Performing (Art) Institutions.

Against the autonomy of aesthetics

by Ilenia Caleo

translated by Gabriella Riccio
Performance and instituent capacity

“We don’t need new art, but new institutions instead”, thus Coco Fusco\(^1\) declared in October 2020 when, amid the Black Lives Matter outburst, we begin to realize that art institutions - museums, biennials, festivals, theaters, cultural centers - despite the declarations of intent, they continue to be spaces for the reproduction of a white, Eurocentric and patriarchal knowledge.

I would like to look at the relationship between art and political activism through a lens opening up on instituent practices because I believe it can account for the aesthetic dimension and the political dimension as interrelated, “inter-acting” forces, which mutually co-establish themselves in a continuous motion of material experimentation. When the reappropriation of art institutions is conceived and carried out in continuity with artistic practices, there is a different involvement of the artists, who are involved in a process of subjectivation, instead of a mere commitment or participation. It is not a question of taking a position on something that happens elsewhere or to others, but of putting into play and redesigning one’s biography, material conditions, relational and productive systems, multiple economies that operate continuous changes of scale - from the personal to the political, from singularities to what we can define transindividual\(^2\). Art is therefore reconfigured as a space of radical imagination, capable of rethinking the status of institutions, artistic and not\(^3\), as well as that of creation, aesthetics, and languages.

With Deleuze of “Instincts and Institutions”, we can describe institutions as expressions of imaginative power and social creativity, places where tendencies and desires manage to have an impact on the real\(^4\), and where the world becomes available as a space for action. So says Sara Ahmed, providing a feminist perspective on the relationship between spatiality, acting, and (from my point of view) institutions, in which the bodily dimension is decisive: what we come into contact with, shapes us\(^5\). This availability of space for action is not uniformly distributed: not all bodies and subjects can access it in the same way, or have the same forces, temporalities, materialities at their disposal. This “availability” differs from body to body, defined by proximity or distance from this space of possibility, and it is crossed by inequalities. Instituent practices generate systems of proximity, in which languages, experiences, knowledges, habits, postures are reproduced, and in

\(^4\) G. Deleuze, “Istinti e istituzioni” (1955), Mimesis, Milano 2014.
which variation and codification are continuously at stake. In addition to aesthetic and poetic practices, writing and composition unfold their full potentials in their ability to bring new political and bodily performances into the world, thus questioning the existing framework. Hence, gesture, body, and public space as a generative choreographic but also political sequence.

How to create new institutions? Can this work of political creation draw on procedures, repertoires, gestures, and knowledges trained in the arts? In the era of exhaustion of political and social mediations, can artistic institutions function as alternative spaces for new citizenship and social cooperation? What autonomies does artistic and creative work need, to express itself as a full liberated power? In which subjectivity is it embodied? These are the focuses around which this path unfolds, composting theoretical issues with inventions that come from the practices. As Valeria Graziano writes, what is at stake is understanding whether the artistic field, emerging from an idea of self-sufficiency, can become a tool capable to generate other ways of creating:

“The recreational industries always corresponded to exercises in the fragile temporality of sheltering both our labor force, allowing us to experience its potency as it disentangles itself away from capitalist forms of relation, but also to experience our constitutive difference not as something to be merely managed, but as the true source of the pleasure found in the ‘creative function’ of the body politics.” ⁶

Dark Matter (1). What do we say when we say "artist"?

I have been working for twenty years in the performing arts in different roles: as a performer, actress, author, dramaturg, and educator in the transmission of knowledge and training. As an “artist” it is politically necessary for me to destabilize the status of exceptionality and separateness of the artistic work. A status enjoyed on the level of social recognition and that contributes to the construction of an abstract and almost mystical figure, the last remnant of a now-vanished aura, and intertwined with the all-male myth of the “genius-creator”. On the contrary, and in spite of any claim to the autonomy of the aesthetic, those who work in the artistic field find themselves with both feet firmly planted in the material swamp of the slippery real neoliberal economies, where - too much often in fact - the differences of social class and origin decisively contribute to the progress of professional biographies and "careers". Art - when observed under the lens of the work and forms-of-life of those who practice it - is anything but a sharp object with well-defined contours. Besides the more official, recognized, and variously "contractualized" works, there is, as a matter of fact, a whole "dark matter” that has no name. Borrowing the definition from astrophysics, that is how Gregory Sholette defines the whole hidden activity that institutions, ministerial programs, and influential voices of culture do not

recognize, yet constitutes the complex and multidimensional body of the production and economies of the art world:

“it includes makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organised practices - all work made and circulated in the shadows of the formal art world, some of which might be said to emulate cultural dark matter by rejecting art world demands of visibility, and much of which has no choice to be invisible.”

As a note of my personal biography - being pretty aware it being part of a collective biography - I would add that in this dark matter, we might also count all those activities that are not closely artistic, yet allow the sustainability - always on the verge of survival - of the very fragile economies of those who work in the art world in Italy. As a consequence of the absence of a welfare system recognizing the statute of structural intermittence of the artistic work and its specific forms of precariousness, the off-work and unemployment-covered hours must actually be filled by other jobs. Jobs that must themselves be precarious and intermittent enough to combine with the unpredictable instability of artistic activity: jobs that therefore one may be able to abandon at any time in the event of an artistic engagement or the confirmation of an artistic residence, without any consequences: jobs that must allow (unpaid) time to dedicate to the development and promotion of one’s own artistic projects: jobs which must be invisible enough, not to affect the identity of the “artist”. Being a bartender, a waitress, a dishwasher, working in catering - the catering sector being the dark side as opposed to the glittering of the art world - working in clubs, doing graphics, projects in schools, art-linked teaching in the most different fields, workshops, seasonal jobs, and moreover cleaners, riders, babysitters, call center operators, leafleting, and so on. Who am I, how am I defined socially? Low-paid, unsecured, and mostly undeclared jobs that reappear at different times in the artist’s professional life and not just in the early years of training. In the absence of welfare measures, these junk jobs or stopgap jobs fill and compensate for an existence marked by an intermittence not only of income but also of professional identity, a discontinuity that defines subjectivities with a temporality "other" than that of the wage-labor society. "Against-the-time jobs" - one may define them - which have the effect of fragmenting, even more, our already fragmented enough lives. So many pieces that often struggle to make a whole.

How can we explain this composite economy made up of many often concurrent and inconsistent identities? And again, is it really possible to speak of the "artists" without naming this material component that absorbs life, time, and energy, and which is treated as the shameful shadow to be omitted from curricula and portfolios?

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Practices of radical imagination

Start from the practices is an indication that comes from feminist thought and which allows us to reposition the relationship between art and politics in the contemporary world. A relationship not without shadows and ambiguity. Performing arts are here meant as practices, as ways of human doing, as a space for counter-hegemonic narratives, rather than as art objects that can be decoded according to the canons of aesthetics or art history. bell hooks write - in his fundamental reflections on the need to decolonize narratives, representations, and on the strategic centrality of cultural formations - a language is a place of struggle.8

Following this indication, two possible tracks open up. One track is about investigating artistic processes focusing on the experimentation of languages and the imagination of the sensible, bringing the world to the world every time anew. Giving the final cut to the original gap between feminism and art in Italy, Carla Lonzi already in 1977 in the “Female Revolt Second Manifesto” declared that the bare theme setting is no sufficient criterion for evaluating the political consistency of an artistic (or political) action. Indeed, quite the opposite: “the more you deal with the woman, the more alien you are to me”. A radical and final declaration - displaced on the level of the aesthetics - that cuts ties with a whole tradition of political art that thematizes and argues, tells, and represents without affecting the existing canons and grammars. Art expresses a part of its power in the ability to make the world - or in Rancière words, to open up a new distribution of the sensible: “aesthetic acts as configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity”9. In this sense, language is to be considered among the institutions of social organization, starting with Hume who theorized the mobility and the evolutionary capacity of social institutions as a result of historically and culturally determined conventions. Nature and the artifact are configured in a bidirectional dynamic co-implicating and modeling each other - a theme upon which feminist thought has dug and continues to dig unprecedented and generative paths.10 Thus, crystallized social relationships are naturalized - as it happens to the relationship between the sexes and the institution of heteronormative binarism - yet, with Butler, they can also be subverted at any time.11 It’s about interrupting the repetition of the performance and of the given repertoires, in order to open up to the instituent potential and the rewriting capacity that the performative makes manifest. It is in these connections and at the productive intersection of those debates,

that the idea of "fictional institutions" opens up. To be understood in both ways: as the conventional and artificial the character of the institutions, which are therefore to be considered "fictions", narratives that can always be rewritten from scratch: but also - thus Blanga-Gubbay and Piazza - as a terrain of possible falsification and invention, which trespasses into the exercise of art. Here we investigate the possibility that invented institutions, as well as aesthetic acts, can impact reality with transformative effects. At the same time, fictional institutions have the capacity to crumble and tarnish the alleged solidity of the existing institutions: "they do not claim their realness, but rather transport the same ideas of institutionality as in the realm of fiction." 12.

A parallel track - one upon which I focus further below - attempts recognition of the political action of artists and art workers who have activated processes of subjectivation and instituent proposals. In Italy at different temporal heights and in different ways, these struggles have taken on the practice of occupying, managing, or self-governing spaces as a form of artistic precariousness self-organization. The occupation of spaces traditionally is an invention made available to movements since the 1960s and 1970s, and which in Italy has an extraordinary intensity - from housing occupations to the occupation of workplaces, social centers, urban spaces, and abandoned lands. In the very same years and in addition to those occupations, the artistic experimental scene also passed through the creation of capillary networks of non-institutional places - from cellars to galleries, and independent festivals. The Italian feminist movement, unlike the North American one, rather than negotiating entry into "major" institutions - whether they were artistic institutions or university departments has - has known an extraordinary proliferation of autonomous institutions: libraries, publishing houses, self-managed counseling centers, independent self-awareness spaces, study groups, seminars for medical, sexual and political self-training, and homes for women. An archive so rich in innovations, knowledges, and imagination, that can always be thrown in, reactivated, incorporated in different times and contexts.  

Looking at artistic activism of the 2010s, the practice of the occupations expresses its instituting capacity as well as its political autonomy. In Teatro Valle’s early days the activists declared “today we occupy a theater, just like once workers occupied factories”. A claim going beyond the self-representative dimension, and immediately leading to the productive dimension - through the direct management of the means of production, the setting up of informal economies, the experimenting of new relational systems - and the imaginative dimension of a new institutionality. The art of self-government in a different way, outside the neoliberal repertoires of production and competition, inventing new ways of cooperation able to trigger social transformations and recall a different idea of citizenship.

Ten years later today, in a fully changed political social phase, yet again on the verge of a crisis that will hit hard, I am interested in the possibility of building ramified genealogies. Multiple genealogies - from the nineties to nowadays - useful to link the threads among some junction experiences that marked and reconfigured the political space, as well as the languages of the artistic activism in Italy. With a cross-eyed and a chronologically reversed gaze, I am going to look at the experience of the TPO from a perspective that embodies the experience of the Teatro Valle Occupato, Macao, L’Asilo, reading again and opening again questions in light of the political urgencies of the present. Rather than a historical analysis, keeping these stories alive and always playing at inventing new connections is an exercise in prefiguration launched towards the future. A getting intimate with other temporality and stories - Haraway would say - as a practice of imagination and thought.

2011 Teatro Valle Occupato / Macao / L’Asilo

The pulsating matrix of the occupations of theaters and art spaces was the need to self-organize precarious work during the crisis. We are in the open flow of a movement that is active on several fronts, born to counter the economic crisis of 2008 and the austerity policies that intend to address the crisis by cutting resources and welfare. The neoliberal choice to privatize and cut funds and resources in the public sectors of immaterial and cultural work (schools, universities, cultural heritage, performing arts industry) is equivalent to a direct contraction of the employment opportunities, in a sector already heavily exposed and precarious. In Italy, in the 2009-2010 two-year period, universities are fighting against the Gelmini reform, which with a series of measures reorganizes education and public universities in a decidedly corporate-management direction. Not only students but also precarious researchers are mobilized to occupy the roofs of universities. It is propagation by contact: the meeting with the researchers - reinforcing the awareness that there were common conditions in cognitive and cultural work - pushes the singularities inside the immaterial production sector which remained on the margins of public discourse, and up to then dispersed, to speak up.

At the time of the temporary occupations of the Cinema Metropolitan in Rome in January 2011 (which was closed to be transformed into a shopping center), and after that on June 11 during the occupation of the Teatro Valle, the activists defined themselves as “intermittent and precarious cultural workers”. Those occupations will be then followed by the occupation of L’Asilo in Naples and Torre Galfa skyscraper and Macao

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in Milan. Other occupations follow across the entire national territory. Those actions are the result of an already active relational policy, a federative doing and thinking together, a connective tissue, which is initially favored precisely by the nomadic and mobile nature of the workers of the art and performing arts sector: who are almost never definitively rooted, who use work in different places and contexts, who frequently change employers, and who often know each other. This cartography includes the sister experiences of Sale Docks in Venice and Angelo Mai in Rome which, although previously born, share the same postures and desires. A network composed of sometimes ephemeral and heterogeneous nodes - unstable yet boiling - of spaces but also of territorial micro-politics, groups, and scattered subjectivities.

On a smaller scale, this rising movement breathes in resonance with other global insurgencies, different from each other, yet interconnected by common words and practices, such as the re-appropriation of public spaces and the call for self-government and direct democracy: from the Spanish 15M to the revolutions in North Africa, the Occupy Movement in the US, Gezi Park in Istanbul, the revolts and experiences of self-government during the crisis in Greece (schools and hospitals).

I would like to focus in particular on one node in the generative richness of the cultural world struggles: the graft between, on the one hand, the artistic precariousness subjectivation process seeking its own forms of self-organization, speaking out, finding alliances and inspiration in other sets of cultural (and not) precariousness: and on the other hand, the many scattered struggles over the commons: from public water, the damaged territories of the South, the No Tav in Val Susa, to the digital commons. It is a double movement: on the one side, to allow art workers struggle to escape from corporatism within which they often entrench themselves in the need to recognize their own exceptional nature; on the other side, to open a perspective on the “productive” commons, intended not only as primary resources management alternative model but also as work direct self-government in a collective and disseminated way. In this tangle, the theme of new institutions becomes an innovative tool and practice of artistic activism, generating models, prototypes, experiments actually in progress of possible systems of production.

Many are the experiments: permanences\textsuperscript{15}; training schools for workers: self-inquiries\textsuperscript{16}; collective art management tables: participatory writing of new statutes: alternative forms of income as well as informal and circular economies, or the use of a common currency\textsuperscript{17}; the collaboration with universities and the decentralization of research activities outside the academy; self-training seminars: collective writing; new dramaturgy projects: the creation of artistic, performative, musical, visual, editorial, curatorial projects. This is

\textsuperscript{15} On the idea of “permanence” as an expanded and inhabited form of the classic artistic residence, cf. http://www.teatrovalleoccupato.it/portfolio-items/permanenze.


\textsuperscript{17} For a discussion of this practice that has seen central Macao, cf.: http://www.macaomilano.org/spip.php?rubrique8.
the terrain - as Giuseppe Allegri points out - on which creative and minor use of common law is activated, through non-state institutions where

"it is possible to experiment with practices of freedom, inventing forms of self-governance in relationship to others: imagination and a constituent practice, which is the result of social conventions that, instead of replicating the tradition, find new ways of behavior and rules of conduct produced by the collective agreement around the satisfaction of the needs of a community that intends to self-govern." 18

1995 “From the hypermarket to cyberspace”. Teatro Polivalente Occupato (Bologna)

On November 6, 1995, Teatranti Occupanti, an acronym bringing together several young research companies19 occupies the theater of the Academy of Fine Arts via Irnerio 54/c in Bologna, which had remained closed for thirty years: "From now on, every possibility is open, if desired".20 Desire and subjectivity are the first elements that I am interested in highlighting because it is in these years that we begin to thematize and recognize - even if this term was not yet used - the question of the precariousness of the artistic world. The subjectivity that takes shape in this occupation is varied and multifaceted: students, technicians, artists from various disciplines, performers, visual artists, videomakers, musicians, choreographers, graphic designers, self-builders, set designers, curators, sound technicians, cybernauts. Often, with that undisciplined posture typical of the countercultures of the 1990s, one is more than one thing at the same time. The choice to name themselves "theater people", and not "artists" gives a sense of the complexity of roles and functions, rejecting the idea that the artist is separated from the environmental ecosystem. After all, a company is (historically) already a small cell, a nomadic collective identity, an ephemeral temporary institution. Here also available as the first infrastructure of political organization: at the time of occupation, the coordination of the companies dissolves reconfiguring itself into a more open and heterogeneous subjectivity. Over a period of ten years, the

19 Amadossato, Centro Ricerca Arti Performative – Teatro dell’Infetto, Inquinamento di Rifiuti Argonauti, Teatro Situazionautico Luther Blissett, Amorevole Compagnia Pneumatica.
20 The occupation manifesto, available online:
Tpo will in fact be inhabited, with different degrees of intensity, by many artists and companies, sometimes transitory, or resident, regular guests, as well as its belonging militant activists.

Unlike other independent spaces or festivals - as in those same years in Bologna in the case of the Link -, the selection and design of a precise aesthetic line have never been the guiding criterion. I believe this as a choice of cultural policy which, sometimes putting at risk the level of "artistic quality" - a concept with which the occupants explicitly argue since the moment of occupation - opens up to other possibilities that are not yet codified. Like at Teatro Valle, an inhomogeneous and osmotic modality is preferred to the program and the curatorial identity, that allows those spaces to be transformed into a very fertile compost, nourishing undergrowth that, feeding the scene from the bottom, allows even unexpected combinations to grow. Unstable assemblages, which mix and hybridize different communities - from the hypermarket to cyberspace, that's to say. Once again, desires!

The attempt to keep both the political and the artistic experimentation together has generated innovative practices on both fronts. First of all on the front of the art world where the dominant practice of groups and companies was certainly to regularly use informal, independent, or occupied spaces and contexts, yet mostly without determining their political perspectives. Although the independent circuits established in the 1980s and 1990s were large, interconnected, and highly populated - in the performing arts, as well as in the music and publishing industry, with all the independent labels, magazines, and fanzines -, the experimental scene continued to depend on more institutional systems. Tpo attempts therefore a path of strong autonomy which - starting from its own material, economic and production conditions - opens a path of subjectivation: "it has contributed to developing specific skills with respect to the use of technical and artistic means of production"21 (1997). The issues of cultural and immaterial work and precarious subjectivity will become central in the struggles of the following years - from the manifestations of MayDay (2001) and San Precario (2004) to the struggles of the French intermittents, with their coming to the surface in 200322 and the following cycles of struggles -, but they find a first dazzling incarnation in the experience of the TPO, prefiguring new forms of artistic activism.

Second of all, the attempt is also innovative on the front of the political spaces, in which cultural activity has always been perceived as a sideline programming, rather than as a field of struggle and a space for the cultural workforce self-organization. In the experience of the Tpo, activism is also expressed through aesthetic choices, experimentation with new languages, new productive and cooperative practices. Not by chance, it

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21 From a 1997 Tpo document, available in the Grafton9 movement archive, partially digitized: https://grafton9.net/webarchive/tpo-2000/index.htm?fbclid=IwAR1D0pYwi4T-ya-PhvKSR-GjGPTIPnreSmdAwreCu7ue9bsPQrV-wf_1kzNAS.

chooses to label itself an "occupied theater" rather than a social center, precisely to mark a discontinuity in its approach to the materiality of cultural work. It is a work of political imagination, as well as of artistic invention. No coincidence that the Tpo becomes humus for two other experiences at the crossroad of the struggles of the following years: the birth of the Bolognese node of Indymedia, and Sexyshock (2001) a feminist pink – queer activism space.

Alike the Valle, also Tpo (no) plan was to occupy it for three days and "see how it went": an ability to improvise that we can read as one of the skills that art can lend to political organization, namely a form of instant composition, connected to the present and open to the unexpected, in some way an alternative to the programs and plans of traditional political structures.

**Dark Matter #2. Between the folds**

The critical analysis of live arts gives us a privileged observation point from which to read the transformations of contemporary work in the neoliberal framework - it is in fact the "activity without work", "unproductive", performative, that becomes the paradigm of production in the post-Fordist economy, as Virno highlights in his seminar “A Grammar of the Multitude”. In my opinion today it is precisely this trait placing art, and in particular live arts, in intimate proximity with capitalism, that we must know how to look at. Proximity that hides in the folds of an aestheticization of the political that every form of artistic activism must question and undermine. Even the gradual collapse of the boundary between artist and activist is sometimes almost encouraged by the institutions and the art market and reveals peculiar traits of ambiguity. In the society of performance, this indistinction is accompanied by the request to be more and more performative, more and more involved: the artist must be able to be the entrepreneurs of themselves. Thus, politics becomes work, and vice versa. Already in 2001 Virno clearly pointed out that creativity had been transformed into managerial skills of the self, in an increasingly opaque indistinction between life-time and work-time. That is what Hito Steyerl calls an economy of the presence, which also becomes a measure of efficiency, and the value of social activity put to work:

23 A space with similar characteristics is the Rialto Santambrogio in Rome, occupied in 1999 by a collective of artists, cultural operators and musicians.
“in addition to developing works, artists, or more generally content providers, nowadays have to perform countless additional services, which slowly seem to become more important than any other form of work. The Q&A is more important than the screening, the live lecture more than the text, the encounter with the artist more important than the one with the work. Not to speak about the jumble of quasiacademic and social media PR formats that multiply the templates in which unalienated presence is supposed to be delivered. The artist has to be present, an in Marina Abramović’s eponymous performance”28.

In recent years - especially since the 2008 economic crisis and the global insurgencies that resulted out of it - art institutions, biennials, festivals, forums, conferences, and also many other artistic processes, focused their programming on radical politics and the performance of the struggle. The creative economy extracts value putting into play the political and the common, as Marco Baravalle points out in his analysis of new curatorial trends: it is possible to recognize in their "mimetic" forms "the governmental trait of contemporary cultural industries, that function precisely through the enhancement of the interstitium, the differential of freedom, the compatible excess”29. Neoliberal governmentality that parasites the relational forms and the networks created by social cooperation, resorting to the use of the rhetoric of participation and community, in the mimetic desire to re-shape the expressive and trans-bodily intensity of the struggles, and increase the value of the experience that they offer. Temporary communities occasionally convened, pre-packaged contexts in which it is possible to place oneself, in a safe and conflict-free way. In what way is this action of absorption actually compensated with forms of widespread redistribution, or with the negotiation of different production models?

We can certainly read this trend as a symptom of needs that are not satisfied - the need to participate, to feel part of a community of meaning, to speak up, to subvert asymmetrical and toxic relational systems - and which get intercepted by the more organized artistic system. Yet this trend risks being a mere substitute - deconflicted, pacified, neutralized - for political action. Anesthesia and aestheticization. Political radicalism becomes a packaging, translated into a regime of representation in which every transformative force is neutralized. Even though they evoking political radicalism, seldom do such contexts become real spaces of subjectivation, or even more concretely, infrastructures of support and active solidarity for the more fragile and more exposed organized forms of activism.

At the same time, this attitude leaves the door open to possible action strategies. In the experience of the cultural occupations - such as Valle, Macao, L’Asilo - many have been the experiments in which a strategic alliance has been attempted with some formal institution - universities, international cultural institutes, foundations, publishing houses, national theaters of other European countries, or even fashion brands, to name

a few - whose objectives stratify. From a purely defensive level, where the support of official institutions aims to publicly “protect” the activist spaces from possible acts of repression. To a level where the practices become more complex and substantial: including forms of redistribution of resources, or forms of provision of logistic and service infrastructures, such as access to calls, use of spaces, transnational networks, or agreements. Another possible area of engagement of cultural institutions opens up on the right to the free movement of bodies, in an attempt to actively oppose - not only as a form of self-representation - the violent European migration policies. As in the case reported by Hito Steyerl of the Cultural Center of Suruç in Turkey, which during the emergency, became a place to welcome refugees fleeing the borders after the Daesh attack in Kobanê. The artistic institutions could be able to mobilize the available means and infrastructures, both material and relational. Let’s imagine the saturation of the administrative functions specific to the institution, to multiply protocols, authorizations, study visas, certified training activities, and so on.\textsuperscript{10}

This is undoubtedly a battlefield that can be activated and solicited by artists and cultural workers in the coming years, and whose ability to generate conflict - instead of the domesticated spaces of the art market - will be a useful indicator. Occupying - both materially and symbolically - the territory of the institution has a very different meaning from institutionalizing anomalous spaces, or the mimetic reproduction of existing institutions. This difference passes precisely through the transformation of the political space and the "performative reconfiguration of institutions, as an infinite and not-determined place of conflict."\textsuperscript{31} Furthermore, through the relational ecosystem created by the Institute for Radical Imagination - a fictional institution that also includes Macao, Sale Docks, and L’Asilo - it was possible to engage the Reina Sofia Museum, a prestigious Spanish artistic institution, to be part of a network that supports the action of artists/activists engaged in the struggle for unconditional basic income.\textsuperscript{32} This same ability to diversify and hybridize different levels and actions is the sign of the intelligence of the struggles, which know how to move simultaneously, on different levels, with different strategies. Inventing and giving shape to new autonomous institutions of the municipality and, at the same time, hacking where possible, the existing institutions, creating monster assemblages and navigating between the interstices, like reticular mushrooms, thriving in between the cracks. Post-anthropocentric practices for transcorporeal subjectivities to come.

\textsuperscript{10} See in this regard the mutualism projects of the Utrecht bak with migrant communities: https://www.bakonline.org.


\textsuperscript{32} See the Art for UBI campaign promoted by the Institute for Radical Imagination: https://instituteofradicalimagination.org.
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Images


2. Teatro Polivalente Occupato, 1995
3. Teatro Polivalente Occupato

4. A week of “Spacial Struggles”, Teatro Valle Occupato, September 2013
5. MOTUS at Teatro Valle Occupato, projection on stage, 1995

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Abstract

There is a family similarity between art and politics, between art and activism, following Deleuze (1987) who notices a constitutive affinity between the work of art and the act of resistance. Starting from the practices - an indication that comes from trans-feminist thought and that allows us to reposition the relationship between art and politics in the contemporary, a relationship not without shadows and ambiguity. I intend the performing arts as practices, ways of human doing, a space for counter-hegemonic narratives (hooks, 1998), rather than as art objects that can be decoded according to the canons of aesthetics or art history (Deleuze, Guattari, 1991; Rancière, 2000).

This paper, therefore, investigates, on the one hand, the artistic practices that focus on the experimentation of languages and the work of political imagination (Athanasiou, 2016) - the theme, as Carla Lonzi (1977) already declared, completing the original break between feminism and art in Italy, is not a sufficient criterion. On the other hand, it attempts a recognition of the practices and political actions of artists and art workers who have activated processes of subjectivation and institutional practices (Ahmed, 2007; Deleuze, 1955; Van Campenhout, Mestre, 2016), starting from the multiple genealogies of some experiences in Italy from the 1990s until nowadays - from the Tpo of Bologna to the Teatro Valle Occupato, passing through Macao and the Angelo Mai. The critical analysis of live arts gives us a privileged observation point to read the transformations of contemporary work in the neoliberal framework - it is precisely the unproductive, performative "activity without work" that becomes the new paradigm of production in the post-Fordist economy. (Virno, 2001). In my opinion, it is also this trait that today places art, and in particular live arts, in intimate proximity with capitalism (Kunst, 2015) and between the folds of an aestheticization of the political, that every form of artistic activism must question and put in crisis (Steyerl, 2018).

Keywords

political theory / subjectivation / new cultural institutions / performing arts / performativity

Short biography of the author

Ilenia Caleo is a performer, activist, and researcher. Since 2000 she has been working as an actress, performer, and dramaturg in the contemporary scene, collaborating with various companies and directors including Motus, Davide Iodice, Lisa Natoli. With Silvia Calderoni, in 2018, she created KISS, a performance project with 23 performers, produced by Santarcangelo Festival and CSS Udine. Master Degree in Contemporary Philosophy, Ph.D. Fellow in Art and Performance Studies at Università La Sapienza (Roma). Her research focuses on bodies, feminist epistemologies, aesthetics, new institutions, and forms of cultural work. At present, she is a researcher at the IUAV University of Venice and coordinator of the Arts Module within the Masters in Gender Studies and Politics at the University Roma Tre. She collaborates with the research group of the five-year project “INCOMMON. In praise of community. Shared creativity in arts and politics in Italy
(1959-1979)*, ERC Starting Grant directed by Annalisa Sacchi (IUAV). She is an activist in commons and queer-feminists movements. Politically and artistically she has grown up in the underground counterculture.
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