04 2019

Caring ecologies 4 - Compost, Reclamation, Conclusion

Francesco Salvini

Compost

“Stand up and walk around your desk. And go out of your office, and feel the fresh air of the city.” Gardener, psychiatric nurse, artist, long-time social co-operator, and president of the Trieste Association of Artisans Giancarlo Carena is often theatrical when he tries to explain the singularity of Trieste’s social cooperatives movement. He starts by arranging the narrative around your perceptions, to make you settle in the analytical journey that he asks you to undertake with him. “How can a place where such horrible things happened in the past today be a space that triggers beautiful projects?” he asked me in 2014 when we first met walking in the blossoming gardens of the former asylum.

Once opened, the asylum becomes part of the city and then a park. A park that lives on the limit between management and refusal, between institution and society, between nature and city. The caring ecology is a space of composition and expression, a practice of sensibility and transformation within the circuits of production and accumulation of capitalism; it lives amid the dangerous tension of capitalist dynamics that domesticate nature in order to profit

from it. The practice of the common enterprise aims to deal with health care within (and against), rather than outside, these dynamics.

"Care is too important to give it up to the reductions of hegemonic ethics. *Thinking* in the world involves acknowledging our own involvements in perpetuating dominant values rather than retreating to the sheltered position of an enlightened outsider who knows better" (de la Bellacasa, 2017). This means that the practices of utopia can be challenged, dis/assembled and, in Basaglia's term (2005), immersed in reality.

Also *caring ecologies* as a text, in this sense, aims to operate here as a conceptual gateway for an institutional critique that reconfigures health and care practices in the contemporary, understood as a critical edge of modernity. Caring ecologies is therefore an abstract machine, one that operates using concepts to produce knowledge inserted in, and possibly useful for, social change. In doing so, the analysis of the material dimension of the ecology intertwine with the ethics of those operating in it, crossing different layers of institutional analysis and subjective enquiry. The practice of research holds together the analysis of the ecology and the diagrammatic proposal of an action – it tries to open a dialogue between the signs and the things that make the ecology, in order to make critique into programme. In this machine, molar and molecular are always intertwined.

The entanglements of caring are constituted as a system of values and significations, as rationalities of governance, but they must also be interpreted as bearers of a series of lateral possibilities that need to be interpreted and re-enacted so that they can invent new institutional forms capable of participating in sustaining a

distributed ecology of caring, in a present that is more precarious every day.

While I get lost in these thoughts about my text, Giancarlo is drawing on the paper placemat at Il Posto delle Fragole, the Place of the Strawberries, one of several restaurants managed by another social cooperative, La Collina, and the first public space opened in San Giovanni. Back then, in 1973, it was run by the people sectioned in the asylum. He is explaining the three contradictory utopias that have been unfurled in this place, and how the three of them still survive today. The first utopia in the 1907 mental asylum, when Trieste was part of Austro-Hungarian Empire, was part of the Empire's impressive public investment in its four main metropolises to sustain a new conception of mental healthcare based not on punishment, but on the construction of a separated and serene community. Although this first utopia was one where beauty and serendipity were represented through idealism, normality and discipline; and it was ultimately a utopia of violence and segregation.

The second utopia emerged through the 1960s and the '70s. When Franco Basaglia closed the asylum in 1979, he said "the only good thing to do here is to throw salt, so that nothing can grow, ever again." Destruction was not just a metaphor; it was a concrete practice. To bring an end to violence, the doctors gave the formerly sectioned the tools to destroy the fences and supported them in their exodus from the asylum into the city, through institutional and activist practice, including disobedience and occupations. This second utopia was one of destruction and liberation.

"We disobeyed", Franco Rotelli often says. The third utopia is the park today. It lives in the same (still public) premises of the Austro-Hungarian therapeutic garden, which is also where the soil,

filled with salt during the utopia of destruction, became a cross-contaminated forest, nurtured since the 1980s by many unstable, sometimes hidden, and almost always informal practices: raves, arts, occupations. The third utopia is an allegory rather than a representation or a metaphor. The park is a symbol of care and diversity, as well as a place of well-being. It is not an exaggeration to say that it has been the morphology of the park that has put together cultures and generations, integrating cultural life and economic enterprises in the space of the ex-asylum.

“This process of reconstruction and redefinition has involved everything and everybody. No one component (and it could not have been otherwise) has been able, or has tried to, avoid this process. The very physical places of the asylum have affirmed a new “being”: not any more as a space to be forgotten and left behind, but as a crossing point. An urban trajectory used for the neighbourhood: a road to be crossed. Another piece of the city (one of the few with a lot of green) to be enacted and to be questioned” (Assunta Signorelli)

In this sense, the composition of a certain capacity of acting, a certain trajectory of empowerment, resonates with the reflections of Italian autonomous Marxism on the term *class composition*, a metaphor borrowed from the chemical composition of elements to represent the subaltern’s autonomous capacity of analysis and organisation.

In the 1960s debates, composition acted as a counter name for class consciousness, which would separate the class in itself from the capacity of the class to struggle (the class for itself). In the autonomous approach, the technical and political composition of the modes of organisation directly constituted the capacity of acting and speaking, as workers against capital.

But there is a difference here. Ecology of care may be *like* class composition, but it *is* compost: it makes things grow. The park is a plurality of sites and a multiplicity of perceptions, composed in the process of care: it is symbol, but also material space. A combination of agents: the university, the cooperatives, the healthcare system, the public services; the soil, the users, the students, the workers; but also a multiplier of relations: contracts, conversations, concerts, screaming, laughing. A park made of roses, earth, memories, gardeners, saws, lovers. The ecology of care is a compost of organic matters that reclaims care by building the city in common.

Reclamation

The park reclaims care in the same place that the asylum imposed a practice of constraint. I use *reclamation* here in an effort to explore tensions like those addressed by Maria Puig de la Bellacasa in putting ambivalences at the centre of her work around caring: "To reclaim often means to re-appropriate a toxic terrain, a field of domination, making it capable of nurturing; transformative seeds we wish to sow [...] acknowledging poisons in the ground that we inhabit rather than expecting to find an outside alternative, untouched by trouble, a final balance – or a definitive critique." "Reclaiming care keeps it grounded in practical engagements with situated material conditions that often expose tensions." (2017)

In this ecology of care, refusing a certain mode of organisation is only possible when another is invented. This means affirming sustainability, resilience and durability as vectors of another logic of caring. Destroying the asylum while at the same time "reaffirming the right to asylum, as a fundamental right for the person in a moment of distress" was and is one of the core principles of the

Basaglian revolution, as Giovanna Del Giudice explained to me in our first conversation in 2014.

In Giovanna's practice and conceptualisation (2015, 2019), the care for the past and the present is always the edge of the care “for the future”: the destruction of the asylum and the transformation of the institution needs to happen continuously and simultaneously. Every day we work to dismantle the institutional entropy and the opportunistic mentality of care as control, but in order to do that, we have to ceaselessly invent new modes of organising care, as a practice of encounter, permeability, cultural crossing. A practice of social permaculture, as Starhawk (2016) calls it in her translation of the ecological practice of permaculture as a tool for political action.

Dimitris Papadopoulos refers to the process of commoning as one of creating generous infrastructures. In his analysis of techno-scientific practices, “what counts as invention is not primarily the individual experimental achievement that gives coherence to traditional experimental scientific practice (although this might be sometimes part of it); rather, it is a form of dispersed experimentation: distributed invention power. If science as experimental achievement ever existed, this achievement of invention is now dispersed in society and matter” (2018). The ecology of care is immersed in this dynamic invention: it is more than social, more than an enterprise; it is more than institutional, more than personal; it is mobile and dispersed, yet it persists.

For Papadopoulos, commitment, accessibility, engagement (and words that resonate with reciprocity, responsibility and inclusiveness, which are the words we saw in the analysis of the Micro Area at the beginning of this *deriva*) are joined in the infrastructure to make possible an ecology that constantly challenges institutional entropy, that transforms urban life and

supports the emancipation of those agents that build the city. These generous infrastructures "are autonomy made durable: transparent, unnoticed, and persistently present spaces that incorporate political practice in their workings. Infrastructures allow more-than-social movements to politicise ontological practice in the absence of consensus [...] without the need to start again and again from scratch" (2018).

Commoning becomes a practice situated in a non-sovereign relationality: it creates a space of instability and contradiction, where the politics of the commons become a practice through which society can occupy "the very contingency of non-sovereign standing" (Berlant, 2016) rather than resolving ambivalences (or, again, contradictions) through affirming of a new sovereignty, one that always exists on someone else's back.

Compost for the future, on the edge of the present, the rose garden is the material sign of the utopia as it exists in reality: both failed and continuously being renovated. "[We have five thousand roses], but five thousand roses are still missing, and they are for me the sign of the city that is uncertain; they are the cypher of what is possible, of what has not become true in that true life that we wanted to live, for us, for the loonies, suffering brothers and sisters with whom we have taken a long walk. A walk that took us far, but not as far as we hoped we would get (but much farther than their Lordships could even imagine). The rose that still does not exist calls for another time, another generation, another energy, another love. And no one today, especially today, make any secure prophecy about this: a prophecy of men and women that can look, and listen, and watch, and touch, and smell, and use all their senses, and cultivate the concrete signs coming out of them because they are capable of hearing the noise of life, of touching the earth,

watering the roses, and changing the things." (Rotelli, 2015). E bagnare le rose e cambiare le cose.

Toward a conclusion

Trieste is an ecology of practices where knowledge comes together across many tangled registers. It is a palimpsest of codes and operations in which different discourses, affections and compositions define an unstable and plural mosaic of voices. The ecology of care stands continuously on the edge of the present: it escapes the narrative of care as autonomous space and affirms one inherent to social life by forging a city that cares and heals.

Go back to the park, Giovanna told me once, when I was telling her where my research was taking me. And back in the park, I add one more thing before concluding, an experience in which I have been actively involved during my time in Trieste: a show of Radio Fragola, the autonomous and cooperative radio born in the early 1980s, at the intersection of social cooperatives and counter-cultural radio stations. "The Universal In/Corporate, leader enterprise in the production of symbolic matrixes, presents *Eschuchame* [Listen to me, in Spanish], a sporadic case of someone's ingenuities."

Every week with these words, Margherita Antivulgaris opens a space of imagination and discussion where different agents participate in creating a common sense of listening, in which the ambivalences of a plural reality are not resolved through the linearity of discourse, but instead exploded as a multiple ecology of caring. Escuchame is a cosmicomic ecology of voices coming from different sites of mental health and the city, meeting in the park every Friday, at 5.30pm, for many years.

In Escuchame, the radio narrates every time, “voices get stuck in smoking nucleuses of sonorous matter, where meanings are untied from objects, through the foolish certainty of eloquence, without fulfilling their own finality.” A world-making microphone that works through intimate expression; that affects the modes of existence of bodies; that challenges the prejudices and roles that even the distributed and emancipatory institutions of Trieste tend to reproduce. The voices on the radio, separate from the body’s stigmatised identity, give us back a palimpsest of expressions, in which the boundaries between deviance and normality are disrupted by waves of sound.

Escuchame follows its own rules and rituals, instituting a resilient space where the singular modes of existence can find a contingent consistency, a quivering normality. The mathematician Ferdinando repeats his questions on the genealogy of families, week after week; the artist Diego Porporati reads his “Short Chronicle of Time in Twenty Four Chapters,” never getting past the third chapter: the history of wine. The Titolare Ignoto, at the mixer, fades out the signature tune of the show. It is 6.30pm.

Then the ritual of care continues: a fizzy drink from the soda machine in the corridor of the former pavilion of calm patients. Next, each of us adds a little bit to the salutation protocol: the procedure lasts an undetermined amount of time, summoning a composition of gestures and stories that evolve, and, by growing, repeat themselves endlessly, until the voices of the show begin returning to their factual form, bodies again in the twilight that enshrouds the park.

Stuck in the middle of the trouble, the ecology of care comes together as matters, gestures, memories, across the park, through bodies, plants, artefacts, along and with social and institutional

relations. It stands as an interdependent dynamic of intrusion and perception, transition and repetition, denial and invention, composition and insistence that plays with the materials and relations that constitute social life, with the intersections of partial singularities and partial commonalities and their thick specificities, sometimes immersed in the contradictions of the institutional field, sometimes lost in a moment of fragility and freedom.

Imagination can be a space to craft this ecology of care, through contradictions, ambivalences, or discontinuities. Imagination as a materialisation of plural worlds. Thresholds, perceptions, translations, catalogues, transitions, enterprises, composting, reclamation have been just eight stories for my *deriva* through this ecology. A *fabulation* of care that I hope can contribute to thinking about social practices of emancipation and reproduction that are *capable of responding* within this current dangerous moment and contribute to crafting practices for making life, in a damaged world, sustainable.

References

Barbagallo, C. (2016). 24-Hour Nurseries: The Never-Ending Story Of Care And Work. In *We need to talk about family: essays on Neoliberalism, the Family and Popular Culture* (Garrett, R., Jensen, T., & Voela, A. eds.). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Basaglia, F. (1964). The destruction of the mental hospital as a place of institutionalisation. In *First International Congress of Social Psychiatry, London. Available at* http://www.triestesalutementale.it/english/doc/basaglia_1964_destruction-mhh.pdf.

Basaglia, F. (1979). Brazilian Conferences. Milan: Raffaello Cortina.

Basaglia, F. (2005). *L'utopia della realtà* (Vol. 296). Einaudi.

Basaglia,
F. and F. Ongaro Basaglia (1987). Peacetime crimes. *Psychiatry inside out: Selected writings of Franco Basaglia*, 143-168.
bell hooks. (2009). *Belonging: A culture of place*. Routledge.
Benjamin, W. (2009). On the concept of history.
Berlant, L. (2016). The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *34*(3), 393-419.
Beuret, N. (2018). The end of the world for whom?. *new formations: a journal of culture/theory/politics*, *93*(93), 138-141.
Brunner, C. (2018) Activist Sense: Affective Media Practices during the G20 Summit in Hamburg in Technecologies, *transversal* 03.18 available at https://transversal.at/transversal/0318
Cogliati, M. (2018). *La città che cura. Rotelli, F. (2016)*. Alpha Beta.
de La Bellacasa, M. P. (2017). *Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds* (Vol. 41). U of Minnesota Press.
De Leonardis, O., & Emmenegger, T. (2005). Le istituzioni della contraddizione. *Rivista sperimentale di freniatria*.
Del Giudice, G. (2015). … *E tu slegalo subito: sulla contenzione in psichiatria*. Alpha beta.
Del Giudice, G. (2019) Interview. www.entrarafuera.net (released April 2019)
Deleuze, G. (2004). Desert Islands: And Other Texts, 1953--1974.
Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1988). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
Echeverría, B. (2000). *La modernidad de lo barroco*. Ediciones Era.
Federici, S. (2013). The reproduction of labour power in the global economy and the unfinished feminist revolution. *Workers and Labour in a Globalised Capitalism: Contemporary Themes and Theoretical Issues*, 85.
Foucault, M. (2003). *Madness and civilization*. Routledge.

Fraser, N. (2016). Capitalism's Crisis of Care. *Dissent*, *63*(4), 30-37.
Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
Ghelfi, A. (2016). *Worlding politics: justice, commons and technoscience* (Doctoral dissertation, School of Management).
Giannichedda, M (2005). Introduzione in *L'utopia della realtà* (Vol. 296). Einaudi.
Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Vol. 294). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
Guattari, F. (1984). *Molecular revolution: Psychiatry and politics*. Penguin Group USA.
Lefebvre, H. (1996). *Writing on Cities*. Blackwell: Oxford.
Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.
Harney, S., & Moten, F. (2013). The undercommons: Fugitive planning and black study.
Lorey, I. (2019), International Board Feedback. www.entrarafuera.net (released April 2019)
Mitchell, T. (1999). Society, economy, and the state effect. *State/culture: State-formation after the cultural turn*, *76*, 90.
Mol, A. (2008). *The logic of care: Health and the problem of patient choice*. Routledge.
Newey, I. (2019), Chronicle. www.entrarafuera.net (released April 2019)
Papadopoulos, D. (2018). *Experimental practice: technoscience, alterontologies, and more-than-social movements*. Duke University Press.
Precarias a la deriva. (2004). *A la deriva: por los circuitos de la precariedad femenina*. Madrid: Traficantes de sueños.
Raunig, G. (2009). Instituent practices: Fleeing, instituting, transforming. *may fly*, 3.
Raunig, G. (2016). *Dividuum: Machinic capitalism and molecular*

revolution (Vol. 1). MIT Press.
Rotelli, F. (1988), L'istituzione inventata. Per la salute mentale/for mental health. *Rivista Centro Regionale Studi e Ricerche sulla Salute Mentale (1)*
Rotelli, F. (1992), Per un'impresa sociale. *Salute mentale-Pragmatica e complessita*.
Rotelli, F. (2013), Servizi che Intrecciano storie, in *L'arte della cura nella medicina di comunità a Trieste: storie e racconti di malattia*, (ed. Giovanna Gallio), ENAIP, Trieste.
Rotelli, F. (2015). La rosa che non c'è in *La Rosa Che C'è* (ed. Giancarlo Carena). Eut.
Rotelli, F. (2019) [audio-visual], International Board Feedback. www.entrarafuera.net (released April 2019)
Signorelli, A. (1998) Relazione per il Convegno Donne e Salute Mentale organizzato, Società Italiana di Psichiatria, Lucca.
Sraffa, P. (1975). *Production of commodities by means of commodities: Prelude to a critique of economic theory*. CUP Archive.
Star, S. L., & Griesemer, J. R. (1989). Institutional ecology, translations' and boundary objects: Amateurs and professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39. *Social studies of science*, *19*(3), 387-420.
Starhauk (2016) Social Permaculture-What Is It?, available at: https://www.ic.org/social-permaculture-what-is-it/
Stengers, I., & Pignarre, P. (2011). Capitalist sorcery: breaking the spell.
Stengers,
I. (2013). Introductory notes on an ecology of practices. *Cultural Studies Review*, *11*(1), 183-196.
Tosquelles, F. (1986). *Le vécu de la fin du monde dans la folie*. Ed. de l'AREFPPI.
Tosquelles, F. (2012) [audiovisual] Interview. In *Deconnage* (ed. Angela Melitopoulos)

Ghost track: “L'animale della buona coscienza” di Franco Rotelli. [1]

Quando S. distrugge le fotografie della mostra del P, egli compie il gesto impopolare: nega, rompe l'armonia della fiaba: è “cattivo” e aristocratico. Nega la verità del cavallo, vede la mistificazione: non c'è uno spazio in cui la fiaba possa realizzarsi.

In città i sottoproletari caracollano dietro il cavallo come i proletari dietro la carretta di Madre Coraggio: ma il cavallo, inutile e bello, sarà sempre la mercé, l'oggetto prodotto: il sottoproletariato diviene qui produttore di mercé e quindi accettabile, accettato a circolare per le vie della città. La produzione ha le sue leggi, la legge custodisce e sostiene la produzione. I fuorilegge producono per un giorno, e per un giorno sono ammessi a circolare con la loro macchina cavallo, ancora una volta macchina desiderio e non macchina politica. Si pavoneggiano nei loro vestiti di stracci: è l'eterno carnevale dei poveri: c'è spazio per porsi ma non per opporsi. La lotta ha altre date altre sedi altre piazze: la vacanza continua, lo spettacolo ha vinto un'altra volta, l'oggetto si pone ancora una volta impenetrabile: il cavallo-liberazione si morde la coda, il matto ritorna ai circuiti normali della sua distruzione.

Dietro al cavallo c'è l'orrore di sempre, la sporcizia, la violenza, la penuria del manicomio, la condizione sottoproletaria dentro l'“ospedale” dove l'“aggressività” del “malato” può scomparire solo per ricomparire trasformata nella docilità handicappata del cavallo garantito dai suoi cavalieri: gli “ippocrati” appunto. Asettico, privo di virilità, il cavallo garantisce alle vittime la possibilità di sognare; ma questa unica chance è socializzazione di un desiderio che, svincolato dal bisogno, è pura negazione di storicità. Desiderio di essere in quel luogo specifico: il “fuori dal manicomio” che ti tiene

esso stesso fuori: di essere in quel luogo della grettezza nel quale è improponibile, per la strettezza dell'abito, la vita per chiunque desideri vivere.

La gente del manicomio ha prodotto un oggetto di inconsueta bellezza, segno consolatorio che anche nella merda (il manicomio) nascono fiori. Questo fiore ci piace, a tutti. E il segno di un ottimismo nell'uomo che non riesce mai a morire anche se assurdo.

Solo ad S. questo fiore non piace. Rigido e solerte difensore di un'istituzione organica, S. distrugge, come un bambino cattivo, “psicopatico”, il gioco degli altri bambini: il trastullarsi di chi gioca a far fiabe. La sua violenza verbale è sgradevole tanto quanto inesplicabile: il camerino d'isolamento sarà il luogo ove meditare la sua asocialità.

Ma: popolare è e rimane la maschera.

---

[1] Published in 2006, this text refers to an episode at the Laboratorio P, during an exhibition to describe the workshop of Marco Cavallo, a papier mache horse built for the first public demonstration of the users and workers of the asylum in the streets of Trieste, in 1973.