KEEP IT SIMPLE MAKE IT FAST!

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# 3.2 DIY and Independence as means of cultural resistance and artistic production

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Abstract

The contribution is part of my doctoral research project that investigate DiY and Independence as means of aesthetic and cultural production inscribed in historical libertarian conception of art and artists in society. The research steps out from the Neapolitan scene where a group of artists started a series of events; this group is part of a larger set of practices which operate as a form of cultural resistance, fracturing the field of the dominant culture and creating a space of freedom where themes of language, space and relationships become problematic. Here takes place the experimentation of different expressive languages and modality of relationship, arising the political aspects as well, connected to such practices. As such, it is the experimentation with one's own cultural and political identity.

Keywords: *DIY, independence, Napoli, artistic identity, performance, libertarian.*
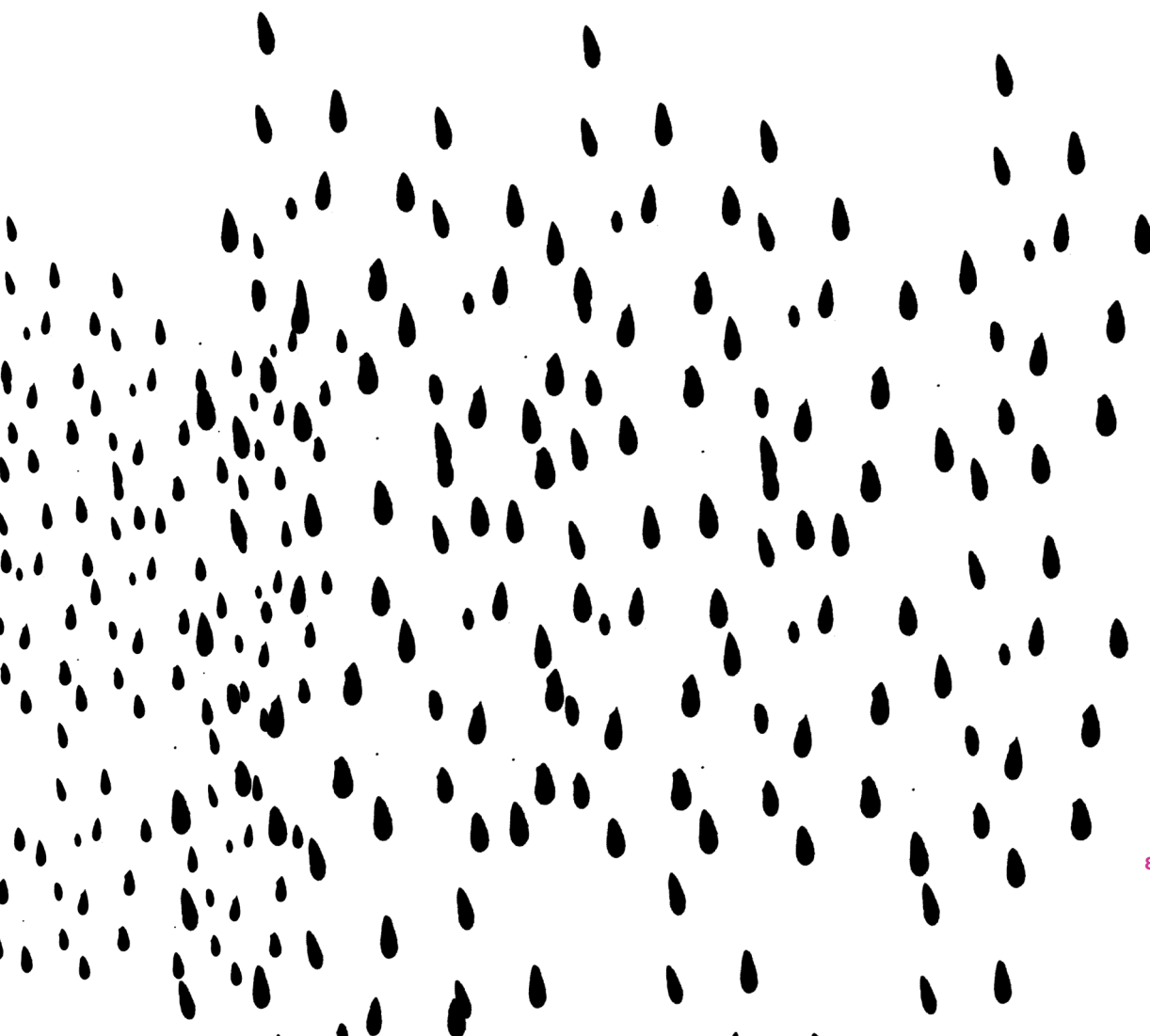
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This contribution investigates Italian DIY practices related to independent artistic and aesthetic creation, inscribed in historical libertarian conception of art and artist's role. At the end of 19th century, classic anarchist thinkers were questioning the concept and the role of art and artists in society. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, denigrating the concept of "art for art" thought that the art, by then degenerated, addressed only a small minority and in doing so neglected both the *true* and the *ideal,* thus becoming a mere object of luxury, leisure and immorality, an article of prostitution. In asking the artist to become more social, Proudhon wasn't asking to renounce to the aesthetic quality, on the contrary, he believed that the artist would be truly revolutionary only if he would not separate the aesthetic quality from the ethic value in his work, for a misunderstood concept of 'art for the sake of art' (Ciovolani, 2000). The art, therefore, should be at the same time realist and idealist, it should depict reality and point to the ideal: "l'art a son principle et sa raison d'être dans une faculté spéciale de l'homme, la faculté esthétique. Il consiste, avons-nous ajouté, dans une représentation plus ou moins idéalisée de nous-mêmes et des choses, en vue de notre perfectionnement moral et physique" (Proudhon, 1865, p.218).

Other thinker, such as Kropotkin, Bakunin, Grave, basically sustained the idea that art shouldn't be detached from the social reality and that artists shouldn't enclose in their ivory tower or, worst, they shouldn't think they were better than common people. Artists must know and learn that the artefact of their *genius* was depending on the collective intelligence and creativity. Bakunin and Kropotkin in particular, saw the artists as a new caste, enclosing in itself to create and reclaim some privileges. Both saw in the modernity the highest expression of human creativity and Kropotokin, with a surprisingly contemporary eye, could already appreciate the power of the beauty of a machine, in which, he believed, the man could enjoy the results of his intelligence, he writes:

> *Seeing how a gigantic paw, coming out of a shanty, grasps a log floating in the Nevá, pulls it inside, and puts it under the saws, which cut it into boards; or how a huge red-hot iron bar is transformed into a rail after it has passed between two cylinders, I understood the poetry of machinery. In our present factories, machinery work is killing for the worker, because he becomes a lifelong servant to a given machine, and never is anything else. But this is a matter of bad organization, and has nothing to do with the machine itself […] I fully understand the pleasure that man can derive from a consciousness of the might of his machine, the intelligent character of its work, the gracefulness of its movements, and the correctness of what it is doing; and I think that William Morris's hatred of machines only proved that the conception of the machine's power and gracefulness was missing in his great poetical genius.* (Kropotkin, 1899, p.118)

Considering the inextricability of the aesthetic quality and the ethic value, and the 'poetry of machinery' from which men can experience pleasure instead

of only alienation, the Italian case, as well as DiY in general, could be read as a practical translation, or a practical articulation of the inheritance of those instances. Taking DiY not as a *culture*, but as a tactic of survival, we can read the experience of a group of artists and friends based in the city of Napoli, in South Italy. Between 2008 and 2013, in the Campania region and in the city of Napoli in particular, invisible and subterranean artistical fluxes developed, bringing to the establishment of connections between artists coming from all over Europe, USA, South America, and Asia. One of the main points of intersection was a small festival that started in Avellino, a small town surrounded by mountains, the festival was named *Altera! Pratiche non convenzionali.*

It was created by a group of passionate artists, researchers and indefatigable experimenters such as: Mario Gabola[83], Sec_[84], Andrea Saggiomo[85], Gaelle Cavalieri[86], Tiziana Salvati[87], Gianluca Pellegrini, Francesco Gregoretti, M. DellaMorte[88] amongst others.

The group opted a particular attitude and a singular organizational method: the complete self-exclusion from the mainstream circuit and the recourse to minimum economical resources. A mobile and fast organization that, combined with a dense net of spaces, allowed to move easily from place to place; a net composed especially of relationships and interpersonal exchanges, a net that permitted the artists to recognize and select each other, to get in relation with poetics and aesthetics similar to theirs, to get to know new strategies and different ways to approach the specific linguistic of their art and to refine their research bringing to a complete renounce of the idea of artistic product, of fame, and of the definition of 'artist' (in the sense of someone who belong to a caste, trying to define an exclusive territory from which he can reclaim some privileges).

83 Mario Gabola, born 1981, is a saxophonist whose first musical experience belonged to the marching bands and, later, to the free-jazz scene; then he moved towards more experimental forms meanwhile he started organizing concerts in small venues in the Campania region. He collaborates with musicians such as Roberto Bellatalla, Arnadu Rivière, Alexei Borisov and Olga Nosova, amongst others, and he is a massive presence in several experimental music group. Besides, Gabola connect to his artistic activity the organization of workshops related to the manipulation of technological devices. With the musician Sec_, he has played at the Experimental Intermedia hosted by Phil Niblock in New York, and in Israel.

84 Sec_ (aka Domenico Napolitano), born 1985, is a musician, composer, sound designer, author of articles and essays published on national and international magazines; recently he started a PhD at the University of Napoli "Suor Orsola Benincasa" with a project focused on vocal technologies. His election instruments are the Revox with tapes, laptop, synthesizer and different electronic devices; the collaboration with international artist such as Jérôme Noetinger, Dave Phillips, Franck Virgoux made him a reference point for the Italian and European music scene. He was also member of the artistic direction and organizational team of the festival *Flussi* set in Avellino (the last edition was in 2016). Nowadays he connected his experimental vocation with the professional organization creating, together with Renato Grieco, Giulio Nocera and Andrea Bolognino to the festival *La Digestion* in collaboration with Morra Foundation in Napoli.

85 Andrea Saggiomo begins his artistic path as theatre director and actor, founding the theatre company *Piccola Officina Teatro* (after renamed *Compagnia Andrea Saggiomo*). After several important production, in 2011 the company ceased its institutional theatre journey. Saggiomo has always been interested in experimentation with analogic film camera and so started a project with a Super8 camera and the production of sound based on light and photoresistor. He works with Gaelle Cavalieri, in most of the performances, and with international film-maker; he also collaborates to the programming of Indipendent Film Show ideated by Raffaella Morra and held in some location of the Morra Foundation.

86 Gaelle Cavalieri, from Florence but living in Napoli for 15 years, starts her artistic path in the theatre world, working as light designer of the *Compagnia Andrea Saggiomo*. Already photographer and painter, with a minute but athletic and strong body, she was perfect as performer, so she started acting in the plays for which she was meant to light design. She was stable presence in every production of the company and still works with Andrea Saggiomo on some projects. As soloist she experiments the construction of small audio device composed with disparate materials (iron sprigs, balloons, screws) accompanying an intense work on the sonorities of ungraceful voice.

87 Tiziana Salvati, from a small town nearby Bari (South Italy), attended the master's degree in Visual Arts and Disciplines of Spectacle in the Accademia di Belle Arti in Napoli, where she graduated with and experimental thesis in Photography. During the years of the academy, she collaborated with various artistic groups such as *Quarta Pittura*. She specializes in photo-dynamic technique while continuing her pictorial work using different materials (oil, acrylic, assemblage). Later she dedicated to the multimedia interaction through the use, in her live performances, of TV screens, closed-circuit television camera, physical actions and projectors. Since 2005 she realizes stop motion cartoon movie and since 2013, she collaborates with musicians, performers, actors and dancers.

88 M.DellaMorte moves in between theatre and performance; she developed an original and hybrid formula: research without intellectualism, physicality without satisfaction, words without self-referentiality. Her obscure and obsessive poetic, attracted by the horrific and the morbid, recall sometimes the *actionism*, but corrected in the light of a research on scenic devices and DiY practices that is characterised by an irony charged with paradox.

The festival, in six editions, involved eight towns in the Campania Region and more then 80 artists both from the local scene and from international context. It is important to underline, here, the fact that already at its early stage the group acted criticizing the mainstream world of art and music, often expressed in those kinds of events where the spectacular dimension has more weight than the relational one. Maybe the first visible sign of this critic attitude was that all the indications about the kind of performance (music, video, theatre performance, and so on) had disappeared; there wasn't the urge to label an artistic expression with the strict language of critics and market.

The end of the festival didn't mean the end of the group's activity, in fact they designed other two events back in 2010: one was an experiment in the streets of the city, the other a kind of gathering of artists and friends in the countryside. The first one, named *Queste quattro cose* (*These four things*) took place in Napoli in the month of August, when the city was almost empty: four performances in the streets, one for each Saturday, without authorization and with the electricity borrowed from local shops. The spaces were chosen right in the city heart: Piazza Dante and Port'Alba, an open passage that connect Piazza Dante to Piazza Bellini and that has a large arch forming a semi-covered space at the beginning and at the end of the passage. One of the performances, starring musician Sec_ and performer M. DellaMorte, was everything but the normal shows we are used to experience in the streets: loud noise sounds, *musique concrète*, grotesque voice and small gestures, with several people passing and responding with screams or jokes to the scenic actions. After the performance, wine was offered to the people that had remained until the end and in a short time a ball appeared, and a spontaneous volleyball match, involving the artists and the 'former' audience, started and went on until 1:00 am.

The other event had no name and was set in the countryside in the province of Benevento, where two of the members of the group had moved seeking relief from the chaotic urban life. Their house was a small two floor house, with a large garden. The group decided to meet there and show each other some of their personal project, fragments, preview, essays, and experiments. They went there with camp tents and spent two days organizing the food and the performances day by day.

The idea of this unnamed, undefined, event arose firstly because the artists felt the danger to be too much recognisable as a cultural entity or organization; or worst to be included in the good practice of cultural and social innovation that the city was experiencing at that time (starting in those years the topic of "commons" had entered the political agenda of the city, very often with nothing more than a propaganda based on "assenting" to the occupation of buildings in order to receive consent from marginal social forces traditionally opposing to the mayor). Another concern of their critics was the so called 'festivalization of the culture', where they could only see a commodification of lifestyles, of artistic creation, and a simple way to buy an experience that seemed as much as possible *real*.

Even though the first intuitive move is to consider this lack of 'identity' as an identity itself, it is possible not to follow this path that can results as a naïve approach to their work: it is not in the uncertainty of their borders as a group and as artists that the identity has to be sought, but in the perversion of common strategies, in the appropriation of technological knowledge, in the will to share competences and experiences.

In the case of the event in the countryside, so, we are not faced with a regular festival structure, not even with the regular relationship between performer and audience and between the people involved; there isn't an intended structure, even if it is possible to recognise some elements referring to different cultural situations: a symbolic stage; the rural space and a shared responsibility.

· The symbolic stage recalls live arts and theatre. The settings, here, always follow the classic division between audience and artist, that's to say it follow the visual implant of the spectacular event, even in those performances that seek another spatial relation with the spectator. Regarding this aspect, we should point to the fact that the intention is never directed towards any kind of *participation*, a keyword for a lot of the European art of the last decades, as the lucid book of Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells* shows (Bishop, 2012). In this respect the audience is left as simple audience; because the participation is believed to be real only when every participant knows exactly all the details of the event they are involved in.

· Rural space recalls the tradition of some free festivals (McKay, 1996). Here we can recognize most of the features of festival as sites to explore new form of encounters, different ways of living, places where to develop or reinforce identity and to strengthen the relationships with those in that community, to develop and preserve the well-being (O'Grady, 2015). One difference is significant: this event is not intended for a proper audience and it is not intended to gather people with the same cultural inclination or artistic taste; it is conceived as a party where everyone share the same position, in different moments and where the focal point is to share one's own results. There isn't an entrance fee and very rarely (only once until last year) an artist needs to be reimbursed, this is due to the voluntary adhesion, on the wish to be there.

· Shared responsibility for food, cooking and cleaning recalls a *commune* lifestyle. This responsibility is a request from the beginning. Each one is responsible for common spaces, for washing and preparing the food and the supplies; the organization of the duties follow a day-by-day (or better an hour-by-hour) plan. It is a commune feature, it's true, but only for a concise time, no one whish to live in a commune.

These 3 elements are combined in a situation that is a retreat both from everyday life and from any kind of confrontation with an occasional street audience; on the contrary, with the four performance staged in the street (*Queste quattro cose*) we can still talk of an artistic identity of the group confronted with occasional audience (or an audience of non-spectator), of an artistic disruption in everyday life, an incision of a normal situation with theatrical and artistic signs (Vicentini, 1981). Looking closer, we can focus on the kind of space used in the countryside and the kind of relationship between people that arise in it, differentiating the audience identity as such and the artist's identity.

The spaces are, generally, two with completely different structural and environmental characteristics: a room of about 20 square meters, located on the first floor of the tufa house, completely painted in black; the open space,

in front of the tufa staircase and the henhouse. Depending on the type of performance, the most appropriate space is chosen: smaller and intimate performances are assigned to the black room, while concerts (especially those with drums) are played at the 'henhouse'. The dark, closed room recalls directly the traditional *scena all'italiana*, a space that opens *upon the otherwhere*, a magic cave that, with its emptiness, opens the possibility of writing within the space (Mango, 2003); but it also recalls, as an appropriate metaphor, the *camera obscura*: a space for the delicate phase of the development of an image, in this case the development of a performative image. In this kind of space, the people almost instinctively occupy the place of a proper audience, a compacted one, assuming the related behavioural norms and entering directly the world of the artist without any sort of distraction.

The open space, emancipated by the twentieth century theatre practices that invade public spaces, streets, unconventional places, recalls two operations: it is true that it is the expression "of the will to deny oneself to a certain system of production and fruition of the spectacle that wants it reduced to the status of goods" (Mango, 2003, p.183) and it is also true that it constitutes "a liminal territory, a non-coded space [...] in which a new relationship between spectacle and public and, more generally, between art and life happens" (Mango, 2003, p.183); on the other hand, unlike those theatrical practices, such as the Living Theater, which tried to "get out of the institutional places of art and invade those of life" (Mango, 2003, p.184) and transform a non-place into a theatrical one, here we witness a voluntary retreat, or disappearance, from those same non-institutional places. What is missing here is the will to affect a daily situation with theatrical signs; one withdraws to an isolated place, far from possible casual or solicited contaminations between art and life.

The audience, in this setting, is free to behave more loosely while the performer is forced to assume the interferences of the situation in the play. The relation inscribed in this context is not fixed and while it allows the spectator a certain degree of freedom (Wilkie, 2002a; 2002b), it restrains the artist's freedom. The artist can also decide to play on the inadequacy of one of the spaces to the performance and, for instance, some musicians with the aesthetics of the high volumes, can choose to play indoors to saturate the environment and create a disturbing effect in the 'audience'. Likewise, theatrical performances, can be performed outdoors, to challenge the dispersive conditions of the open environment and to solicit the 'spectators' to develop a sense of intimacy in the absence of a space that fosters it.

In this context, the whole *situation* of the event can be read and analysed from the theatrical point of view: a physical frame, completely detached from everyday life, (the rural space in its entirety) and a time frame are established (2 or 3 days); within this framework everything that happens responds to 'other' rules and behavioural norms; there are roles, but interchangeable; there are fixed structures for the functioning of the whole event that everyone knows and, in this sense, one can speak of an area in which everything that happens has those artistic qualities that establish an inextricable link between art and life. In other words, the whole situation, and for the whole duration, can already be read as an artistic, performative fact, in which the art goes beyond its specific linguistic, renouncing at it, to return an almost exclusively aesthetic experience of life.

Read in this sense we can't avoid stressing firstly the position towards what is called *audience development* and, secondly, the features that make this

event more akin to a party, a feast. For that concerns the audience development, the current and growing attention to the audience characterized by the care for the pedagogical and social aspect of participation in the play, is seen as more akin to a sort of *consumer development*: forming an audience –and make it loyal - so that it can consume more theatrical or spectacular products, but feeling as a part of an exclusive community and equipped with its new toolbox that thrills to use.

It is clear that both the events we have seen here are careless regarding any sort of *audience development*, especially the one in the countryside where the relationship is so deeply criticized that the only request is to share, at least for some moment, both the role of the audience and that of performer: who first see, acts later. Due that performing is not mandatory, each one has to provide its energy for the functioning of the whole situation; the attention is shifted on the friendship relations that already exist or that can come into existence in that very moment and, in this sense, this event is more like a feast.

Having already said that there isn't an entrance ticket, we can add there isn't even a bar with volunteer serving drink or food: everyone knows where everything is and, also, there is no need to pay, for everything has been payed collectively. As a feast, a party, we can think about this space as a space of latent resistance that fractures the field of the dominant culture creating a space of freedom where themes of language, space and relationships become problematic and are confronted with artistic means. In this freed space takes place the experimentation of different expressive languages and different modalities of relationship between those involved, arising the political aspects as well connected to such practices. As such, it is the experimentation with one's own cultural and political identity. It is in these spaces that the solitude and the sense of powerlessness of an artist (of a person) meets the solitude and the sense of powerlessness of another, and it is right in this meeting that the first political act is situated.

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