchello would soon feel deeply ashamed of his participation in these units, which could not be downplayed as an instance of "manly" contempt for dangerous actions. And yet, while the cult of honour and the military is disparaged in several of his works, a certain fascination for the brave, anti-bourgeois virility incarnated by the "Decima" did not entirely disappear from his moral universe.⁷² This is not the place to discuss Baruchello's relationship to his staunchly anti-communist father, but it is revealing that, in the early 1980s, the artist acknowledged he "always had a great respect" for the "heroic virile ideal" his father had of himself.⁷³ Nonetheless, Baruchello's "respect" or admiration for "heroic virility" was not synonymous with adhesion. He implicitly observed that the adjective "heroic" could also be used to describe the courage needed to question one's guiding principles. When Baruchello gifted his father a copy of Antonio Gramsci's *Letters from Prison* in the post-war years, his father almost "slapped" him, as Baruchello bitterly reported, remarking, "So all of his courage still didn't [give him] courage enough to allow him to look at his life and think it through again." Baruchello was probably reflecting on the political transformation from fascism

69 Favero 2011, p. 370; Baruchello 2020, pp. 53-54.

70 I wish to thank Carla Subrizi, Baruchello's wife and professor of art history, for discussing this complex and sensitive aspect of Baruchello's biography with me. Further analysis of his time spent in the Decima is beyond the scope of this study but certainly needed. Jaroslav Novák, who was both a prominent member of Potere Operaio and the partner of one of Baruchello's daughters, was aware of Baruchello's months in the Decima. In an email to the author, he stated that he was probably one of the very few in Potere Operaio to know this "secret" (email dated 7 April 2022).

71 Capra Casadio 2016, p. 19.

72 Baruchello 2020, p. 338.

73 Baruchello/Martin 1983, p. 21.

to the far left, which he had experienced in the 25 years following the war, and his own transition from manager to artist during that period.⁷⁴

In 1946 Baruchello married Elena Naldoni and had four children (the couple divorced in 1975). He took over his father's role as the head of a vaccine production business. Indeed, Baruchello did not actively pursue an artistic career until the late 1950s, but he then quickly established a solid position in the art world. By the early 1960s, he had exhibited in Italy and abroad, and joined Gruppo 63, a major network of Italian intellectuals and writers.

Unlike Sottsass' production, whose cryptic allusions are often derived from the architect's non-Western intellectual sources, the enigmas of Baruchello's work emanate from his encyclopaedic culture and are integral to the dream-like syntax of his paintings/objects. These combine dozens of minuscule teeming figures and obscure writing (in several languages but barely readable), generating what occasionally resembles large rebuses. Several attempts have been made to interpret his canvases, which are populated by surreal images (from "rectal monitors" to flocks of mechanical birds), and recurrent symbolic motifs such as "the great moccasin", "the chemical messenger", as well as myriad cartoonish castles, labyrinthine grottos, mock-scientific devices, gruesome mutilations, automatons, political icons, etc. As Jean-François Lyotard observed, Baruchello's paintings are perhaps best understood as fragmented short stories, visualisations of thoughts and tentative translations of unconscious drives.⁷⁵ On these puzzling surfaces, numerous signs point to the male and female identities, which are cast as both archetypes and historically situated constructs.

What follows relies on Baruchello's writings and the author's interviews with the artist and his family. However, the aim is not to unpack the symbology of the artist's oeuvre but to complicate the reading of a set of interrelated motifs around masculinity and domesticity that appeared in Baruchello's work between 1975 and 1979. Before commencing a closer analysis of some works, however, it is important to clarify the political framework within which they were produced and its counter-cultural qualities. This will provide a more nuanced understanding of Baruchello's engagement with his own gender identity and with domestic symbols.

In 1973, Potere Operaio was the first extra-parliamentary organisation to disband. However, by the mid-1970s, many argued that the type of activism marshalled by "the groups" (Potere Operaio, Lotta Continua, Avanguardia Operaia, Servire il Popolo, etc.) showed signs of exhaustion. At least four paths can be discerned for those who were seeking a shift. Some abandoned political commitment altogether. Certain grassroots activists joined (or returned to) the institutional left in the hope of an imminent *svolta a sinistra* (left turn) permitted by political elections, while others joined Autonomia operaia (Workers' autonomy), a loose and factionalised network of collectives and factory assemblies that would grow in influence and numbers after 1973. Last but not least, a sizeable number of former militants and a new levy of leftists refused the conciliatory tones and piecemeal approach of leftist parties. Yet they also denounced the bankruptcy of forms of militancy based on an ethics of abnegation, which was common in the "groups" but persisted in large swathes of Autonomia operaia. Rather than postpone a less alienated existence into a hypothetical future, they aimed to "practice communism" here and now, to experiment with a "leftist life" (the title of a contemporary book) premised on non-sexist, non-homophobic, non-monogamous relationships, the refusal of wage labour, recreational drugs and an environmentally sustainable mode of living.⁷⁶ The conduits of this composite milieu, whose degree of secession from mainstream society varied, included

74 Baruchello/Martin 1983, p. 22.

75 Lyotard 1982; Baruchello/Martin 1978.

76 Cevro-Vukovic 1976.

magazines such *Re Nudo*, the comics *Puzz*, the Marxist *A/traverso* and, not least, *Rosso* (particularly between 1973 and 1975), which was also, but by no means exclusively, an expression of organised groups of *Autonomia operaia*.⁷⁷

From 1969 to 1973, Baruchello was an artist and a militant within *Potere Operaio*. In hindsight, the years as a group member seemed a “healthy and self-destructive experience of political commitment”.⁷⁸ In 1973, while *Potere Operaio* was unravelling, Baruchello and his new partner, Agnese Naldoni, moved to the countryside on the outskirts of Rome, embracing a path sought by activists willing to practice a “leftist life”. The artist was aware of this kinship, but he was blind neither to the distinct meaning of his venture (he moved with his partner, not with a collective) nor to the class differences between him and the majority of young people establishing shared households in the countryside, on which Baruchello commented: “Our idea wasn’t too far removed from theirs, even though we went about it in terms of a different style, with the use of different means.”⁷⁹ He purchased a house surrounded by plots of land owned by speculators. Because of a change in urban regulations, the plots were no longer buildable areas, but they were too small for farming, which made the land un-serviceable for investments. Baruchello defiantly occupied the plots and launched *Agricola Cornelia*, a farm and an artistic experiment.⁸⁰ From 1973 to 1981, Baruchello mostly attended to crops, fertilisers, agricultural machinery and animals, including goats, sheep, horses, ducks and pigs. His farm was idiosyncratic, though, and conjured the bizarre spirit of Fluxus. Financial profits became impossible because both Baruchello and the workers he employed lacked basic knowledge of agriculture.

The parallels between Baruchello’s project and those of the leftists establishing communes cannot be overestimated. In fact, while “Cornelia” referenced the address of his farm (via di Santa Cornelia), “Agricola” (agricultural) evoked, intentionally or not, the movement of *comuni agricole* (agricultural communes), which organised a national congress in 1974.⁸¹ Although Fluxus’ Dionysian spirit hovered over *Agricola Cornelia*, a mid-1970s observer of Baruchello’s amusingly disastrous farming would have recognised similarities with the simultaneous experience of the confused urban youth who struggled with manure, harvests and animals and sought homespun advice in the DIY “alternative manuals” published by Arcana and Savelli.⁸² In this milieu, feminists played a pioneering role. Indeed, it was feminism that consumed the bucolic idyll where Baruchello and his pregnant partner were living.

In 1975 Baruchello turned 51 and became a father for the fifth time. Yet this time, his role as a man, partner and father suddenly lost the status he had taken for granted. It is useful to quote at length an interview that he gave in 1981, as his words illustrate well the extent of his anxieties.

I found myself [...] very much affected by [feminism]. It even developed into sort of a crisis after the birth of the baby, since the baby was a girl. She arrived as though she were the messenger, the harbinger of a new and different epoch [...]. She was a symbol; she was a woman [...] and so there were now two women here in this house. [...] A man still had a role to play, but just what kind of role wasn’t at all clear. [...] I really tried to have another look at myself, and when it came to writing *Sentito Vivere I* [wrote] a book

77 *Avete pagato caro* 2008.

78 Baruchello 1978, p. 7.

79 Baruchello/Martin 1983, p. 19.

80 Catenacci 2018; Subrizi 2017.

81 Cevro-Vukovic 1974–1975, p. 166.

82 Dogheria 2019.

where the protagonist has no gender. [...] I didn't reject the feminist movement at all, I just tried to absorb it [...]. The way the feminist movement was reflected in the woman I lived with meant a kind of diminution of everything as far as I was concerned. [...] I was beginning to discover, well, finally, a Luciferic quality about women. Something almost demoniacal [...]. I thought that what I saw there was a very profound cruelty, an absence of pity. [...] I'm not saying that this is what the women's movement is all about, I'm just talking about the way it was with us.⁸³

In light of these admissions, it is possible to explore *Sentito vivere* (Felt Living) as a work documenting a narcissistic wound that pushed Baruchello to grapple with the gendering of men induced by feminism. *Sentito vivere* is a 1978 book comprising 42 short texts that the artist viewed as “paintings” as he stripped them of the features of narrativization and endeavoured to employ words not to comment on images but rather “in lieu of images.”⁸⁴ Baruchello's reluctance to assume a fixed authorial identity precedes the advent of feminism and can be ascribed to Duchamp's role in his life.⁸⁵ More specifically, Baruchello's impulse to self-effacement can be dated to the 1966 fictional figure *Ioimiss* (“Io” means “I” in Italian), whose importance for the artist has been clarified by Subrizi.⁸⁶ In *Sentito vivere*, however, the abdication to a demiurgic authorship took a non-human, genderless character derived as much from Baruchello's attempt to introject feminism as from the sublimation of his fears.

In the introduction to the book, he explained that “the author” identified with an animal, the unicorn (*liocorno*), that “lacked specific sexual features, [...] symbolising the continuity of the contraries.”⁸⁷ The 42 “verbal” paintings display the same eerie, if ironic, imagery traversed by hordes of swarming figures as in Baruchello's mid-1970s “pictorial” paintings. Yet, references to gender are conspicuously numerous in *Sentito vivere*. The reader is confronted with unsettling metamorphic vertigo. An “androgynous unicorn” is given birth only to become a “narwhal-unicorn”, described a few pages later as “bisexual.”⁸⁸ Further enigmatic characters coding what the book calls “polysexuality” include a “hermaphrodite”, an ephebus and a humorous depiction/description of Goethe with shaved legs and a mini skirt. The protean imagery and genderfluid characters of Baruchello's verbal paintings arguably set out to capture that fleeting experience whereby the “I” is instituted through gendering because, to use Judith Butler's words, “the ‘I’ neither pre-cedes nor follows the process of [...] gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves.”⁸⁹

The extra-parliamentary Left repeatedly surfaces in *Sentito vivere*, and in one instance, the artist mentioned a “Great-Libidinal-Ragù (the same that characterises the organisation of militant groups in homosexual terms).”⁹⁰ In Sottsass' pop soteriology, the mystical fusion of the sexes was conjured by references to Hinduism. By contrast, Baruchello's cultural background was rooted in contemporary Freud-Marxism. A brief analysis of how the gay movement appropriated this philosophical current sheds light on Baruchello's creatures.

In Italy, the “movimento omosessuale” (“the homosexual movement”) began to gather speed in the early 1970s, when gay men, lesbians and transgender people

83 Baruchello/Martin 1983, pp. 49–51.

84 Baruchello 1978, p. 7; Portesine 2020.

85 Baruchello/Martin 1986; *Étant donné* 2011.

86 Subrizi 2011, pp. 28–30.

87 Baruchello 1978, p. 7.

88 Baruchello 1978, pp. 10, 25, 38.

89 Butler 1993, p. 7.

90 Baruchello 1978, p. 37.

were often all termed *omosessuali* (homosexuals). Their most organised networks gravitated towards the magazine *FUORI!* (*Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano*, the Italian Revolutionary Homosexual Unified Front; “fuori!” also means “out!”).⁹¹ By the mid-1970s, however, lesbians and gay men increasingly parted ways, and in 1974 a conflict broke out among the men of *FUORI!*. A politically moderate wing, led by Pezzana, joined the Radical Party, following an institutional path. Instead, the communist wing, whose leading figure was Mario Mieli, sided with *Autonomia operaia* and launched groups such as the *Collettivi Omosessuali Milanesi* (Milanese Homosexual Collective). Mieli’s main theoretical work, *Elementi di critica omosessuale* (*Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of a Homosexual Critique*), evolved out of a dialogue with the countercultural components of the “first” *Rosso* and the post-Situationist trend *critica radicale* (radical critique).⁹² Yet the volume poked fun at the sublimated eroticism immanent to the homosocial male bonding of leftist groups in terms that recall Baruchello’s gargantuan “great libidinal ragù.”⁹³ Responding to these tacit urges, *Elementi di critica omosessuale* posited “transsexuality” as a chief goal. Mieli defined this as the liberation of the “polymorphous” desires that, according to Freud, characterise infancy before the repression inherent to education (or to “educastration,” according to Mieli) forces the child’s undifferentiated drives into a state of latency. Mieli also discussed Sándor Ferenczi’s “ambisexuality,” as well as the Freudian notions of “psychic hermaphroditism” and “physical hermaphroditism” (known today as intersexuality), both developed before he elaborated his theory of the Oedipus complex.⁹⁴

Via Freud and, not least, Jung, who tended to view the androgyne as an archetypical symbol of the unity of the opposites, Mieli and the 1970s homosexual movement tapped into a conceptual arsenal that was imbued with the prejudices of turn-of-the-century medicine, and its proscription of “sexual inversion.”⁹⁵ As Michel Foucault has argued, the late nineteenth-century medicalisation of “hermaphrodites” reinforced the stigmatisation of forms of gender deviance located in the interstices of binary classifications.⁹⁶ Yet, as Mosse has shown, *fin-de-siècle* sexology was also steeped in decadent literary *topoi* that provided tools to upend the denigration of “pederasty” and to challenge the taxonomies of hegemonic masculinities. In his groundbreaking study of the history of Western masculinity, Mosse indeed highlighted the cultural importance of the motif of the androgyne and the graceful ephebus as icons that legitimised, at least on an intellectual level, the description of ephemeral moments where beauty could be regarded as fluid and sexual identities as shifting.⁹⁷

Without necessarily positing a direct influence, *Sentito vivere* relied on intellectual sources that were being debated in the radical circles of the Italian homosexual movement. This partly overlapped with the political milieu with which the artist was familiar, such as the groups publishing *Rosso*, a magazine that featured a Baruchello drawing in 1975. The artist’s explicit references to “polysexuality” and to figures such as the androgyne, the hermaphrodite and the ephebus can be interpreted as an effort on the part of a heterosexual man who felt “cornered” by feminism to explore the bisexual drives that Freud saw as innate and that Mieli wanted to liberate under the banner of a communist-minded “transsexuality”.

91 Zundel 2022; *FUORI!!! 1971–1974* 2021.

92 Mieli (1977) 2018, p. 13, n. note 1.

93 For the concept of “homosocial”, see Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985.

94 Freud (1905) 2017.

95 Jung (1946) 2014.

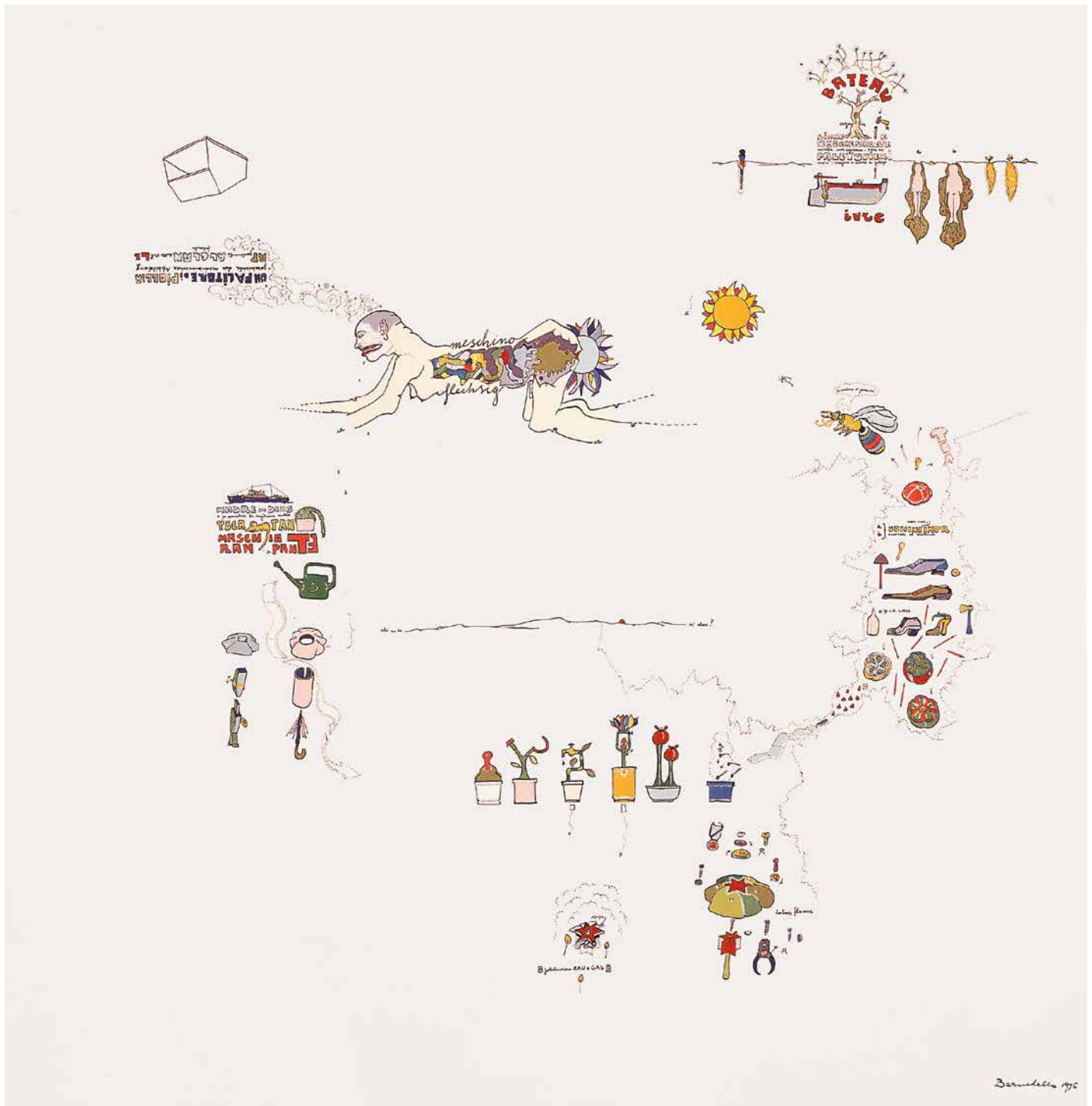
96 Foucault (1980) 2010, pp. 7–17; see also Delille 2021; Domurat Dreger 1998.

97 Mosse 1996, p. 92.

98 Freud (1911) 1958.

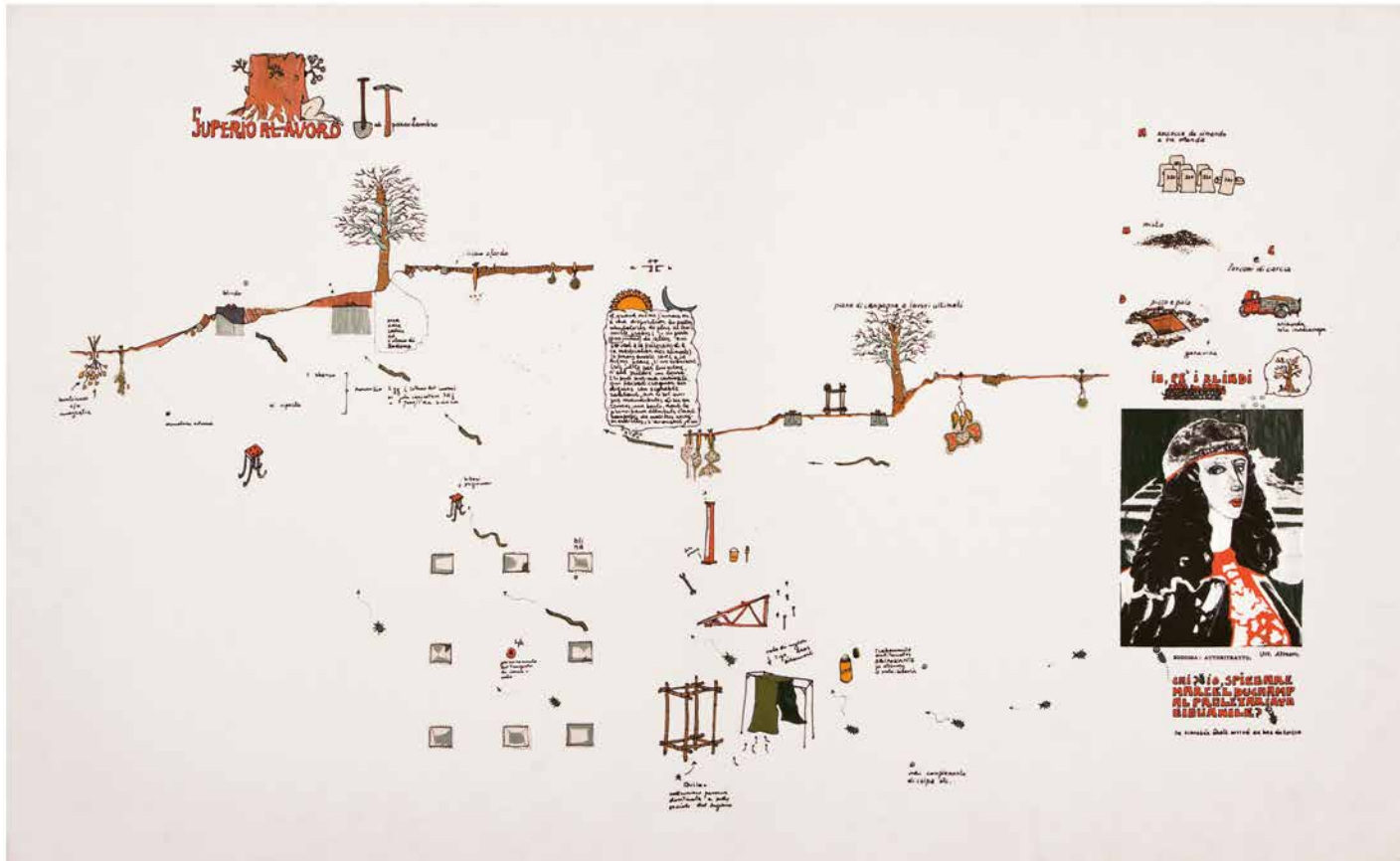
99 Deleuze/Guattari (1972) 1983, pp. 8–9 and 56–58.

100 Mieli (1977) 2018, pp. 185–192.



10 Gianfranco Baruchello, *Piccolo meschino Fleshig* (Mean Little Fleshig), 1977, mixed media on aluminium, 50 x 50 cm (photo Fondazione Baruchello)

In the case of Baruchello, the gendering of men was also mediated by allusions to Daniel Paul Schreber. A German judge, Schreber penned *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* in 1903, which Freud discussed in his essay “Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)”⁹⁸ Freud’s exegesis, which centred on the diagnosis of Schreber’s repressed homosexual desires, was challenged in *Anti-Oedipus* by Deleuze and Guattari, who read Schreber’s hallucinations as repositories of proto-fascist fantasies.⁹⁹ Mieli drew a provocative analogy between the “depraved” desires of homosexuals and Schreber’s “schizophrenic trip”¹⁰⁰ Thus, similar to the motifs of the androgyne and the hermaphrodite, Schreber’s delusions provided fertile ground for Baruchello’s engagement with images of dethroned masculinity. In 1977, he completed a painting (fig. 10) about Schreber where the judge is naked, has breasts and features a spiky sun in his anus (possibly also an allusion to



Georges Bataille’s text *The Solar Anus*). A few years later, Baruchello briefly talked about “his” Schreber, explaining his interest in the judge’s transgender impulses and embrace of femininity.

He wrote a history of his own madness and you see him as a man who turns in some way or another into a woman [...] He was possessed by a force of femininity and felt himself actually physically invaded by it. In the images that I drew so as to enter or continue with his story, there’s a kind of sun that grows into his asshole, into his intestines, there are all of these rays, he was obsessed with a whole panoply of energetic phenomena. I’d found myself very much attracted to that.¹⁰¹

Until the mid-1970s, Baruchello had been immersed in a political milieu permeated by sexism and homophobia. For instance, some members of the Roman *Autonomia operaia* excoriated the putative frivolity of the gay movement, and ripped out the section of *Rosso* written by gay collectives before distributing the magazine.¹⁰² Whether or not Baruchello actively challenged patriarchy in his private life is debatable; but his interest in “hermaphroditism” and the interplay of femininity and masculinity typifying his work in the late 1970s certainly testified to a critique of heteronormativity that departed from the martial and rugged virility of his former “comrades”, not to mention that heralded by the *Decima Flottiglia MAS* 30 years earlier.

Two years after Jean-Christophe Ammann’s “Transformer: Aspects of Travesty”, the first major exhibition about drag performance, Baruchello searched for insights in Duchamp’s oeuvre. More specifically, he found inspiration in

11 Gianfranco Baruchello, *Come spiegare Marcel Duchamp al proletariato giovanile* (How to Explain Marcel Duchamp to the Proletarian Youth), 1976, industrial enamels on photographic print on canvas, 70 × 112 cm (photo Fondazione Baruchello)

101 Baruchello/Martin 1983, p. 67.
 102 Wright 2021, p. 373.
 103 Hopkins 2008 p. 29; Jones 1994a.

Rose Sélavy, Duchamp's female alter ego and, according to Hopkins, a response to the autonomous feminist female type, the so-called *femme homme*, that had emerged in the 1910s.¹⁰³ If in the 1920s Duchamp had staged himself as a sort of flapper, in 1976, Baruchello projected his gender trouble on the queered portrayal of a Renaissance painter, Il Sodoma, in his *Come spiegare Marcel Duchamp al Proletariato Giovanile* (How to Explain Marcel Duchamp to the Proletarian Youth) (fig. 11). Baruchello's painting presents a meditation on intellectuals in relation to the counterculture, and its title alludes to Beuys' performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. Baruchello responded to Beuys' esoteric action with a work that tackled the pressing political issues raised by the Sixth Party of Proletarian Youth (Lambro Park, Milan), a four-day music festival that took place in a Milanese park in June 1976. The event was organised by *Re Nudo* and the Clubs of Proletarian Youth, a network of far-left squatters with countercultural predilections. It brought together tens of thousands of people, including hippies, "communist freaks", feminists, gay activists and traditional militants. At its best, the party approximated a communist-inflected Woodstock. Yet, despite its occasionally ecstatic atmosphere, the sixth *Festa* was also the last. Women were harassed, the stand of *Fuori!* was destroyed, lorries with food supplies were "expropriated", and protests disrupted the concerts.¹⁰⁴ It was this mayhem and its political implications that prompted Baruchello to attend to *Come spiegare Marcel Duchamp al Proletariato Giovanile*.

In the top-left corner of Baruchello's painting, a naked person crawls into a hole in the trunk of a tree. Below the drawing, the caption reads, "Superego at work at Lambro Park". Baruchello commented on this painting in 1985, recalling that the term "superego" referred to far-left intellectuals who were thought to be "endowed with the power to keep youthful discontent on a properly productive path."¹⁰⁵ But in Lambro Park, the revolutionary left was "practically lynched and declared superfluous [...]. The crowds jeered at homosexuals, derided the feminists, raided the kitchens and raised riot about the prices of all the food on sale."¹⁰⁶ For Baruchello, the Proletarian Youth had demonstrated desperation, which ushered in regressive, if not outright fascist, behaviour. The canvas also featured a hidden self-portrait (on the right-hand side of the painting) in the guise of Il Sodoma. This was the derogatory nickname – literally meaning "the Sodom" and referencing sodomy – attributed to Giovan Antonio Bazzi, a painter who, according to Giorgio Vasari, was attracted to ephemic beauty and lived surrounded by unusual animals.

Giovan Antonio was brutish, licentious, and eccentric and was called Il Sodoma because he always associated with and lived with young, beardless boys, a name to which he quite willingly responded [...]. Il Sodoma, a capricious man, always kept parrots, apes, dwarf asses, small horses from Elba, a talking crow, Barbary horses for racing in the Palio, and other such things in his home.¹⁰⁷

Considering Baruchello's farm animals, his identification with Il Sodoma – whose 1505-1508 self-portrait he virtually turned into that of a drag queen – was patent. This is strengthened by the placement of the sentence that acted as the painting title underneath the image of the Renaissance painter: "Me? You mean me explaining Marcel Duchamp to the Proletarian Youth?"

104 Fracchia 2015.

105 Baruchello/Martin 1986, p. 46.

106 Baruchello/Martin 1986, p. 46.

107 Vasari (1568) 2008, pp. 378–379.

The question was rhetorical and alluded to the abject conditions at Lambro Park. Baruchello said: “You can imagine what sort of reception would have been given to someone who wanted to talk about Duchamp.”¹⁰⁸ In 1985, the artist was far from the anxieties he had intended to foreground with his painting in 1976. He initially expressed nothing but scorn for his endeavour; Duchamp “could never have cared less” about the Proletarian Youth, and the work demonstrated “the shamelessness I’ve shown in the ways I have tried to make use of Duchamp [...] without any kind of fidelity to the things he actually said or showed.”¹⁰⁹ A few lines later, however, Baruchello admitted that, through his painting, he aspired to stage “an unimaginable moment or condition when it would be not only possible but even necessary and fruitful to talk to the sub-proletarian youth movement about Duchamp.”¹¹⁰ Explaining Duchamp to the Proletarian Youth would have been tantamount to welding “the most desperate and extremist political situation and [...] the most refined and incomprehensible voyage of the mind.”¹¹¹ After all, Duchamp saw working as “an imbecility from an economic point of view [...]. Isn’t it odd that people should have been talking about exactly that sort of things at Lambro Park [...]?”¹¹² Baruchello conceded that, whereas Duchamp’s refusal of work equated with “sleeping late” and “playing chess”, the most disenfranchised fringes of countercultural youth in Milan sought their escape from alienation in heroin. For all his disillusion, the issue that Baruchello had raised in 1976 still haunted him in 1985: “Can’t you think of these attitudes as extensions of one another?”¹¹³

Baruchello’s role, while choreographing this missed encounter within the fictional space, was encapsulated by a non-binary self-portrait that registered the gendering of a man who, only a few years earlier, had cooperated with communists such as Potere Operaio member Valerio Morucci, whose antifascist manliness was inseparable from “the conquest” of women and the deft use of firearms.¹¹⁴ If in *Sentito vivere* and *Come spiegare Marcel Duchamp al Proletariato Giovanile*, Baruchello had questioned heterosexual masculinity by delving into genderfluid characters, in 1979, the artist returned to Duchamp, but this time, he dissected the place most disrupted by the “malign” feminism Baruchello encountered in the mid-1970s: the house.

A few weeks after the publication of *Sentito vivere* in 1978, Baruchello began organising exhibitions that revolved around the theme of the house. He displayed paintings with sewed and collaged images of domestic interiors (fig. 12), small plexiglass boxes depicting bathrooms, as well as ephemeral constructions and a portable “house” made of iron wire, whose symbolic dimensions shared little with the practical nature of Buckminster Fuller’s geodesic domes cherished by the hippies of Drop City, Colorado.¹¹⁵ Baruchello’s exploration of the house had a more private, intimate tenure, as exemplified by a small hut of bamboo and gauze (fig. 13) that the artist left outdoors until its destruction. In his retrospective view, this transient structure represented an artistic correlate of precarious shelters such as the tents of itinerant populations, which he construed as non-patriarchal architectures contradicting the idea of the house as a “property” encasing women as man’s possessions.¹¹⁶ For all its metaphoric value, at the time of its production, the material culture of this fragile object resonated with that

108 Baruchello/Martin 1986, p. 47.

109 Baruchello/Martin 1986, p. 48.

110 Baruchello/Martin 1986, pp. 50–51.

111 Baruchello/Martin 1986, p. 47.

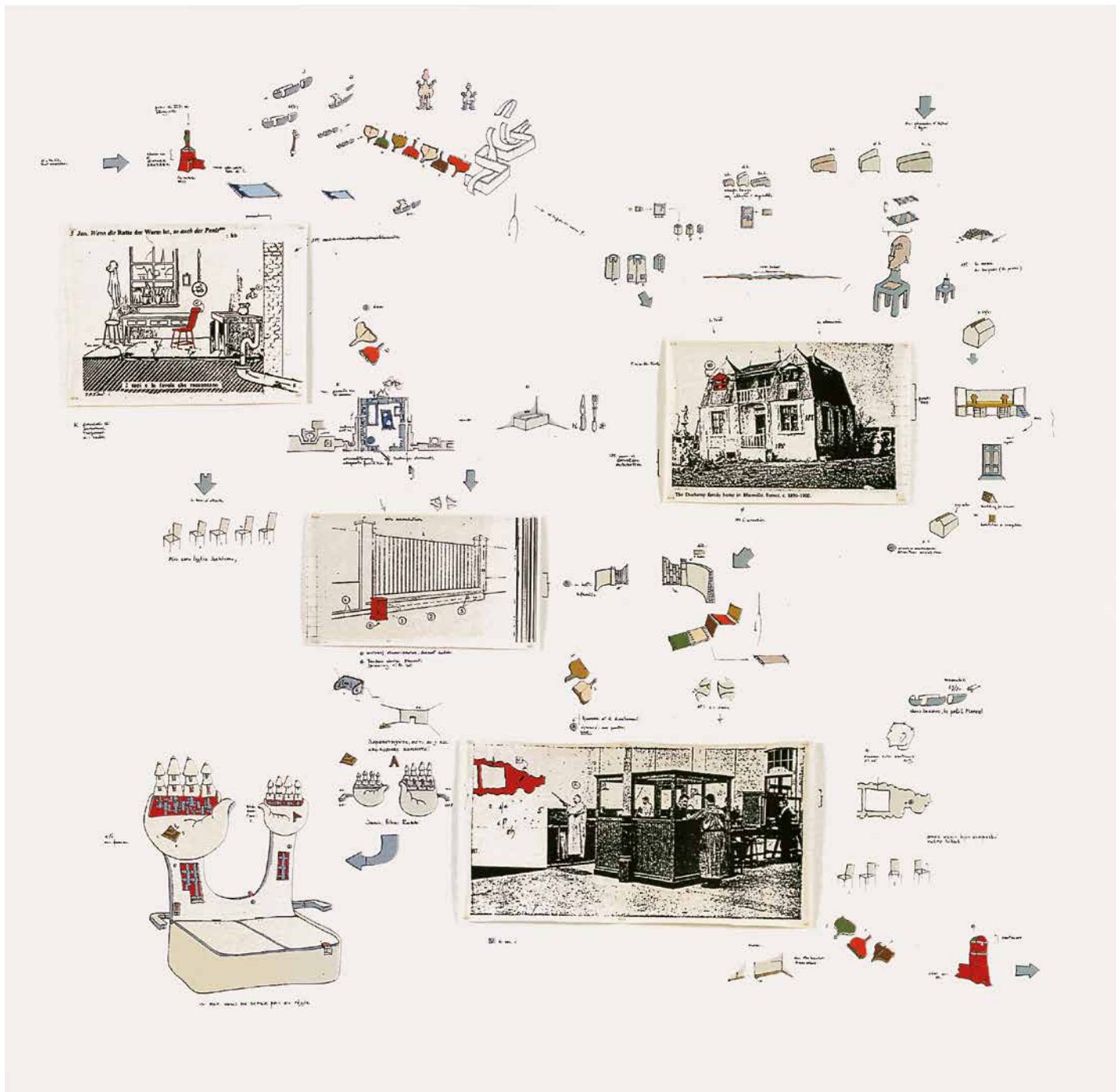
112 Baruchello/Martin 1986, pp. 53–54.

113 Baruchello/Martin 1986, p. 54.

114 Interview with Gianfranco Baruchello, 27.10.2011; Morucci 2005, pp. 18–19, 22–23.

115 Curl 2007.

116 Baruchello/Martin 1986, p. 56.



12 Gianfranco Baruchello, *Intorno ad alcuni aspetti del rapporto di Marcel Duchamp con lo spazio detto comunemente stanza* (Some Thoughts on Marcel Duchamp's Relationship with the Space Commonly Called Room), 1978, mixed media and sewn pictures on canvas, 180 x 180 cm (photo Fondazione Baruchello)

of contemporary *comuni agricole* and only indirectly with that of nomadic populations. One only needs to flip through *Fallo da te. Manuale pratico di vita alternativa* (Do It Yourself. Practical Manual of Alternative Life), a 1974 publication also featuring a group interview that included Sottsass, to find illustrations of shelters resembling Baruchello's, along with instructions on how to build yurts, igloos and wigwams.¹¹⁷ What is more, Baruchello's hut also appears in the bottom part of *How to Explain Marcel Duchamp to the Proletarian Youth*, explicitly casting Lambro Park's dropouts as the imaginary interlocutors in a dialogue around the house.

His research on domesticity and dwelling spaces converged in an artist book titled *L'altra casa* (the other house), which appeared in 1979 (Baruchello, 1979).

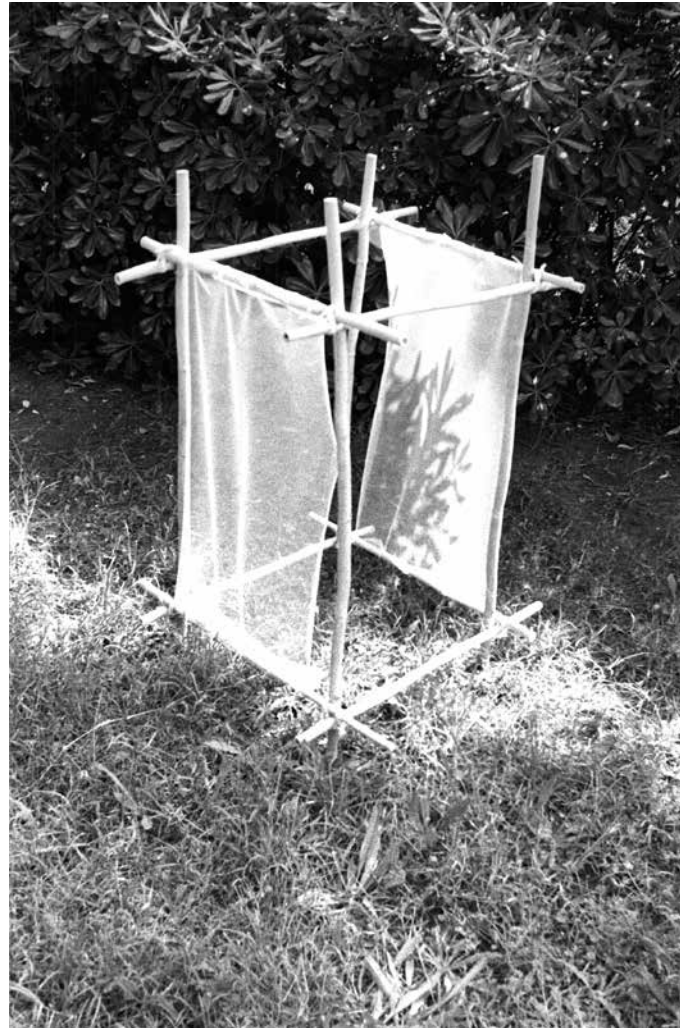
117 *Fallo da te* 1974.

The volume comprised approximately 70 black-and-white plates featuring a motley assemblage of Baruchello's drawings and writings with collaged photos and photocopied texts (fig. 14). *L'altra casa* was prefaced by Jean-François Lyotard, who in the same year published *The Postmodern Condition*, the essay that made him famous worldwide. Lyotard's text highlighted the "mock-up" (*maquette*) aesthetics of Baruchello's plates. It is possible to clarify Lyotard's indication, suggesting that *L'altra casa*'s combination of handwriting and poorly reproduced black-and-white pictures, arranged with little care for graphic layout, drew upon 1977 zines. Groups of contemporary "alternative" people and Duchamp's frequent references to furniture and household appliances (consider *Bottle Rack*, *Nude Descending a Staircase no. 2* or *Porte, 11, rue Larrey*, etc.) informed Baruchello's compositions, and yet the low resolution of *L'altra casa*'s images also aimed to conjure the loss of "definition", the blurriness that characterises personal memories of places like one's childhood home. Indeed, *L'altra casa* weaves together the shared symbols of dwelling (often framed within uncanny nineteenth-century bourgeois interiors) and Baruchello's own recollections.

As the artist explained in the first plates of the book, the "other house" defines a dream-like setting where ghostly presences traverse the interstices and secret recesses of the home: "We have forgotten the 'other house'", Baruchello wrote, and "yet it's there. [...] We own the keys [...]. The garden disappeared; or there is a wall with a gate where in fact there was none. [...] Unknown neighbours remember us very well".¹¹⁸ Baruchello conceptually relied on books from his library, ranging from Jung's archetypal research to Géza Róheim's psychoanalytic anthropology and Gaston Bachelard's exploration of the "reverie" of the earth. But the artist also gathered heterogeneous visual sources (now held in the archive of the Baruchello Foundation), including 1920s magazines illustrating "war caves". In the dim, cavernous rooms of "the other house", where a rag can be made of "human skin", Baruchello discovered the entanglement of cosmogonic myths and the soil of Agricola Cornelia, as laid bare by the vertiginous chain of associations that Baruchello articulated in a 1980s interview where he discussed this phase of his oeuvre.

The earth becomes a womb, a mother, it's a vagina too, and death is a return to something, a return to the womb [...]. The cavern as the world egg, the initiatic cavern as the image of the world, as a symbol of the heart and the central place of origin, the grotto as the first place where men played music and made images, the way the Madonna still today is in a grotto and how that makes you wonder if the virgin's halo isn't a vulva. I started out thinking about grottos because they're the primordial abyss, but they're also the cave, the first house, and the point of entry for the descent into the underworld.¹¹⁹

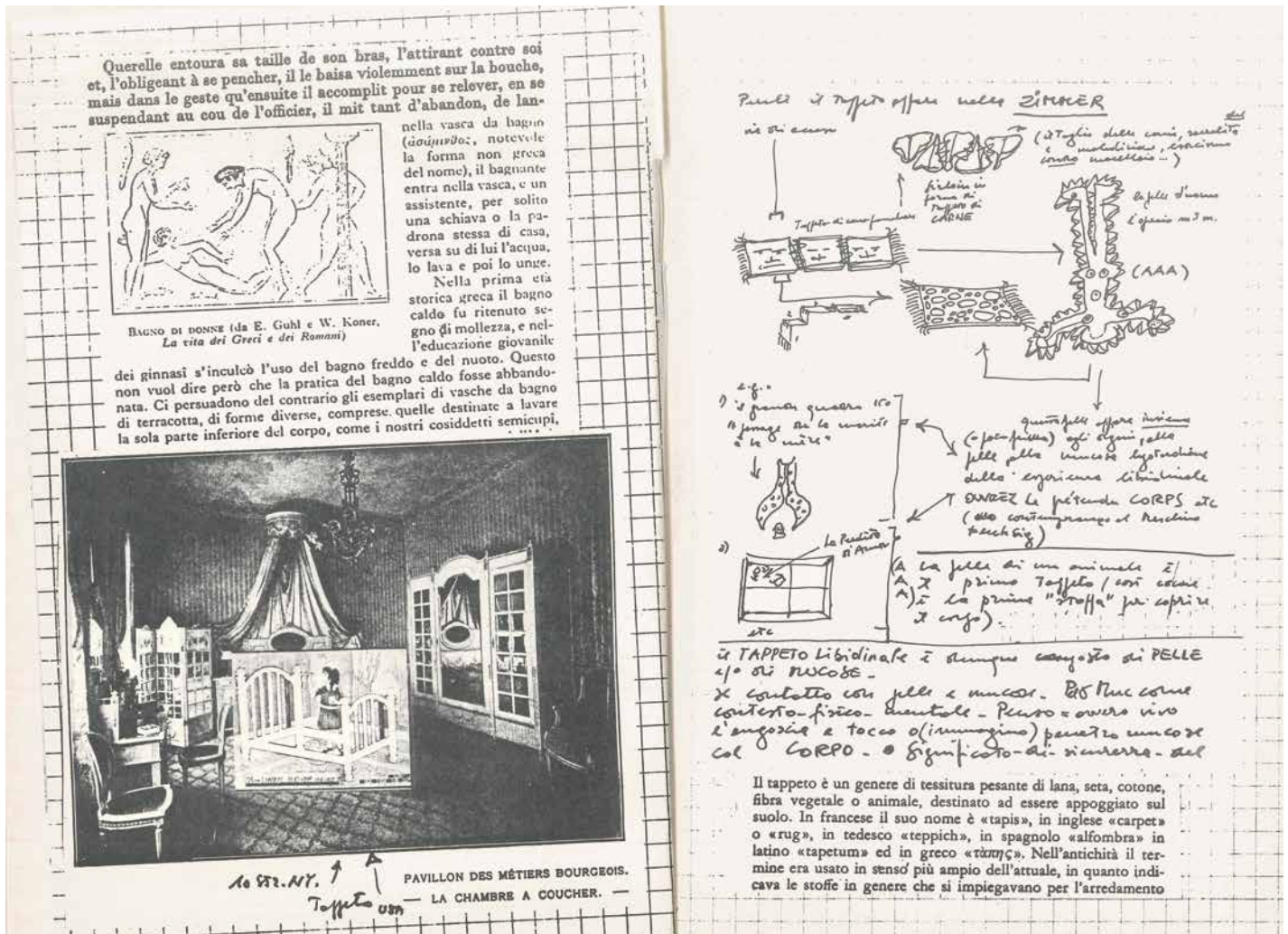
With *L'altra casa*'s excavation of the myths of femininity, the non-binary world of *Sentito vivere* (and its underlying Freudo-Marxism) receded to make room for a more esoteric, if ecologically minded quest whereby the artist attempted to tame



13 Gianfranco Baruchello, *Casa di canna e veli* (House of Bamboo Cane and Veils), 1974–1975, bamboo cane, tulle and cotton ribbons, 200 × 100 × 100 cm (photo Fondazione Baruchello)

118 Baruchello 1979.

119 Baruchello/Martin 1983, pp. 15–19.



14 Gianfranco Baruchello, two pages from Baruchello's artist book *L'altra casa*, 1979, n.p. (photo Fondazione Baruchello)

the “demonic” feminism haunting “his” habitat. In both artist books, however, Baruchello engaged with the gendering of men as demonstrated by the same interview quoted above, namely, in the excerpts where the artist clarified the anxieties implicit in the “idea of the house as a female space and of the woman as a house.”¹²⁰ His comments require extensive citation.

I began to think about the underworld, it wasn't just a whim or a decision, it was a part of this epiphany that came out of a sense of anguish. [...]. My experience of what was coming into my life from out of the women's movement was telling me that I wasn't supposed to be this creature of the air [...]. That sort of creature was far too open to a kind of suffering from which he no longer had any means for protecting himself. It was clear too that I could start out all over again and reformulate myself only after passing through some sort of initiatic revisitation of at least a part of the rites and myths of femininity. [...] And I started out in fact by thinking that I was working on an operation that I was going to title, “The Fear of Women”. [...] It's as though I began to say to myself, “But how is this possible? Why do I have to live the experience of what the women are doing in the feminist movement from such a negative point of view, emotionally negative if not intellectually?” So I began to look through my books again and to live through the daily facts of my life in search of a different point of view. [...]

120 Baruchello/Martin 1983, p. 22.

The whole way resources are running out, the depletion of the oil reserves, the exodus into the cities and the abandonment of farm lands, all of these things are typically masculine stupidities, and in the women's movement there seemed to be a desire to think things through again, to re-identify with the source of things. [...] Women are in this aggressive attacking phase because men are in the process of destroying the planet with the idea then of going off in search of some other kind of mythology. That was the kind of hypothesis I was starting out with, and so the idea was that instead of escaping into space we should descend back into the centre of the earth [...]. You become interested in the cult of Demeter when you discover that Demeter is the person you go to bed with.¹²¹

With this deeper understanding, it is now possible to summarise the findings of this research into Baruchello's visual translations of his own gendering. Between 1975 and 1979, Baruchello encountered feminism and came to the realisation that the masculinity incarnated by a 50-year-old man, who had fought in the Decima and had been a member of a revolutionary organisation, was not a natural and immutable constant. On the contrary, the "man's place" (to borrow the artist's terms) constituted a social construct fraught with uncertainties and laden with the history of oppression and the rejection of sexual non-conformity. What Baruchello called an "epiphany" was prompted by his feminist partner and his growing familiarisation, at least on a theoretical level, with the undifferentiated sex drives that Freud had theorised and whose liberation Mieli posited as the objective of the homosexual movement. In *Agricola Cornelia*, Baruchello's ethos as a leftist man influenced by the counterculture might not have been very different from that parodied by the 1971 inquiries published by *Noi Donne*. Nevertheless, his earnest self-questioning recalls the first men-only groups practising consciousness-raising, emerging in Italy around the mid-1970s, or the four male confessions transcribed in the 1977 book *L'ultimo uomo*, discussed in the introduction.

Through the lens of Baruchello's oeuvre, the 1970s gendering of men generated a twofold output. On the one hand, and concomitantly with the fact that his work mostly took place outdoors, Baruchello examined the "other house", viewing it as a matrix of feminine symbols and a place haunted by the "demoniac" feminism that destabilised his self-perception as a man. Baruchello's initiatory journey into "the rites and myths of femininity" demonstrated some ambivalence, however, as his "descent in the underworld" can also be interpreted as a sophisticated form of escapism where high culture allowed him to "fly high", as it were, and thus eclipse more pedestrian responsibilities such as childrearing. On the other hand, Baruchello consistently presented his personal experience of gendering through the creation of a non-binary universe punctuated by hermaphrodites, androgynes and characters such as *Il Sodoma*, *Schreber* and *Rrose Sélavy*. These enigmatic gender-fluid figures can be linked to Mieli's "transsexuality". But Baruchello's characters can also be read using the conceptual framework offered by Abigail Solomon-Godeau to account for the proliferation of androgynous figures in Neoclassical painting before, during and after the French Revolution.¹²² Solomon-Godeau construed these images of disempowered masculinity as an illusory resolution to the institutional misogyny of the Republican discourse. The vulnerable and effeminate male nudes of Neoclassical painting represented, in her view, a legitimate "stand-in" for an eroticised rococo femininity deemed inimical to manly republican virtues. Based on her interpretation, Baruchello's figures can be seen, by analogy, as being

121 Baruchello/Martin 1983, pp. 51–69.

122 Solomon-Godeau 1999.

123 Interview with Pablo Echaurren, 14.03.2022.

124 Salaris 2015.

more concerned with the valorisation of acceptable aspects of 1970s hegemonic masculinities – such as erudite knowledge of mythology, anthropology and psychoanalysis – than with the “absorption” of feminism, as the artist claimed.

Similar tensions, but also new problems and innovative approaches, pervaded the work of an artist who regarded Baruchello as his putative father, Pablo Echaurren, who will be the focus of the next section.

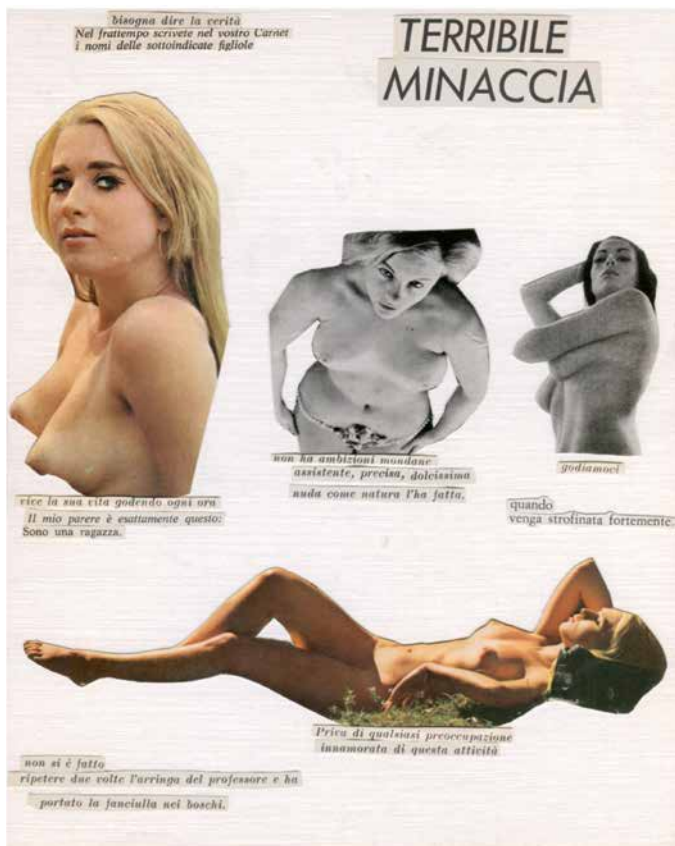
Echaurren’s Bunnies, Monsters and Teddy Bears

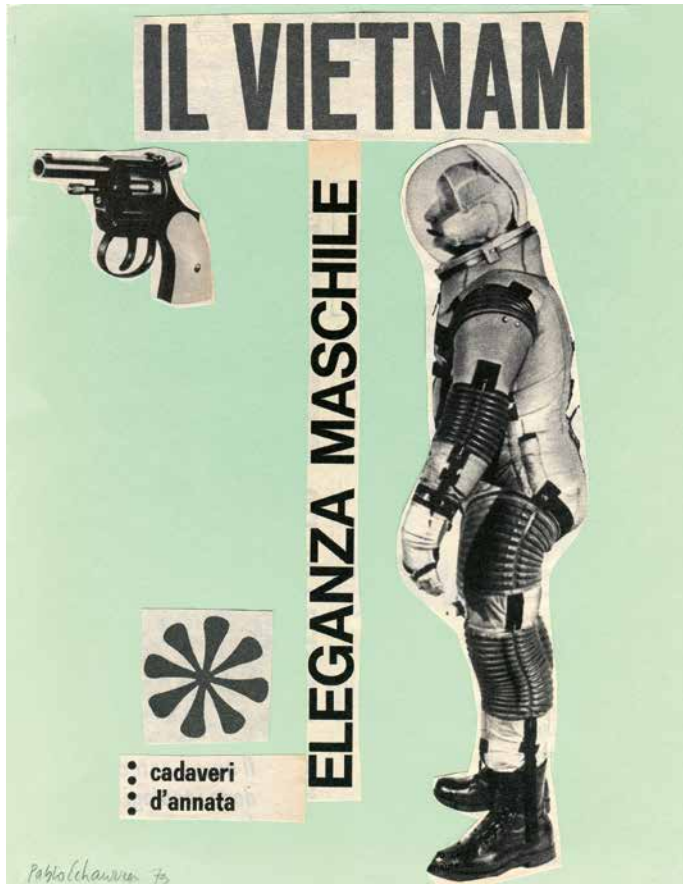
Pablo Echaurren was born in Rome to the painter Roberto Matta, a celebrated surrealist painter but also an absent father; in fact, Echaurren has claimed that it was Baruchello and not Matta who acted as his mentor and father figure. In his early teenage years, Echaurren could often be found among youth groups prone to violence, where it was common to see homosocial clannishness “expressing” itself in gay bullying.¹²³ Under the paternal guidance of Baruchello, Echaurren moved away from these environments to focus on art – he exhibited with Arturo Schwarz when he was only 20 – and politics.¹²⁴ However, while Baruchello joined Potere Operaio, Echaurren opted for Lotta Continua, one of the three largest extra-parliamentary organisations (the third being Avanguardia Operaia) that shaped the leftist Italian landscape during and after the major factory strikes of 1969.

Some of Echaurren’s juvenile works provide compelling evidence of his early engagement with masculinity. This is particularly true for the collages where the artist pasted together strips of text (often combining political statements and sexual innuendos), images of mass-produced objects and cut-outs of pin-ups taken from erotic magazines. The work of Mel Ramos served as a source of inspiration, as well as Italian visual poets such as Lamberto Pignotti or Nanni Balestrini. With his associations, Echaurren repurposed and ridiculed the stultifying language of advertising and the facile marketing strategies of 1960s billboards, routinely predicated on female bodies. Yet, and despite Echaurren’s pointed irony,

15 Pablo Echaurren, *Una terribile minaccia* (A Terrible Threat), 1970, collage on cardboard, 24 × 19 cm. Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Fondazione Echaurren Salaris)

16 Pablo Echaurren, *Ci si accorge* (One Realises), 1970, collage on cardboard, 24 × 19 cm. Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Fondazione Echaurren Salaris)





one should not assume a latent feminist sensibility. In a prude context where pornography still constituted a niche phenomenon and censorship rendered reproductions of nudes difficult to obtain for a minor, Echaurren’s collages denote an inchoate critical consciousness just as much as the need for a pretext – namely art – to consume taboo images and pore over the inventories (fig. 15) of soft-core pornographic magazines listing the supposed personality traits of the models.

Nonetheless, in a contemporary collage (fig. 16), a more self-reflexive approach began to emerge. The strips of text allude to the skills acquired during outdated military training (e.g., “repelling a cavalry charge”), but also to the violence inflicted on a gay man (“a faggot? Carnally, and raped” [sic]) and, more obliquely, to the gender ambivalence of Rose Sélavy, “It’s a man (a woman, even)”, with “even” placed at the end of the sentence to reference Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. Concentrating less on the manipulative idiom of advertisement and more on the patriarchal mentality underpinning its dizzying sensory overload, Echaurren’s incipient interest in masculinity was borne out by two collages he completed in 1973. Here the gendering of men constituted the dominant theme of the work, a shift probably contingent upon the growing visibility of the feminist movement. In Echaurren’s 1973 collages, the images of fast cars, naked women, alcohol, and weapons no longer coded a generic mass society. Instead, these putative cornerstones of manhood indexed the artist’s awareness that such stereotypes addressed a heterosexual male audience as much as they constructed it through a panoply of hints at what a “true man” should look at and appreciate. If “Vietnam”, a pistol and a clumsy space suit were ironically dubbed “masculine elegance” in a 1973 collage (fig. 17), in another work (fig. 18) from the same year, a woman with naked breasts and a bottle of brandy are accompanied by writings (“a liar as much as pious”, “the wife should not” “in short: 3,58 metres”, “when a man drinks” “strong! Powerful invincible”) that lay bare the mottos of 1970s hegemonic masculinities. Isolated in the bot-

17 Pablo Echaurren, *Il Vietnam*, 1973, collage on paper, 28 × 21,5 cm. Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Fondazione Echaurren Salaris)

18 Pablo Echaurren, *Sciopero* (Strike), 1973, collage on paper, 28 × 21,5 cm. Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Fondazione Echaurren Salaris)



19 Tano D'Amico, photograph of Maurizio Gabbianelli, Claudia Salaris, and Pablo Echaurren (from left to right), September 1977. Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Bibliotheca Hertziana/Collection Pablo Echaurren PE-8569)

tom-right corner, the word *sciopero* (strike) reads as a moral and political disavowal of the active participation in the coercive system conjured by the picture.

Echaurren further pursued his research on the mandated norms of masculinity in his dialogue with the mid-1970s counterculture and the 1977 movement. He numbered among the most dynamic members of the latter; indeed, he was one of the few artists who devoted his creative efforts entirely to devising a visual language for and within the political movement from the beginning of 1977 through to 1978.¹²⁵ In these eventful months, his main outlets included zines, posters, dazibaos, performances at demonstrations and occupied universities, as well as artist books and, not least, the pages of *Lotta Continua*, a daily newspaper (the group had dissolved, but its newspaper continued into the 1980s) selling up to 25,000 copies.

From February 1977 until the beginning of 1978, Echaurren worked full-time for *Lotta Continua* as a representative of what was regarded as the “creative wing” of the movement.¹²⁶ Indeed, in the spring of that year, the editorial team of the newspaper allotted a portion of its page count to the “Metropolitan Indians” specifically and to the playful components of demonstrations and occupations more generally. That included pranksters, provocateurs, street performers, musicians and people who simply rejected the martial jargon of the organised groups of Autonomia while adhering to the radical messages of 1977.¹²⁷ Notably, in *Lotta Continua*’s office, “creatives” and “feminists” shared the same meeting room. The forced cohabitation of these newcomers unintentionally signalled both their perceived marginality in relation to the core topics of the

newspaper (strikes, demonstrations, antifascism, national politics, the geopolitical conjuncture, etc.) and a sort of elective affinity. After all, the wry humour of both feminists and the Metropolitan Indians (factions that coincided in zines such as *Zizzania* and *Foeminik*) targeted not only the moderation of the Communist Party and the cult of labour professed by the trade unions but also the far-left, with which many former members of *Lotta Continua* identified.¹²⁸ The Metropolitan Indians’ sardonic irony, in particular, satirised the stiff Marxist lingo, solemn tones and self-sacrificial vision of politics foregrounded by radicals. To the totalising commitment of traditional militants, the Metropolitan Indians responded with Dadaist absurdism and surrealist black humour.

Echaurren’s sartorial choices in 1977 are emblematic of how he continually challenged contextually widespread gender standards. While male activists fashioned their anti-bourgeois manliness through scruffy manes and beards and a practical wardrobe comprising bandanas, wool jumpers, jeans and trainers, Echaurren, who was perfectly shaven, reposted with heeled ankle boots (popular in night clubs), shirts and a trimmed mushroom haircut *à la* Ramones (fig. 19), which earned him the infantilising nickname of *paggetto*, “page boy”.¹²⁹ Likewise, Echaurren recalled making ostentatious use of deodorants in a milieu that, as far as men were concerned, deprecated sprays produced by North American and European corporations.¹³⁰ This brief analysis suggests the artist’s conscious per-

125 Perna 2016; Echaurren 2014.

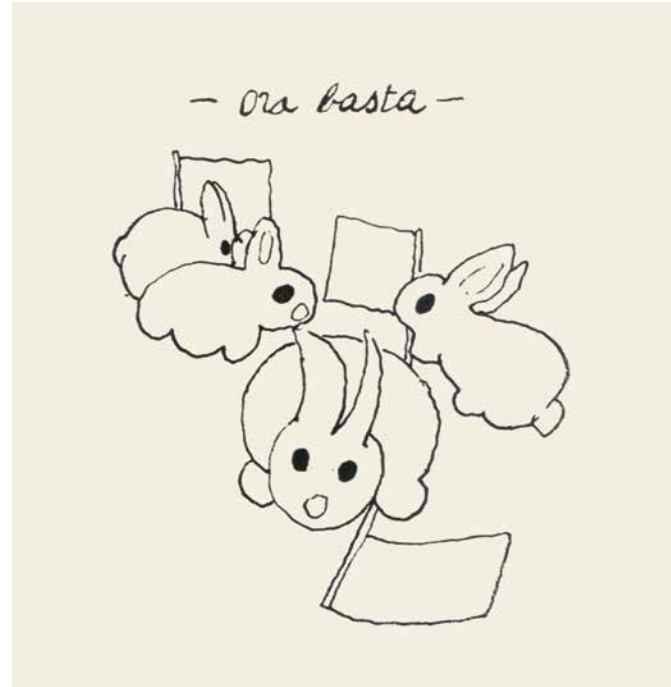
126 Salaris 1997; Gruber 2010; Edwards 2014.

127 Iacarella 2018; Salaris/Sgambati 2017.

128 The countercultural archive of the Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (AFES) is now online, see URL: <http://dlib.biblhertz.it/PE> (accessed 15.05.2023).

129 Echaurren 2014, p. 30.

130 Echaurren 2014, p. 15; Echaurren 2005, p. 97.



formance of a dissonant form of masculinity – delicate, refined, and “frivolous” – that provocatively contrasted the prevailing masculine models within the far left and displayed attitudes considered “affected”.¹³¹ But Echaurren’s defiant approach to leftist gender standards was not only restricted to his vestimentary codes. Three visual motifs of Echaurren’s 1977 production best illustrating his critique of militant manliness are the bunny, the monster and the teddy bear, each of which will be discussed below in detail.¹³²

With the Proletarian Youth groups at their apex and Lotta Continua at its end, the last months of 1976 witnessed a membership surge in Autonomia, which by this time constituted less of an organised network of workplace collectives and more of a heterogenous and internally riven political “area”, involving both disciplined groups (including armed groups) and loose collectives of feminists, students, precarious workers, the unemployed, and more traditional militants. In this thriving and confused situation, a new generation of activists who were too young to have experienced the 1968–1969 struggles first-hand went through a rapid process of politicisation. While some political currents, such as Maoism, that had shaped the post-1968 far-left landscape were waning by 1976, others, namely feminism, percolated into several milieux as testified by the first male-only consciousness-raising groups described at the beginning of this article. In the far left, the private was considered political, and the unexpected success of the novel *Porci con le ali. Diario sessuo-politico di due adolescenti* (Pigs with wings. Sexual-political diary of two teenagers), a book with a drawing by Echaurren on the cover, demonstrated the topicality of this idea.¹³³ Yet, conflicts about offsetting the risk that this principle transformed itself into an ever-present “red” censorship looming over individual behaviours remained. This shortcoming was deeply felt in the realm of artistic expression (music, literature, film, theatre, comics, etc.), as Autonomia hardliners accused many artists of bourgeois *intimismo* of cultivating an individualistic focus on romantic feelings and escapist fantasies. However, some warned that these tirades

20 Pablo Echaurren, *En plein air!*, 1976, Indian ink on paper, 17.2 × 12.3 cm. Drawing on the invitation for the book event for *I coniglietti*, 1976, at Galleria Aglaia in Florence (photo Fondazione Echaurren Salaris)

21 Pablo Echaurren, page from *I coniglietti* (The Bunnies), 1976. Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Fondazione Echaurren Salaris)

131 For this topic, see Jones 1995.

132 For Echaurren’s limericks, which partook in the same visual strategies, see Echaurren/Salaris 1978a.

133 Lombardo-Radice/Ravera 1976.



22 Pablo Echaurren, page from *I coniglietti* (The Bunnies), 1976. Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Fondazione Echaurren Salaris)

invertedly rehabilitated the sectarianism informing the early 1950s champions of socialist realism.¹³⁴

In this fraught conjuncture, Echaurren published a tiny pink book – less than 10 centimetres tall – titled *The Bunnies* featuring 43 drawings of bunnies.¹³⁵ Within the politicised milieu where the artist operated, the size of the book would have recalled the “Little Red Book” of Mao’s citations, some editions of which fit neatly in a shirt pocket. However, despite the fairy-tale tenure of Echaurren’s naïve graphic trait and primary-school-like calligraphy, the “fluffy hairballs” (as the artist dubbed his bunnies) were meant for adults. They occasionally allude to *Alice in Wonderland*, but also sexuality and revolutionary politics; for example, bunnies with flags (figs. 20, 21), fatigued by activism, meander under a heading that reads “enough already”. Yet, the overall tone of the book was not allegorical; indeed, the majority of the plates did not lend themselves to a coded reading but rather referenced the saccharine imagery of Easter bunnies and Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*.

These drawings could be misconstrued as an early instance of *riflusso*, of the blasé retreat to a “private” dimension bereft of any “politics” which came to characterise the 1980s in Italy, albeit less than is generally assumed.¹³⁶ Echaurren’s goofy and “silly” drawings, which also played on the diffuse fear among members of the left of being sucked into a petit-bourgeois domesticity (fig. 22; the sentence reads “a crocheted carrot”), should instead be set against the background of the revolutionary discourse and its fulminations targeting artists’ *intimismo*. More specifically, Echaurren’s bunnies acted against the imperative of producing an ostensibly political output that was often imposed upon the artists active within the movement. The cosy atmospheres evoked by the bunnies could not be more different from the soldierly discipline and virile austerity – the “red asceticism” denounced by anti-authoritarian feminist Lea Melandri – that still prevailed in the ethos of many militants around 1975–1976.¹³⁷ To the reading groups fascinated by the assertive prose of Antonio Negri’s *Proletari e stato* (Proletarians and the state) and to the autonomi (the members of Autonomia) identifying with the sunburned “laddish” characters of Sergio Leone’s spaghetti westerns, Echaurren replied with an effusive eulogy of what decadent poet Giovanni Pascoli defined as the poetics of *fanciullino* (little boy) – a child’s infinite ability to be captivated and awed by even the most insignificant of things.

Echaurren’s bunnies would be displayed in a Florence gallery as individual drawings in April 1977, when the 1977 movement reached its highest level of mobilisation and shootings at demonstrations became a common occurrence. By then, their insolent infantilism and countercultural discourse – that is, countering the far-left bellicose jargon and praxis – had only acquired more valence in the artist’s view. A year later, Echaurren published a second series of bunnies titled *Other Bunnies*.¹³⁸ This small publication was predicated on Giambattista Basile’s collection of fairy tales titled *Pentamerone*; here, the pets, declared the tongue-in-cheek preface, were supposed “to bring joy and tenderness to the eye

134 Rosso 1975; Rosso 1974.

135 Echaurren 1976.

136 Crainz 2013; Scotto di Luzio 2020.

137 Melandri 1977.

138 Echaurren/Salaris 1978b.

24 Pablo Echaurren, untitled, ink on paper, 22 × 33 cm, published in *Lotta Continua*, 29 October 1977, p. 5. Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Bibliotheca Hertziana/Collection Pablo Echaurren PE-8551)



(fig. 23) (virtually an anagram of “caos”, meaning “chaos”). Written in a speech balloon, the word “Oask?!” was staged as the guttural shriek uttered by the monsters depicted under the masthead – a combination of the morphology of sauro-pods, reptiles, anteaters, sea lions and chameleons. These “impossible” creatures were invented by Echaurren, who also interspersed them in the pages of *Lotta Continua*. Who were these monsters, and what did they want to communicate?

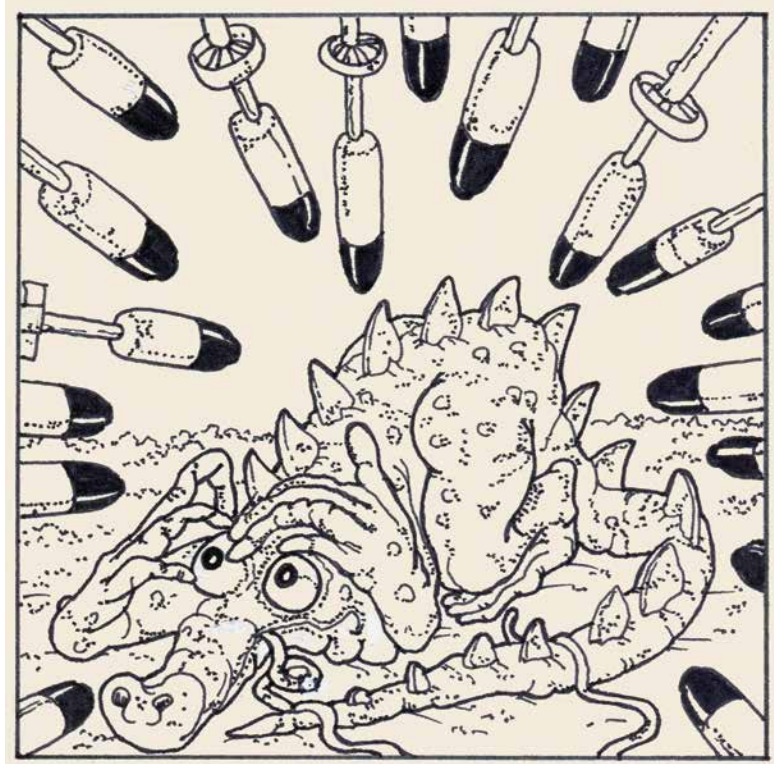
The traits of these figures borrowed elements from the history of art.¹⁴⁰ On occasion, Echaurren’s creatures were variations on the motif of the “grylle” – imaginary beings with arms but without chest or shoulders and whose head is directly inserted into their lower body parts populated the marginalia of the illuminated manuscripts and the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch. At times, the incongruous anatomies of Echaurren’s monsters recall the metamorphic universe of *grottesche* and their pronounced taste for amazement. Other beings the artist crafted for *Lotta Continua* seem to have escaped from a late sixteenth-century Wunderkammer, with its proto-scientific taste for outlandish animals and extravagant objects. These manifold monsters impersonated the components of the 1977 movement that Echaurren understood as being its most authentic spirit. If their unintelligible idiom of hieroglyphics (fig. 24) evidenced the unbridgeable gap separating them from the institutional political arena, their aberrant bodies broke away from the iconography of factory workers, party members and feminists, signalling their resistance to the militant taxonomies of the twentieth century.

It is possible to complicate the interpretations provided in *Hopeful Monster* by closely observing Echaurren’s bunnies, his 1973 collages, and finding inspiration in the queer reading of the monsters featured in Pixar’s animated films as proposed by Jack/Judith Halberstam in *The Queer Art of Failure*.¹⁴¹ In the case of Echaurren, the monsters’ disjointed and bizarre physiognomies can be construed as an instantiation of “queer”. They can be viewed as embodying a deviation from normalcy that implies the disidentification with the conventional parameters of femininity and masculinity, as well as with the conventions governing “successful” gender performances. Butler’s comment on the intrinsic relation between humanness and gender – “[when] abjected beings [...] do not appear properly

139 Echaurren/Salaris 1978b.

140 Galimberti 2020.

141 Halberstam 2011.



gendered; it is their very humanness that comes into question” – is a strikingly accurate means by which to frame Echaurren’s “freaks”. Indeed, these are portrayed as a patchwork of identities (fig. 25), as “abjected beings” incommensurable with traditional gender categorisations.¹⁴²

To be sure, his bestiary could have suggested an idealisation of the irreducible uniqueness incarnated by the monstrous body. However, Echaurren’s “wonders of nature” were anything but self-confident and “successful” (in the sense of Halberstam), revealing their vulnerability, clumsiness and need for care instead. He often represented them as defenceless – for example, one of them cowers underneath a barrage of tear gas grenades (fig. 26); as kind-hearted – such as an adult monster looking after a baby monster (fig. 27); or as infatuated – a lizard-like creature enthusiastically shows off the photographic portrait of his or her beloved (fig. 28). These anti-heroic characterisations suggested that the figures’ refusal of gender divides was inseparable from their critique of the forbidding manliness marshalled by sectors of the movement. Yet much like the movement, even these beings evolved. In the last weeks of 1977, they became teddy bears.

Shortly before Christmas 1977, Echaurren published a double page in *Lotta Continua* (fig. 29) that celebrated, not without nostalgia, the occupation of a flat dubbed Orsottantotto (literally “Beareightyeight”), whose name was derived from its location in central Rome, Via dell’Orso 88 (literally Bear Street, 88). By December, what was also known as “la casa del desiderio” (the house of desire) in Rome’s alternative scene no longer existed, as the police had evicted its inhabitants. Echaurren (who did not live in the flat but frequented it) has recalled that the occupation displayed an unapologetic hedonism that ruffled some feathers among the left because the activists did not aim to accommodate large proletarian families.¹⁴³ Instead, Orsottantotto’s explicit goal was to liberate squatters from the yoke of families and wage labour, granting them the material conditions to indulge in recreational drugs, enjoy free time and experiment with different forms of sexuality. In the bottom-left corner, the artist sketched the blue-

25 Pablo Echaurren, untitled, published in *Lotta Continua*, 20 January 1978, p. 20. The caption reads “L’avventurista nella scala evolutiva” (The adventurer in the evolutionary scale). Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Fondazione Echaurren Salaris)

26 Pablo Echaurren, untitled, ink on paper, published in *Lotta Continua*, 29–30 May 1977, p. 6. Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Bibliotheca Hertziana/Collection Pablo Echaurren PE-8551)

142 Butler 1993, p. 8.

143 Echaurren 2014, p. 22; Echaurren 2005, pp. 97–117.



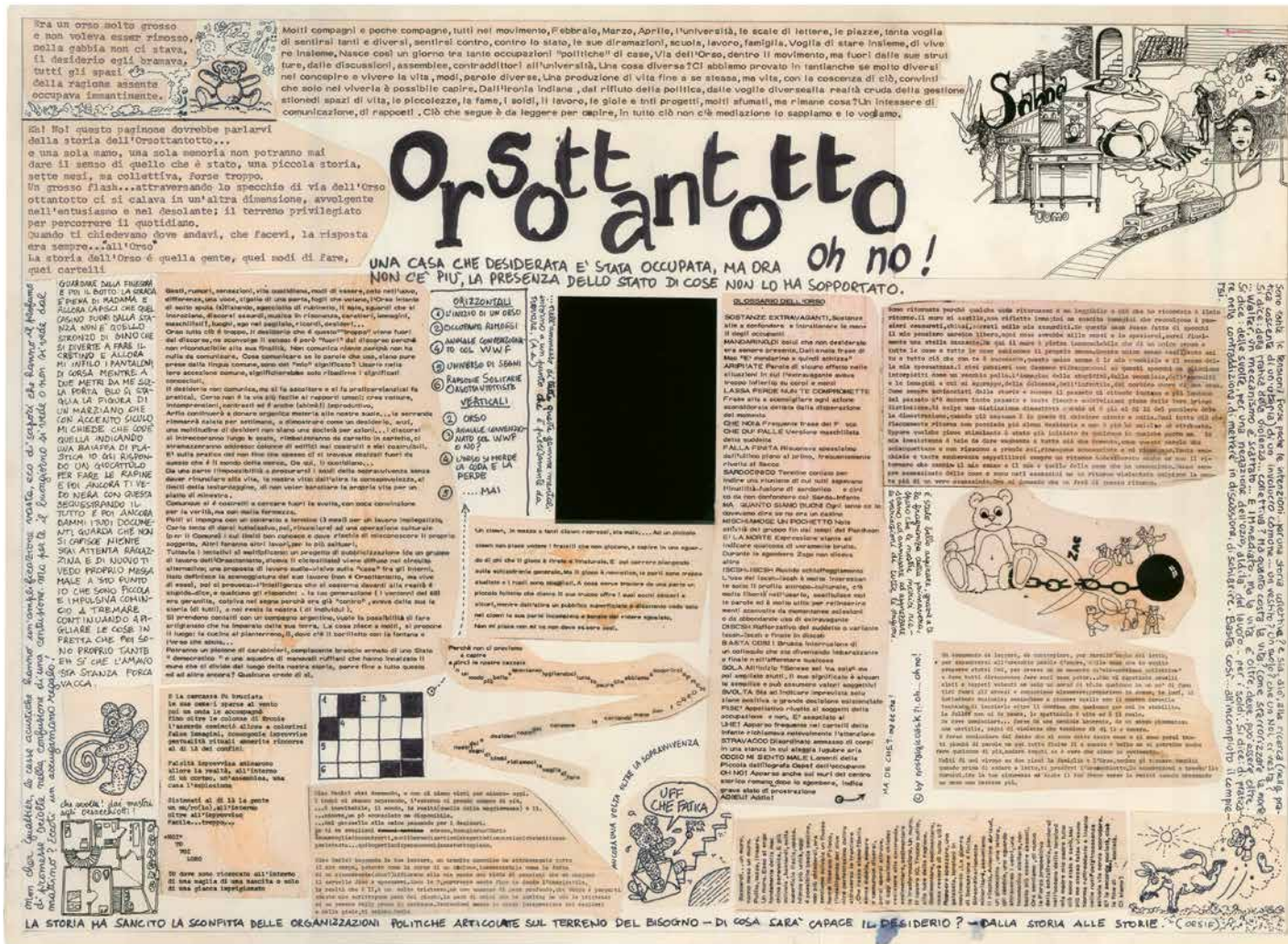
27 Pablo Echaurren, untitled, ink on paper, published in *Lotta Continua*, 25–26 September 1977, p. 6. Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Fondazione Echaurren Salaris)

28 Pablo Echaurren, untitled, ink on paper, published in *Lotta Continua*. New Haven CT, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Pablo Echaurren Papers (photo Fondazione Echaurren Salaris)

print of the flat, above which he placed a teddy bear with the reptilian tongue that had been so characteristic of his previous monsters. Between the two figures, Echaurren inserted a comment elucidating the metamorphosis that had taken place: “What a turn, from monsters to teddy bears!” Teddy bears also appeared elsewhere in the image, symbolising the occupiers of the flat; at the bottom centre a stuffed bear carries a “payslip” (“how tiring” reads its balloon); at the bottom-right corner, a bear falls apart, destroyed by the kick of a donkey with Stalin’s moustache; above it a multitude of minuscule teddy bears set free a Gulliver-like puppet restrained by a ball and chain.

Invented by Echaurren at the end of a year of political struggles, the figure of the teddy bear recuperated the provocative praise of cuteness, fairy tales and the virtues of domesticity (albeit “alternative”) that had motivated his first bunnies. However, unlike the bunnies, the images of the stuffed toy emanated from the movement and addressed the activists reading *Lotta Continua*. The teddy bears depicted in the newspaper’s centrefold also marked a shift from the monsters’ disorienting anatomies. If both figures distanced themselves from heteronormative models of political militancy, the puppet threw into sharp relief the fact that this recalcitrance was associated with a sort of unsullied prepubescent condition involving a strong emotional attachment to inanimate objects. In contrast to the “repellent” morphologies of Echaurren’s monster freaks, the teddy signalled resistance in an Edenic moment before or beyond the gender binary. As Echaurren himself acknowledged, this was indeed a “turn” that reflected the decline of the 1977 movement and the artist’s resignation towards the seemingly ineluctable intensification of armed struggle. The teddy bears anticipated his “other bunnies”, which would mark the beginning of Echaurren’s return to a career as an individual artist in 1978.

Echaurren’s political icons can be assimilated into Baruchello’s. In the latter part of the 1970s, both artists explored hybrid and queer figures in a bid to reclaim aspects of manliness that had been decimated by hegemonic masculinities. Both vindicated play and “infantile” needs for gentleness and protection, viewing them as tools to derail inherited models of virility. However, the two artists diverged in their relationship with the 1970s political movement, also largely due to their age difference. Baruchello, in his early fifties, looked to the counter-culture but tended to respond to his “fear of feminism” with a solitary quest into the recesses of the house, the underworld and the unconscious. By contrast, Echaurren, in his mid-twenties, cast a squat in central Rome as a synonym of



emancipation and established a creative dialogue with transgender, feminist and gay communities in 1977. With Justine (a transgender member of Lotta Continua), he designed the provocative zine *L'occulto*.¹⁴⁴ Likewise, the artist made the masthead of the feminist zine *Limenetiana*, and the three letters in the masthead of the zine *WAM* – which Echaurren co-authored – were traversed by a flock of swallows referencing the feminist group *Le rondini* (The swallows), which was part of *WAM*'s creative venture.

All the same, these communal projects did not imply the absence of conflict between the Metropolitan Indians (with which Echaurren identified in the spring of 1977) and feminists. The feminist-Marxist magazine *Le operaie delle case* (houseworkers) devoted a scathing article to the comrades who acted as “Indians in the street” – that is, playful, anti-authoritarian and feminist – and “cowboys in bed”.¹⁴⁵

A Transformative Masculinity?

Scholars such as Bellssai have argued that each wave of feminism has generated a parallel denaturalisation of male identity. This article took this hypothesis as its point of departure to explore the work of Baruchello, Echaurren and Sotssass, examining the efforts they made between the 1960s and 1970s – the peak of the second wave of feminism – to confront the realisation that, as the feminist

29 Pablo Echaurren, first draft for the centrefold of *Lotta Continua*, 24 December 1977, pp. 8–9. Rome, Fondazione Echaurren Salaris (photo Bibliotheca Hertziana/Collection Pablo Echaurren PE-8551)

144 Echaurren 1998, pp. 86–88.

145 *Le operaie della casa* 1977.

L'Antimaschio put it, “one is not born a man, but becomes one”. The three men did not belong to the same generation; nonetheless, they shared a pronounced interest in the countercultures, which significantly impacted their artistic output. For all their lingering machismo, countercultural milieus in Italy provided fertile grounds to subvert post-war hegemonic masculinities. In particular, this investigation has concentrated on the triangulation between counterculture, the reconfiguration of male identity and domesticity, themes that were profoundly intertwined in the work of Sottsass, Baruchello and Echaurren. The role of domesticity as a site of creative engagement and emotional investment for male artists should not come as a surprise. In a patriarchal country that saw a process of “housewifcation” in the 1960s, the home came to represent one of the few social spaces where post-war Italian men often felt “out of place”. Men still tended to preserve a position of authority in domestic environments, yet their dominance was mediated, and at times ridiculed and contested, by women, which rendered the home (in its concrete and imaginary instantiations) a liminal zone where gender roles were more prone to renegotiation.

For Sottsass, the denaturalisation of the male gender was initially disconnected from the mid-1960s inchoate forms of feminism. Despite his proximity to writers associated with the Beat generation, it was not the masculine sociability of their itinerant community where Sottsass found inspiration. Instead, it was his marriage with Pivano that allowed him to shape a countercultural image of a “husband” on a par with his wife, as demonstrated by the book *Le belle ragazze*. Through the 1965 installation *Camera da letto* (bedroom), which summoned the sensuous atmospheres of the *Kama Sutra*, Sottsass further pursued this strategy and presented himself as a caring, affectionate and yet very sexual partner, thereby deviating from both the model of the decent family man and that of the lustful bachelor shaped by *Playboy*. In the final part of the 1960s, Sottsass, then in his fifties, increasingly fashioned his persona as a hippie, adopting gender-neutral hairstyles that suggested effeminateness and elicited reprobation in the sexist Italy of *I sultani*. The analysis of Sottsass’ critiques of hegemonic masculinities, which were explicit in his writings, has also focused on the phallic totems he exhibited at *Menhir, Ziggurat, Stupas, Hydrants & Gas Pumps* and on a 1971 pink phallus-like flowerpot that was later manufactured and marketed as *Shiva*. Sottsass’ work in the magazine *In* possibly signalled his first response to the feminist movement. Indeed, the cartoonish depiction of the male organ encapsulated an anarchist-minded parody of authoritarianism Sottsass characterised as inherently male. But “true” men, Sottsass implicitly argued in the magazine, could be pacifists and come bearing flowers. In the same publication, he also used his vase to elaborate a syncretic visual discourse where the cosmogonic dimension of coitus in Hinduism invoked a mystical unity of the sexes and, by analogy, a condition beyond sex-based hierarchies.

The blurring of the boundaries and delimiting genders proved to be a pivotal motif in the work of Baruchello in the late 1970s, when he lived on a farm whose ethos bore similarities with that of rural hippie communes. By his own admission, the birth of his daughter and the conflicts that erupted in his household, which pitted him against his feminist partner, triggered his anguished reaction and an unprecedented crisis of his role as a man. On the one hand, he developed a “fear of women”. On the other hand, unlike the staunchly sexist “leftist men” described in the inquiry published by *Noi Donne*, Baruchello tapped into his vast culture to begin a journey into the unconscious and its archetypes, searching for reconciliation with “the feminine”. His perception of masculinity was almost shattered when confronted by a man in his fifties and father of five who had likely adhered to the fascist virility of Decima Flottiglia MAS in 1944–1945 and been a member of the revolutionary organisation of Potere Operaio. In *Sentito vivere*, Baruchello’s attempt to deconstruct his own idea of masculinity

and “introject feminism” was channelled through imaginary creatures, notably the unicorn, and genderfluid figures central to psychoanalysis and nineteenth-century art, including the hermaphrodite, the epebes and the androgyne. This metamorphic universe resonated with the theoretical analyses of the Italian gay movement, namely those of Mieli, whose mid-1970s political sympathies and intellectual beacons exhibited distinctive similarities with Baruchello’s. Two of his coeval paintings, *Piccolo meschino Flesbig* and *Come spiegare Marcel Duchamp al Proletariato Giovanile*, included a self-portrait of sorts in drag, which references what Baruchello named “polysexuality”, and the characters Rose Sélavy and Schreber, who indexed what Butler has called “gender trespass”.¹⁴⁶ Baruchello’s research concerning the “other house”, seen as an unsettling locus made uncanny by feminism, represented the artist’s final artwork engaging with the “crisis of masculinity” he had consciously traversed.

Echaurren’s 1970s interrogation of manhood also concluded with a domestic space, but his “other house” was Orsottantotto. Aged 22, the artist crafted collages that exposed the militaristic and deleterious nature of hegemonic masculinities as depicted by mass-media communication. Three years later, Echaurren would join forces with the creative wings of the 1977 movement. In this context, he produced a provocative book featuring bunnies, whose childish tone subverted the hardening of the political position characterising militants, which often translated into dogmatic requests to activist-artists such as Echaurren. Furthermore, his bunnies satirised the styled boorish “proletarian” virility, thereby articulating a countercultural attitude – in opposition to the mainstream far-left culture – that was paralleled by Echaurren’s cooperation with transgender people and feminists. Monstrous beings, often exhibiting “aberrant” anatomies, constituted the salient motifs of Echaurren’s 1977 production in the pages of *Lotta Continua*, while also figuring prominently in the zines that the artist co-authored. Echaurren’s iconography of the monster has been interpreted as a symbol of otherness exceeding the discursive frameworks set by the 1970s political landscape. This exegesis can be complemented by highlighting that the secession from humanity that was coded by their unclassifiable bodies depicted a dramatisation of queerness as the expression not only of political recalcitrance but also of obdurate extraneousness to the gender binary. At the end of the year, a new political icon appeared in Echaurren’s bestiary: the teddy bear. This stuffed toy stood for the activists of Orsottantotto, and set daydreaming, “unmanly” softness and blissful domesticity against the ruthless tones typifying the apologists of armed struggle, who were gaining the upper hand within the movement.

The critique of masculinity developed by Echaurren, Baruchello and Sottsass should not be viewed as a prelude to the present debates. Rather than being a harbinger of the current reconfiguration of manliness, their work should be better understood as the product of the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s. In particular, it emerged from the strained relationships between second-wave feminism and the sexist tendencies of a countercultural milieu that nonetheless represented the most advanced social spaces where a challenge to patriarchy was collectively practised. Echaurren, Baruchello and Sottsass oscillated between, on the one hand, a biological idea of “masculinity”, with the attendant essentialisation of the “feminine” (in Sottsass and Baruchello more than Echaurren) and, on the other hand, the understanding of the male gender as a social construct. The three drew upon a variety of sources (from psychoanalysis to Hinduism, from feminism to hippie culture and the gay movement) to shape figures or write texts that tentatively evoked a possible overcoming of reductive gender polarities and oppressive clichés.

It is now possible to return to the concept of “transformative masculinity” outlined in the first paragraphs of this article and discuss whether this “overcom-

146 Butler 1993, p. 19.

IL PANE
E LE ROSE

SAVELLI

ANDREA, GUIDO,
MARCELLO, ROBERTO

L'ULTIMO UOMO

QUATTRO CONFESIONI-
RIFLESSIONI SULLA CRISI
DEL RUOLO MASCHILE

INTRODUZIONE E CURA
DI MARCO LOMBARDO-RADICE



30 Pablo Echaurren, cover of
L'ultimo uomo, Rome 1977

something feminism worked to rectify.¹⁴⁷ When and how did male artists begin approaching intimate partner abuse in Italy? Second, for all the self-doubt that informed the work of Sottsass, Baruchello and Echaurren, their work does not transmit those feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction with one's own physical appearance in the same way that pervades contemporary mass culture where, since the vertiginous expansion of porn industry in the 1980s and 1990s, men's naked bodies have increasingly become more visible and subject to social judgement. The emergence of these anxieties in men's artworks, and their connection with both the decline of the industrial sector and the rise of the gay movement (and its distinctive aesthetics), could shed new light on a salient trait of contemporary visual culture.¹⁴⁸ Third, the three artists at the core of this article rarely considered domestic work to be work. What is now a powerful discursive framework of feminist demands was largely alien to Sottsass, Baruchello and Echaurren, despite the large Italian contingent within the Wages for Housework Campaign.¹⁴⁹ Only Echaurren took it upon himself to engage with this nexus. An instance of his preoccupations can be found on the cover (fig. 30) of *L'ultimo uomo* where

ing" constituted something more than a mere renewal of patriarchy in another, more "effeminate", guise. From a different perspective, Echaurren's praise of domestic affection, Sottsass' acknowledgement of the superiority of girls' artistic creativity and Baruchello's tormented confrontation with feminism all could be construed as ill-concealed efforts to update, and even reinforce, contemporary forms of hegemonic masculinities. It is not easy to calm this legitimate doubt through responses that ultimately raise the *vexata quaestio* of art's societal impact. Even where the works addressed a relatively large audience, such as Echaurren's monsters or, to a lesser extent, Sottsass's design products, their actual reception and their impact on collective behaviours remain difficult to assess. From a more personal perspective, the question concerning the three artists' potentially "transformative" masculinity could only be thoroughly tackled via an analysis of their private lives, an examination that is beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, it seems possible to affirm that, at least on the level of cultural production and despite the limits of this viewpoint, these three men consciously endeavoured to question their internalised sexism and undermine central aspects of hegemonic masculinities.

This research has indirectly highlighted three critical points that warrant a brief discussion in these conclusive remarks in the hope that future scholars will elaborate on these initial findings. First, some topics were conspicuously absent from the work developed by Sottsass, Baruchello and Echaurren. Most notable among these are domestic violence and sexual harassment, which have become foundational tenets of the protests of third-wave feminism, partly explaining its mass appeal. Domestic violence was a rare subject of debate in Italy until the early 1970s,

147 Endrighetti 2020.

148 On the social construction of the male body and the topic of gay masculinity after the 1970s, see Callen 2018 and Kosmala 2013, respectively.

149 Toupin 2014.

male hands are attending to domestic chores. On the whole, the issue of unpaid work generally performed by women (from childrearing to care work) remained largely outside of the three artists' purview.

"The women's movement was the only really interesting and significant revolutionary force at that moment". Forty years later, Baruchello's retrospective assessment, which serves as this article's epigraph, retains important elements of truth. Research on female artists and their work significantly expanded in the 2000s and 2010s while the study of the shifting masculinities of artists and how these transmutations are refracted through their work remains underexamined. Despite this lacuna, the perceived "male crisis", and the consequent gendering of men induced by the second wave of feminism could be counted among its most resounding, if unintentional, victories.

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