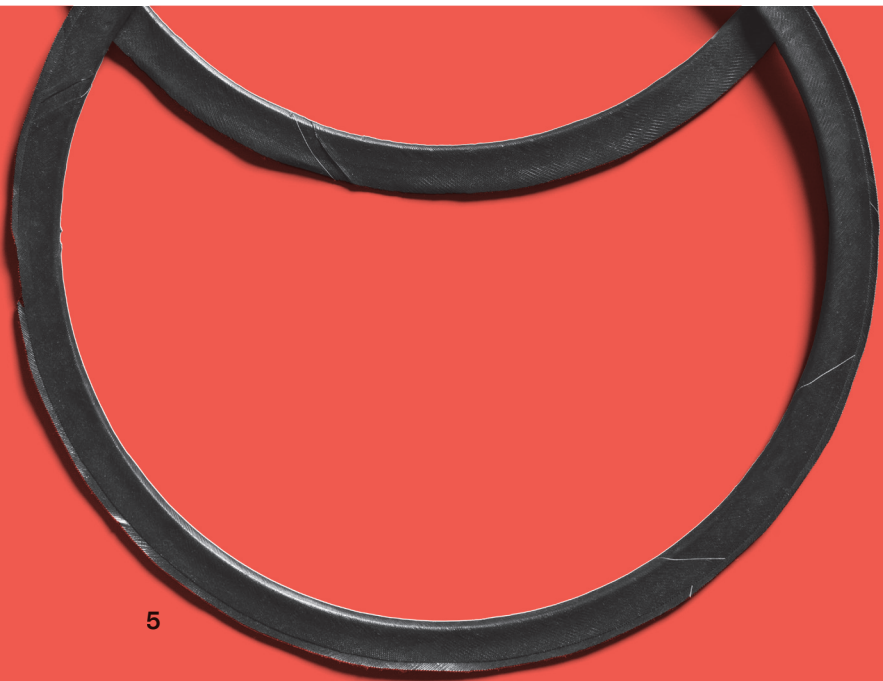
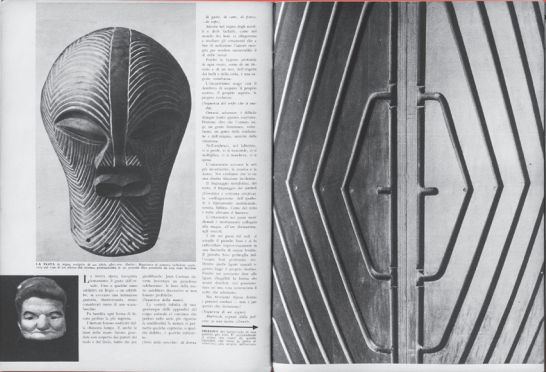


Notes for Cotton/Rubber

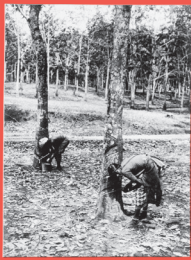
Céline Condorelli



21



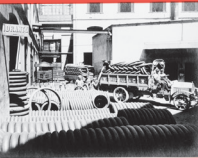
22



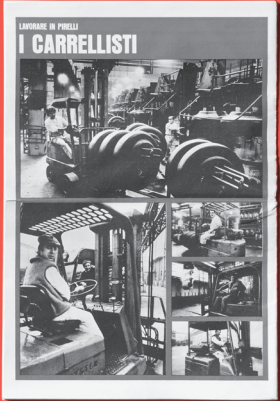
16



17



18



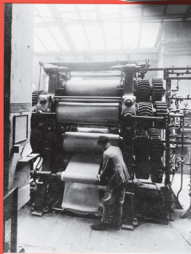
19



12



14



13



15

Notes

1 This is a piece of rubber compound, made by Roberto Di Pasquale, in the Pirelli Factory of Settimo Torinese, Italy. Rubber compound is the result of natural and synthetic rubber being mixed with other ingredients which make it suitable for tyre construction: these include carbon black, which gives the mix its distinctive colour. “The mixing is done in special machines that in our factory have always been called ‘Banbury.’” Luca Gulmini, Unit Manager, Settimo Torinese, 2016.

1.1 This series of images was developed alongside a year-long process of production of an artwork inside the Pirelli factory of Settimo Torinese, outside Turin, that makes high quality tyres.

I decided to consider the Pirelli factory as a possible context for display; a place in which certain things can be shown and made public, and also as a site in which the transformation of materials into tyres takes place as the cumulative effort of individuals and their respective actions, bound into an object that subsequently traverses the earth’s surface, in some ways marking it and thus leaving traces of that collective labour. The factory workers who accompanied me during this process were approached as political, thinking individuals; producers of real objects, and not of profit. I believe that as an artist, I am engaged in the transformation of matter much like they are, and this is what formed the basis for our dialogue. Ultimately, I am fundamentally a person who makes things into other things, using stuff of different natures as raw materials, making work that stands within relations of production, and there is a very small leap from this to looking at the material, social, and political transformations undertaken by raw materials.

The images were produced in a physical, material way: they are constituted by three different types of material collected, arranged and re-arranged over time on a large metallic display structure which forms the red background to the material. The first is discarded fragments from the factory production process of tyres, each made by a particular person who is named, and whom I worked with in 2014. The second is from the 1922 Pirelli & C. Fiftieth Anniversary publication, commemorating half a century

of the company through a meticulous description of the processing of rubber, and extensive photographic documentation of each step of the process that, surprisingly, includes people at work. Finally, the third type of material was collected from the archive of Pirelli’s in-house publications and magazines, both informing and representing its employees through the dramatic changes in the landscape of work taking place through the 1970s, from which were selected contributions by Enzo Nocera, photographer of the Italian social and industrial reality.

1.2 The structure and its display formed a place for discussions and conversations with different people, including Luca Gulmini, employed by Pirelli, and my main interlocutor on the factory shift.

1.3 The “Banbury” mixer is a brand of internal batch mixer, named after inventor Fernley H. Banbury (English scientist and engineer 1881-1963) which has been in production for just over 100 years. It is used for mixing or compounding rubber and plastics, by applying heat and pressure simultaneously. The mixer consists of two rotating spiral-shaped blades encased in segments of cylindrical housings, that intersect so as to leave a ridge between the blades. The blades may be cored for circulation of heating or cooling. Its invention resulted in major labour and capital savings in the tyre industry, doing away with the initial step of roller-milling rubber.

1.4 “The working environment: heat has always been the biggest problem. The new ventilation system is a definite improvement, although it doesn’t solve the whole problem, without a doubt it has had a positive effect... It is worth remembering that in our department there are also problems regarding inter-personal relationships. Human issues are no less important than environmental issues. We have attempted to start a dialogue within the plant. Twice a year, for the last year and a half, each unit has held meetings between workers, foremen, assistants and unit managers, in which people freely air issues regarding internal relations, the environment, production, accidents and quality.” An (unnamed) floor manager at the Bicocca Tyre Factory, 1972.

2 *Fatti e Notizie*. Press. Issue 5. Cover page. ‘I vulcanizzatori’. Milan, 1971.

2.1 Vulcanisation is a thermal process by which raw rubber acquires its elastic properties. To vulcanise a semi-finished (product) it is held for a certain time at a specific temperature in a machine. Although the curing of rubber has been carried out since prehistoric times, the modern process of vulcanisation, named after Vulcan, the Roman god of fire, was not developed until the nineteenth century, mainly by Charles Goodyear. Goodyear gave his name to what is one of the major brands of car tyres, which today speaks less of him or his discovery, and much more of a certain promise of happiness, the good year to come – an ideology of commodity fetishism which not only hides the labour process (of curing rubber), but also conceals an entire world of satisfied desires.

The name and etymology of vulcanisation contributes to the mythical dimension given to the work going on inside the factory, little seen and rarely represented in its own terms, which in this way loses its material, social reality. And yet the labour of cooking rubber is not an ancient myth, it is a specific, chemical method with a particular duration throughout its complex process of production, and a social relation between people and structures, applied to a particular compound of material and processes.

2.2 The image reads: [The Vulcanisers, work problems in two hot departments. The workers speak]. And we know that visual representation always corresponds to a process of foreclosure, to a conclusion – of what is included and excluded, of the chosen relationships between foreground and background, of the connection between subject and object, between medium, support, and that which sustains them, brings them into being, and in photography also of the position between photographer, camera and who or what is being framed. An image is a closed representation, in many ways it hides as much as it reveals.

3 *Fatti e Notizie*. Press. Issue 3. ‘Lavoro al mescolatore’. Milan, 1972, p. 3.

[I work on the mixing plant] reads the title above an image of a worker (named on the next page as Giovanni Gatti) engaged in what appears to be a fast, plastic process with a giant machine. The image is taken from some distance and some height, placing worker and

machine in a context that is just about suggested, and continues beyond the frame: bigger than the individual parts it is constituted of. They are not alone, and fit in a logic larger than they are, in both space, and time.

4 Pirelli Milan factory: one of the rubber-mixing rooms, photographed in 1922.

In this process of production of matter, “la mescola” [the rubber compound] appears in 1922 to be very similar to how I experienced it in 2014, yet in this image the physical presence of the workers, taken on long photographic exposures, has become blurred out of their context, leaving matter and machine in focus, while their own image is in part ghosted, receding.

They reveal an inherent embodied knowledge as operators of what we see, much like my own position, as an artist, collecting and observing.

4.1 Labour is something in which history is still present, tangible, visible, graspable. Unfolding a labour process, therefore, also corresponds to unfolding the historical set of layers that, were we to just look at the resulting product from that same process, would be hidden, dissimulated, forgotten through and by its mere presence. The anachronistic proximity within these images reveals some of these historical layers, and with them, the recognition of parallels and similarities of procedure – more than differences – that take place more than ninety years apart, while their social and technological reality has been completely, and irreversibly transformed. Yet something remains of these labour processes that each image would lose by itself, were it not narrated and contextualised in this way.

The visibility of labour is fragile, precarious, as it is often represented by the very things that obscure it (produced objects). Labour takes place in and through material production, which is how I am using these images to peel back the layers of its making: an otherwise only implied historical dimension to the logics of production, as well as the inherently social aspect of labour, which includes a geopolitical, colonial dimension – as raw materials are transported to the factory, they clarify that connection over and over again.

4.2 Labour is not abstract, it should not be abstracted – as

abstract is exactly what it is not. While engaging in the specific labour processes of the Pirelli factory with some of its workers (the shift), philosophical notions and definitions of work were consistently rejected as completely removed from what is happening, as well as what has happened in the past, in favour of historical, anthropological, or sociological writing, and above all, text written in the first person, descriptive, implicated. Captions and commentaries to images were written or discussed that partly constitute the text annotating these images – translated by myself – to which I have added fragmented thoughts and narratives, gathered, observed and articulated over time.

5 Tyre rim: the headbands secure the anchor to the circle and constitute part of the skeleton of the tyre. In this case it is coated with a reinforcement of rubberised textile which makes the tyre more rigid. Made by Anna D’Aquino.

5.1 These images do not look like anything. What you see in them is not what is in there. This photo essay is not a treatise on political economy, on the exploitation of the working class, or about the emancipation of the factory workers. It is not placed inside nor is it a critique of the workerist movement, or perhaps more specifically, of Autonomia, even though this does constitute a substantial component of the historical context the images address. The images explain nothing and represent nothing; they are made of collected fragments from three different times, containing aspects of material settings and their making that in some way outline, or frame, an understanding of a set of conditions. They outline a situation – interpreted, read, partial, fragmented, incomplete, committed, composed. The resulting series is not a programme for change, nor is it a protest or an exposure of abuse that we are already familiar with: it is an atlas, an orientation device, a register which attempts to describe and map a specific entry into labour, “the human ability to change matter purposefully”. “It not only consists of commodity production, but also engenders social relations and develops community. It possesses obstinacy, its product is history.” (Both quotes Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt. *History and Obstinacy*. New York: Zone Books, 2014. p. 73.)

5.2 Images alone are in fact incapable of addressing a reality which they are supposed to represent and

contain, and in some way stand for – and yet we look at the images only to be subjected to how this very reality has already been appropriated and entirely swallowed up by ideology and capitalism. It is very hard not to experience this condition as alienating, from ourselves, from others, but also from the world. We perceive our own being as social most effectively when looking at pictures of ourselves in social situations, or when faced with an outside in which this social dimension is absent – once we have stepped outside the frame and taken the peculiar position of distant observer of phenomena.

The question reappears when trying to comprehend and adjust how images talk about a notion such as work, when attempting to talk to labour: whether to try and offer an image of work, and if a specific notion of work could be explored through images, against its gradual invisibility, while not representing something that is made, but making something through and with image production.

5.3 If goods and objects can be considered as the crystallisation of the worker’s labour time, they are also the crystallisation of events, of experiences, of knowledge: these images both result from my work and contain images of work by others. In this way an image can function as document as well as visual rewriting of history; the document acts as an objective trace left by events, and is both material proof and part of the production of reality.

5.4 The condition for the images to exist in the first place is one of privilege: access to people, to a private situation, and to an archive of work. Access was given to me as an artist, and was based on a project proposal and a commission which effectively meant that the normal workings of the factory had to be interrupted for that very access to take place. Which is to say that in order to take part in the factory work, and collect evidence, traces, stories and documents, the normal factory work had in fact to be suspended, and that suspension had to be approved by the higher echelons of the Pirelli management. Some other kind of work than the normal work of the factory took place for these images to be made and annotated, and the people I spoke to reflected on that, sharing knowledge, pleasure (the pleasure of interrupting monotony and repetition, and that of a social interaction), camaraderie. The reality of

that engagement, at micro-level, speaks about labour in a way that institutional framing, and the managerial level (that I had access to and had to grant me the right to that micro-level in the first place) do not, and cannot access in such a direct, experiential way. It is a choice not to detach or remove this commentary from that reality, especially not in relation to a pseudo-objective, or analytical gaze.

6 Tyre sidewalls: semi-finished elements used in the assembly of tyres. This constitutes the outer part that protects the tyre from atmospheric agents. Made by Luca Gulmini.

6.1 “Our mode of economic organisation, in which people seem less important than the things they produce, prompts us to stand reality on its head by granting the aura of life to things and draining it from people: we personify objects and objectify persons. This fetishism of commodities, as Marx termed it, is not a universal mental habit; it has its origins in a productive system in which we are split off from our own productive capacities, our ability to make or to do things, which is transformed into a commodity itself, the abstract leveller ‘labor power,’ which is saleable to the boss for wages.” (Martha Rosler. *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings*. October Books. 2004. p. 5.)

7 Bob Noorda. *New Winter Pirelli*. Advertisement. 1957.

7.1 “Our goal was not advertisement as it is meant today, indeed there was a kind of cultural competition with Olivetti.” This is how designer and architect Bob Noorda describes his work for Pirelli, for whom he became art director in 1961. Noorda, along with Lora Lamm, Bruno Munari and Armando Testa, are some of the names that helped build the Pirelli style, and a strong, progressive design and aesthetic for Italian industry and also for Italy in general. Noorda worked for Pirelli, but also for Olivetti and La Rinascente, as did Munari and Lamm. Cultural competition between the various companies also meant the ongoing financing and patronage of the arts in general, including graphic design, contemporary art and experimental music, in a country with a total absence of public funding for the arts, which cemented a relationship between art and industry both specific and rather unique to that context. It is within this history that Pirelli’s availability and my access to the production process can be understood.

8 Bob Noorda. *For a greater mileage of car tyres*. Booklet cover. 1956.

8.1 After graduating from the heavily Bauhaus and De Stijl influenced VNKNO school in Amsterdam, Bob Noorda contributed to introducing modernism to graphic design in Italy. The tyre track is a recurring visual theme in his work: the trace a most direct reduction and clarification of graphic language. His posters do not contain objects but their imprint, reproducible through overprinting in an economical, and visually compelling way; thus, graphic identity gains a new level of abstraction, of emptying out of both labour and material processes, until it becomes pure appearance. And this is precisely where one might be looking for something like labour, to try and understand or capture it. There is a moment of alienation at stake, an invisible moment (incomprehensible perhaps to an outsider): how hard it is to grasp that inherent knowledge.

9 (Not pictured) Threads for woven textile: the textile fabric, after being suitably treated and rubberised, will be one of the main structural elements of the tyre. Made by Francesco Nicoletti.

9.1 It has become almost impossible to disentangle appearance from time (how it enters, regulates life), and images from the things themselves. Collecting fragments from past and present is also a way of disrupting official categories, not necessarily in order to focus on the object of remembrance (that prevailing wage of work), but hopefully in order to open up some of the corners that have been removed from attention and made invisible. I am not in this way looking for something left or forgotten in the shadows of the past – a relationship to an image of labour that the factory embodies in its visual appearance – instead I am bringing into the present the possible contained in the space between fragments, as if rewriting a text from the same words. These all have had a place and role assigned to them, they have all been accounted for and yet are still able to make something visible anew, something which was there all along but was not articulated or recognisable as such. This operation takes place in space, but is actually an action of time, in some ways it might be an action against time, refusing to give up on its possibilities, denying closure, and in this way making time available for rewriting, for interpretation, for that which is still possible.

10 Rubberised metallic reinforcements, commonly called belts. Made by Luca Gulmini.

10.1 “A worker in Frankfurt am Main had spent his life at just one company. This factory went bankrupt. The personnel were dismissed. The worker went to a doctor. He had intense stomach pains, but he had had these for some time, not just since the shutdown of the company. The doctor prescribed pills. ‘I’ve given away the days of my life, said the worker, and in return I get these pills. I can’t accept that. Don’t hang your head, consoled the doctor. I don’t even have the strength left to be angry, answered the worker. Life time for money – hardly a fair trade.’”(Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt. *History and Obstinacy*. Zone Books, 2014. p. 400.)

10.2 Lived time, the time we inhabit, manifests to us in the shape of a forever dislocated present, a present always out of time, perennially fractured, fragmented, broken into myriad tiny forms of mobility and mediation that are never continuous.

Production time seems to have been extended to the totality of life. Is social time entirely subordinated to that of capital? While both struggle and discipline have always been organised through space, inflicted on space, it is time that is under control. Every utterance or form of life, everything that is possible seems to be subsumed to the workings of capital, entirely appropriated, eaten up, capitalised upon. Capital might be taking ownership of all the time that has been freed, but nevertheless multiple stories coexist, and always exceed or escape to some measure the forces that try to control them.

11 Metallic belt: metal reinforcement made of rubberised steel wires, which give form and strength to the tyre. Made by Francesco Nicoletti.

11.1 Material on these pages has been gathered from three moments: 1922, 1971–8 and 2014, throughout which it is possible to recognise that some of the machines are the same, and some of the struggles also.

11.2 The context in time calls for a few more events to be placed in this genealogy: 1919–20 “Biennio Rosso”, massive strikes follow representation by the Turin factory council, starting from the Fiat factory. 1922 Fascist march on Rome and high point of industrialisation in Italy, with Fiat

employing a third of the Turin workforce. 1919 “Autunno Caldo”, mass strikes throughout Italy start what will become the decade of “Anni di Piombo” [Years of Lead]. 1972 is right in the middle of workers’ struggles. 2014 the workers are called employees, the factories have been entirely re-designed, work is considered “clean”.

11.3 But is it the same place? Is this the same factory? It might be in the same location (in this case, 45 metres across a maple tree-lined courtyard), but “first of all, the traditional Fordist factory is, for the most part, gone. It’s been emptied out, machines packed up and shipped off to China. Former workers have been retrained for further retraining, or have become software programmers and started working from home.” (Hito Steyerl, ‘Is a Museum a Factory?’ e-flux Journal. Issue 7, June 2009.)

Or as the case may be the factory is not called a factory, but a “Polo Industriale”, [an industrial pole], and the factory workers – “operai”, from “opera”[action, deed, work, artwork] – do not exist anymore, they are now all employees. Luca described how many more people were working in the factories in the 1970s when he arrived at the tail end of this period. On paper, there is still a large community, but it is spread out in space and time, with management a lot larger than it used to be, and the factory working 24 hours a day, scattering people over three shifts throughout the week. The criticism of the work today is very different, and he describes the great distance between one person and the next along the production process, as he is able to operate a number of machines. Loneliness, not alienation.

11.4 I struggle to understand the difference between an artist’s work [opera] and a worker’s work [operaio] as I talk, work, walk and discuss with Luca Gulmini, employee at Polo Industriale Pirelli, Settimo Torinese. From an experiential point of view, what is the difference between the artist and the machinist, if the artist is in the factory? We are both skilled and working in the same place, engaged in making things out of other things. Again, it is easier to pick the similarities, in time and space, than the differences.

11.5 We establish a time link, which means we work at the same time for a number of days when I am

in the studio, connected through our mobile phones, exchanging actions, operations, activities, movements. Luca marvels at being paid to do that, “as if it was work”. I attempt to explain the system within which my making a living is dependent on. I fail.

11.6 ... At the same time, Luca walks his daily 11,000 metres up and down the production line, and we are somehow connected through space, living the same time, working together.

11.7 “Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity (...), he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought.” (Antonio Gramsci. *Prison Notebooks, The Revolutionary Intellectual*, Oxford University Press, 1989. p. 111.)

12 *Fatti e Notizie*. Issue 2. Back cover. ‘Lavorare in Pirelli. La sala prove pneumatici’. Milan, 1976.

12.1 *Fatti e Notizie* is Pirelli’s monthly internal magazine, established to inform all employees about the news and events related to the Pirelli company, and in this way establish better connections between “all those who work for the same purpose, that is, for the company’s efficiency upon which is the possibility of a greater well-being of all.” Created in 1950, after the difficult years of post-war reconstruction, the magazine carries on through the intense economic growth period of the financial boom years.

In 1971 it takes a new direction under the leadership of Michele Pompili and the Department of Information, which is part of Public Relations. The magazine strives to be a newspaper; it becomes larger (35 × 48cm) and changes to black and white, with a bi-monthly output. During these years social and labour issues emerge, and difficult issues start to appear from both the point of view of the company and from that of the workers: strikes, wages, the energy crisis, high prices. The voice of workers is given space through interviews, surveys, panel discussions on topics related to work, unions, social issues (such as gender equality), world news. The magazine tries to respond to its critics’ accusations of being the “newspaper of the masters”, an “ideological inte-

gration tool”, that “camouflages reality” often distorting the words of workers, by directly giving voice to them. In this brief period of time, leisure items (such as sport and entertainment), give way to inquiries on topics of interest to the lives of workers (schools, kindergartens, transport, women’s work, the new family laws, changes in tax, etc). Enzo Nocera, photographer of the Italian social and industrial reality, undertakes a three-year project titled *Lavorare in Pirelli* [Working at Pirelli], photographing workers according to the division of labour present in the factory. Copies of the magazine are to be found throughout the factory, with fragments pinned in offices, references made directly or implicitly, covers and graphics praised. Contrary to expectations on the other hand, the Pirelli calendar is only present, all over the wall, in one small workshop which produces handmade prototypes of tyre treads and groove patterns – whose six workers spend their days carving these abstract patterns, and are considered the artists of the factory.

13 Stabilimento Milano. Una delle calandre a sei cilindri per la preparazione dei tessuti gommati, [Milan Plant. One of the calendars of six cylinders for the preparation of rubberised fabric], 1922.

The photographer of these images is unknown, much like the workers in his (I assume this is a man) photographs, who also remain nameless but are nevertheless there, both as witnesses and subjects.

13.1 Living labour has not actually been eliminated, and I wanted to include worker’s (bodies) – who are lonely, yes, and therefore often silent.

14 Stabilimento Milano. Una sala di finitura e controllo delle coperture auto, [Milan Plant. A finishing room and tyre quality control], 1922.

14.1 These images appear to give an image to work, an image of labour – if labour is a relation, it is also an unstable one, politically and historically, in its relation to machines, to management, to power structures, and in its relationship to a struggle with material.

14.2 The archival aspect, the documentary quality of this compilation is not so much about finding the past – but the beginning of one’s (Luca’s, my own) claim over that past – making sense of it by bringing something into

the present, and in this way of course propelling towards the future. If this forms or looks like a form of memory it is not a simple re-iteration (nostalgic, longing, in ruins) of that which has passed, but a questioning of the unalterable nature of the past, through a new utterance, an articulation of it. “Speech and action ... possess an enduring quality of their own because they create their own remembrance.” (Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. Chicago 1998. p. 177-8.) In this way it does not state certainties as much as raise questions about how this or that thing might be catalogued, understood, contextualised – problematising the categories that exist in the first place, the certainties and definitions that have been naturalised.

15 Tread band: this is the part of the tyre that is directly in contact with the road, and this is how it looks like before it goes through the vulcaniser. Luca Gulmini, Unit Manager, Settimo Torinese, 2016.

16 *Domus*. Issue 381. August 1961. ‘Italia ’61 Torino. Alla Esposizione del Lavoro.’ p. 1.

16.1 *Expo 61*: In 1961 Italy celebrates the 100th anniversary of its unification with the *International Labour Exhibition* in Turin, which is held in the purpose-built *Labour Palace* by Pier Luigi Nervi, made in collaboration with Giò Ponti, who also curates the exhibition. Different large-scale installations are sponsored by Italian industrial companies who have been paired with architects, themselves commissioned to respond to different themes in relation to labour (“Men at work”). Franco Albini for Pirelli designs the pavilion on scientific research, and experiments with a display that replicates an assembly line for heavy industry. A system of rolls and rails sets infographic material in motion, in an environment in which the sounds of machines are accompanied by Arthur Honegger’s symphonic poem, *Pacific 231*.

16.2 Here we have a rare moment of self-representation on the part of a large company like Pirelli, but also on industry as a whole in-and-for the Italian context. What happens when work is put on display? Work and labour are both elevated to the level of a symbolic national pride, and manipulated to contribute to an image of a modern, progressive, growing, reformed nation. Following the now established tradition according to which industry commis-

sions the most interesting architects, artists and designers of its time, an exhibition is constructed as a large symbolic machine, producing its own display; the labour of material having been replaced by the labour of image-making.

17 Sample of vulcanised rubber compound, packed and compressed between two plastic sheets: newly-mixed rubber compounds are immediately sampled and tested through a machine for their plastic and resistance characteristics. Made by Marco Vinci.

17.1 As inhabitants of an intensely motorised world, we are not familiar with the appearance of the machines that produce the 3.3 billion tyres made every year, and that exist around us at every moment of our lives. Of course this includes the other 3 billion tyres that are dumped every year, making this one of the most ubiquitous, and impossible to eliminate, objects on the globe. Not only do we not know what any of these machines look like, we are also – a vast majority of us at least – largely ignorant and powerless in the face of processes of manufacturing of most of the objects that surround us and that we use every day. We do not know how to read the world in terms of the processes of its own making.

18 Photograph. Stabilimento Milano. Cortile di spedizione dei pneumatici e delle gomme piene. Milan, 1922.

18.1 The stock yard in the Via Ponte Seveso plant is where solid tyres were dispatched from, much in the same way as today’s carrellisti move around and transport tyres which will in turn navigate the world’s roads.

19 *Fatti e Notizie*. Press. Issue 3-4. Back cover. ‘Lavorare in Pirelli. I Carrellisti’. Milano, 1975.

19.1 “In the 1970s, there was a period in which we made ‘islands’, which were a nice evolution, formed by a group of workers who could operate all the machines: there was the *carrellista* [carriage operator], who supplied all needed materials, there were the four people who worked on machines and a replacement, who would step in whenever someone needed a break. The machines basically worked non-stop for 480 minutes. This allowed us to reduce costs and get maximum productivity from machines that never stopped. If a worker was not feeling well one day,

tyres he couldn’t produce were made by the rest of the group, so that by the end of the month the target tied to bonuses was reached.” Severio Santopietro, from an interview with Roberta Garruccio on 4/02/2010 in Settimo Torinese.

19.2 What is the difference between this before and its after? I used to see tyres as forms, material, waste, rubber and black patterns, marks and ubiquitous objects. I look at tyres and I see the work, I see living labour. Like any object, like any commodity, once you see the work, it stops being an object and becomes part of a process, and the fact that – just like art – any work is always part of the world it attempts to address.

20 *Fatti e Notizie*. Press. Issue 3-4. Back cover. ‘Lavorare in Pirelli. I magazzinieri.’ Milan, 1972.

20.1 Can these compiled images say something else than what you see in them, no matter what I say? Perhaps they witness my own contextualising – choosing to place a practice, or myself, within a particular genealogy: the historicity of the logic of production, with a prehistory still present, tangible, regardless of whether that is acknowledged explicitly or not. The context I choose is rooted in a geopolitical colonial dimension, and an embodied knowledge of a labour process, of which something remains and registers in its materialisation, its condensation. This is a way to acknowledge that indeed the material organisation of our practices is inseparable from those practices in the first place.

This positioning entails temporarily acting as an archeologist of the present, and requires a process of gathering, of archiving, of notating, and recording heterogenous social temporalities, starting from two very specific ones: that of myself in relationship to that of the people of a factory shift.

21 *Rivista Pirelli*. Issue 04. July-August 1949. ‘Leonardo Sinisgalli. Subject for a documentary.’ p. 52-53.

21.1 “Humanity has been mechanised in its taste, and does not believe in ornament anymore. Where will we re-encounter the frames and friezes that used to decorate temples?” The articles in the *Pirelli* magazine are signs of how industry chooses to convey culture, while retaining a strong identity as pa-

tron and supporter of the arts. Amongst the articles other experimental formats are present, such as this hypothetical documentary proposal by poet and critic Leonardo Sinisgalli. Pirelli in fact produces several audio-visual projects, and goes quite far into the development of a neo-realist film on post-war Milan, a sort of Milan Year Zero. The film, which will never be realised, was to be directed by Roberto Rossellini, who spends two years working on it in vain.

21.2 The spread, and the proposal for an unmade film, is surprising, perhaps shocking to my eyes in its formal approach to material production: what emerges is an uncomfortable, beautifully crafted parallel with tyres as mysterious, extraordinary, aesthetic objects, naturalised by being put in relation to African masks and face masks for cinema. In this way the tyre becomes pure appearance: an abstraction, a topography, recalling Bob Noorda’s graphics. All traces of its own making having been completely erased, as of course this appears today as a text book illustration of the transformation of labour into a commodity form, the fetish object.

21.3 Sinisgalli is a major figure of the intellectual discourse of Italian industrialisation, and he is largely responsible for reinforcing the relationship between culture and industry, mostly through the magazine he edits and writes in, *Civiltà delle macchine* [Civilisation of Machines]. “I found the culture of the West had remained incredibly backward and sceptical about technique, about engineering. I mean that the discoveries of Archimedes and Leonardo, Cardano and Galilei, Newton and Einstein had been evaded by cultural production. I wanted to break through the doors of laboratories, observatories, and research cells. I was convinced that there is a symbiosis between intellect and instinct, between reason and passion, between real and imaginary. It was urgent to me to attempt a new mixing and mingling, a graft, even at the cost of sacrificing purity.”

22 Photograph. Alternate tapping on half tree. Technique of half her-ringbone. Java, 1920.

22.1 This photograph of rubber tapping was amongst the documents collected by young Alberto Pirelli from the plantations he established in Java. After travelling to Brazil and attempting to set-up a plantation there, discouraged by the difficulties

of the slavery-like structure, prices and competition, Pirelli sets his eyes on South-East Asia. The rubber boom had catastrophic effects on the Amazon Indians, and decimated, amongst others, the Putumayo population. Europeans used to colonial rule report horror and atrocity unleashed on the Indians of the Amazon, in order to provide waterproof wear and tyres to wealthy middle-class westerners.

22.2 The Hevea brasiliensis is originally an Amazonian species, and the countries of the Amazon basin dominated the market at the beginning of the international rubber trade. Brazil tried in vain to prevent seeds from being exported, and in 1876, the Englishman Henry Wickham smuggled 70,000 seeds to London, a feat for which he earned himself an English knighthood. Subsequently, 2,800 plants were raised at the Royal Botanical Gardens in London and then shipped to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). From this point, the British and Dutch draw upon their vast resources of cheap colonial labour to establish a low-cost, labour-intensive alternative rubber industry. Pirelli, after failing to produce rubber in cut-throat competition in Brazil, establishes a plantation in Java – this later also proved to be a failure, and the company has been buying rubber from the South-East Asian market ever since.

22.3 “The life of rubber plantation workers in the Far East is a miserable one indeed, even if it is far better than it was in the past. Anybody with some humanity can sense that it is right and necessary to have rapid improvements, but except the fact this issue should be tackled on a general level rather than that of a single plantation, there is the serious matter of whether these improvements – if not offset by higher productivity or a reduction in costs – may jeopardize plantation rubber from competing with synthetic rubber. This is an emblematic example of the painful interdependence that often links social and economic problems.” from a letter by Alberto Pirelli to his father, 1922.