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CELESTE IANNICIELLO, MICHAELA QUADRARO

Emancipatory archiving practices: a renovation of social theory through art¹

Introduction

This article addresses the idea that art can be a privileged point of theoretical concern in the field of social sciences. It can offer new ways to collect, manage and analyse data, particularly in triggering the multiple levels by which meanings are created by art practices. Although an investigation on art is always based on products, a sociological perspective on art emphasises the processes of objectivation. In *The Philosophy of Money* Georg Simmel analyses the formation of economic value, however he underlines the analogy with the formation process of aesthetic value. We give significance to objects: “Objects are not difficult to acquire because they are valuable, but we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them” [Simmel 1900, trans. 1978, 64]. Within a pragmatic perspective, the artistic identity of an *oeuvre* is established through the adherence to specific conventions that regulate the aesthetic communicative action [Tota 1999].

1. Celeste Ianniciello wrote from p. 165 to p. 172, while Michaela Quadraro wrote from p. 157 to p. 164.

“Art” is a problematic term; as Franco Crespi underlines [1996, 180], there are no absolute criteria to establish a distinction between what is authentically art and what is not. A first contribution of arts sociology is, thus, having highlighted that the criteria, through which an expressive form is considered artistic, change over time, in the different historical and cultural contexts, and in particular in relation to the social structures and the characteristics of the dominant cultural system. Sociologists like Howard Becker and Vera Zolberg bring to the fore the social construction of aesthetic formulations, how art comes to be, and the processes of creation, production, and the role of institutions [Becker 1982; Zolberg 1990]. Here, we use the term “aesthetics” flexibly, to encompass the languages of art forms, or the expressive regimes of art, such as visual arts, photography, filmmaking, music, dance, painting, among the others, and to emphasize the different practices engendered by art. Though at times we refer to art practices in general, we focus primarily on contemporary forms of intervention and involvement, in which the artists and the viewers become creative agents with an undoubted potential for renovation and knowledge production.

Our analysis concerns the on-going art research project *The Country of the Overseas Territories* [*Il paese delle terre d'oltremare*] by Alessandra Cianelli, which focuses on the forgotten memories of Italian colonialism in Africa and represents an example of cooperation between the artist and the researcher, as well as an intertwinement between research and art. The visual output of the project and the methodological framework that is behind it brings to the fore the crucial role played by aesthetic codes in the public discourse and relays about individual, collective and public memories. How do we transmit the public meaning of a controversial past such as Italian imperialistic mission? How do art projects speak of a past that cannot be forgotten and wounds that cannot be fully healed? How can a symbolic site of Italian colonialism such as the Overseas Exhibition Centre [*Mostra delle Terre d'Oltremare*] in the Mediterranean town of Napoli, Italy, be loaded and reloaded with new shared meanings? Still, how can artistic practices contribute to the transformation of this institutional site in a place of public memory? As Pierre Nora has stressed, there are sites, symbols or artefacts that condense memory, around which memory is constantly reaffirmed [1984]. This is a crucial point for the understanding of the alternative productions of memory,

its discontinuous versions and the questions posed to it. These sites of memory challenge the unilateral views of history and constantly tackle with a never-ending sense of redefinition.

Forms of the archive have been explored in several critical paradigms engaging with fragmentation and non-neutrality, and questions of power and selection [Foucault 1969; Derrida 1995; Chambers, Grechi, Nash 2014; Appadurai 2016; Till, Kaufman, Woodward 2018]. Jacques Derrida insists on the irrepressible human drive for the archive, the interminable search for the origin, for a past to preserve, yet nothing is more troubling than the concept contained in the word “archive” [1995]. Moreover, in the obsessive and rigorous attempt to find the origin, psychoanalysis expands the control and the oppression of the archive, the “place of consignment”, the division between an inside and an outside. The drive to chase after the archive – the compulsive and nostalgic desire for the place of absolute beginning – seems to be an inescapable modality.

The art project *The Country of the Overseas Territories* works on the controversial and traumatic past of Italian colonialism and materially opens the archive of the symbolic site of the Overseas Exhibition Centre. Consequently, we ask how an artistic intervention and research project can re-imagine the paralysing pattern of the Italian colonialist archive. Still, how can the colonising force of the archive be diverted from the preservation of only certain past memories and questioned by the experiences of invisible and complex social processes that concentrate on the imagination of a future archive as well as on the elaboration of archives yet to come? A controversial past, paralysed in the ruins of a commemorative shape, can be unwrapped and analysed in its constantly changing configuration [Wagner-Pacifici 2010]. As we know, the past is not a static object, but a dynamic construction, whose public narration is formed by several individuals, social groups, communities, and institutions [Halbwachs 1968]. Central to *The Country of the Overseas Territories* is the concept of the archive considered not as the custodian of continuity, rather as the site of a critical cut in the hegemonic criteria of cataloguing: “the site of histories, lives and sentiments yet to be registered and narrated” [Chambers 2012, 153]. Thus, the aim of the present article is to highlight that aesthetic materials become active participants of the social dynamics and contribute to transforming the public meanings of a controversial and traumatic

past. Through the investigation of a cooperation between the artist and the researchers, as well as through a contamination between art and social research, this paper aims at demonstrating that aesthetic languages are particularly effective in opening the archive and producing new possibilities and participatory forms of emancipation and democracy.

1. The Country of the Overseas Territories: a case study

Our work is based on a specific case study, used to explore the alternative contexts in which sociological knowledge might be produced. In order to explain and understand how the undisputed authority and the consecrated commemorative shape of an Italian institutionalised site can be transformed into a space of public memory, we analyse the on-going research-by-art project *The Country of the Overseas Territories*², started in 2012 and elaborated by the artist Alessandra Cianelli, in collaboration with the independent scholar Beatrice Ferrara. This project has been chosen because it enables the investigation of the interrelation between artistic practices and the transformation of an institutionalised site of a traumatic past into a reconfigured space of memories. Conceptually, the project is conceived as an attempt to investigate, through a participatory artistic intervention, the complex relationship with a controversial Italian colonial past.

This study has been conducted using qualitative methods: a) interviews with the artist and her team, during the whole process of the elaboration of the project; b) ethnographic observations during the workshops organised by the artist to share and have feedback on the meanings addressed by the artistic project; c) analysis of a cultural symbol in which a controversial Italian colonial past has taken its public shape; d) analysis of the web site created by the artist for this art project.

In regard to the latter point, we have analysed the images collected on the web site and those presented during the public events with a visual sociology perspective, which does not consider images in their marginal role as documents or

2. See the project's website: www.ilpaesedelleterredoltremare.wordpress.com.

illustrations, but as a source of relevant data and as a crucial part of the research process itself, thus acknowledging the specific value of the iconic data [Henny 1986]. Visual sociology represents, first of all, the attempt to propose a more visual approach to a social research that works *with* and *on* the images. In this regard, we have chosen to analyse images that are culturally produced, in the sense given by Douglas Harper [2012].

1.1. The art project as an archive of otherness

The art project *The Country of the Overseas Territories* explores the traces of abandoned future scenarios from the colonial past of the country, still lingering in the present, and takes them as cues to read and de-construct the present itself. It is an account of the here and now on the traces of the colonial-national self, “that self that needs the other to be itself” [Cianelli, Ferrara 2017]. The project opens up the (post)colonial archive of Italy through the guide of a critical wonder, developing a specific line of inquiry into archival work and collaborative editing, like Alice in the Wonderland (as evoked by the title), and a subverted exotic desire for discovery, assumed as a research tool with a “fabulous power” able to “open hidden, disappeared, or never existed lands” [ivi, 1].

Taking the official (historical) and unofficial (personal) archives of the Italian colonial history as both a source material and a methodological tool, the project aims at “discovering”, gathering, interlacing and re-working sounds, images, objects, words and memories linked to the stories of the Overseas, that is, the Italian colonial territories beyond the Mediterranean: the Cyrenaic region (Libya, Albania), and the African Corn (Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea), known in the Fascist period as the AOI (Italian Oriental Africa). In particular, the investigation is based on a research field in Naples and what can be considered as its most emblematic colonial institution: the Triennial Exhibition of the Overseas Territories (now Mostra d’Oltremare S.p.A), the place where the project converges and diverges. This place follows the typical logic and the structure of the “exhibitionary complex”, to recall Tony Bennett’s formulation about the proliferation in the nineteenth century of those civic institutions aimed at transferring objects

and bodies from enclosed domains into progressively more public arenas [1988]. Here, within a regime of representation that connects aesthetics and politics, these exhibited objects inscribe and transmit the messages of power within the public discourse.

The Exhibition of the Overseas Territories was built by the Fascist government in 1937-40 in order to celebrate “the Italian Empire” by exhibiting the great variety of its “overseas territories”. It was completed with perfectly reproduced colonial villages inhabited by “real natives”, an open arena, two theatres, a (still functioning) zoo, the (still functioning) amusement park Edenlandia, a tropical aquarium, a swimming pool, restaurants, real Roman ruins, and large extensions of African flora. A space devoted to the *experiential exploration* of the cultural, political and military force of the Empire and on a deeper level, a real “phanta-exotic complex: a desire, a future projection made real” as Cianelli defines it on the project website.

The Fascist architecture, the “exotic” animals and the botanical presences in the Exhibition, as well as a seemingly inaccessible institutional archive, are all that remains of the colonial past of the city and the central role it played in that enterprise. Naples, in fact, during the culminating years of the Imperial period, was the port from which the colonial ships sailed, and the seat of “L’Orientale” University, where the colonial officers were formed. As the first capital of the South colonised by the Northern Italian/Savoy reign, Naples was destined to become the seat of the Ministry of the Colonies and, in its turn, the Northern capital of the southern lands conquered in Africa, thus concluding the colonialist vicious circle of subordination and integration. With the collapse of Fascism and the subsequent ideological condemnation, this project has miserably failed and its history has been buried deeply in the collective and personal unconscious.

It is exactly in the shadow of these colonial ruins that Cianelli moves, recalling the “neofuturist and phanta-exotic imaginary” [Cianelli, Ferrara 2017] that had nurtured the colonial project and the Neapolitan Overseas Exhibition, along with her personal insights, memories and fantasies. She makes real physical “expeditions” accompanied by fellow researchers in the lost lands of the removed past of the nation and the city, and re-activates the stories which survived oblivion to meet the present again. *The Country of the Overseas Territories’* main purpose is to

unpack the archive of an abandoned landscape and participate in the disorder of the memories that are not officially catalogued. This is a process of de-archiving that is based on an archaeological journey into the roots of both the collective and personal colonial unconscious, through its traces and ruins disseminated in the present, thus producing a new historical narrative of the self and the other and of the other within the self. It is significant here to consider the crucial role played by autobiography and its relationship with historiography [Bertaux, Kohli 1984; Jedlowski 2009; Bochner, Ellis 2016]. In the project, the possibility to give an account to one's self, as well as to question it, is always linked to the narration of a wider, collective memory.

For instance, Cianelli's investigation touches on the relationship between her family and the colonial history, starting from interrogating and questioning the familiarity of some words whose meaning seems to be forgotten. Their survival is left only to their sound, and their re-signification is hidden in the emotive and sensorial memory of the body that "registered" or experienced it. The words transformed into sound suddenly reveal their hidden and forgotten meaning. Thus, Cianelli's video, *Words that Hide/Are Hidden [parole che (si) nascondono]*, 2012, is a "minimal attempt", as the artist herself says, at giving an account of the Italian colonial presence in Africa, its persistence in the cultural and political unconscious of contemporary Italy, and its reverberations in her personal history.

This composite artwork is based on two videos: *On My Shoulders [Sulle spalle]*³ and *Ambaradam*, both produced within *The Country of the Overseas Territories* project. The first video revolves around the repressed memory of the artist's grandfather, enrolled by the Fascist army in the war for the defence of the colonised

3. This video is also part of a wider art-research project, where the archive is taken as a vehicle for both memory and future: *The Matri-Archive of the Mediterranean. Graphics and Matters (M.A.M.)*. Inspired to a multiple, complex and plural vision of the Mediterranean, and to the archive understood as a space of dwelling, wandering and narration, and simultaneously the space of creative and political intervention, the project consists of a web platform dedicated to the archiving and dissemination of the contemporary aesthetics and languages, or in our definition, "graphics and matters", the signs and traces of expression – visual arts, plastic arts, photography, graphics, dance, music, land-art, bio-art – produced by female artists of the Mediterranean area. See: www.matriarchiviomediterraneo.org, and Carotenuto, Ianniciello, Piccirillo 2017.

territories in Cyrenaic, and dead in 1940 during a British bombing. A story removed from the family memories, where the Fascist censorship ends by overlapping and invading the personal narrations and existence. The artist recalls how her grandfather's disappearance was part of a family archive of pain and trauma locked in (self) censorship and interdiction, which reminded of a wider, collective archive of Fascist power and war. Beyond the violence of the silence imposed by (His)tory, the artist makes this story live again through the female voices: she consigns the narration to her mother who reads the letters written by her father, during the war. In the second video, entitled *Ambaradam*, both the artist and the spectator follow the meaning of the words concealed under the sound, mixing reality and fiction, familiar and unfamiliar, innocence and guilt, play and war, joy and sorrow. In Italian, the word "ambaradan" is generally used to indicate confusion, turmoil, chaos. It can also recall a magic formula, or a doggerel often sang by children. The meaning of this apparently playful sound reveals a terrible event linked to the Italian epopee in the Horn of Africa. The Ambaradàm is the Ethiopian mountain that was the bloody theatre of the Italian colonial campaign for Ethiopia, annexed to the Fascist empire in 1936 [Del Boca 2009; Cianelli 2014]. The African name has taken part in the common use of the Italian language to indicate chaos, but the historical meaning it unconsciously evokes has been removed and concealed. As the artist suggests, the word has been transformed in order to assume a more convenient meaning.

Some sounds, words, songs, and places reveal to be unsuspected conveyers of memories that can be historically awakened and re-enacted. They are part of an expanded archive that diffuses a critical perspective on the construction of a visible, acceptable "Self" (identity) and an unconscious, removed "Other", buried under it, opening up a possibility of reinvention between past desires and future challenges:

This is the land where I search for an external legitimisation of my internal journey. The broken roots, my mother, a secret, a place, the abandonment, the exclusion; being out of place, on the border, being a threshold and an opening.
This is the way you can learn Nostalgia and Betrayal: backwards, forwards, around the time, I, me, present and cutting, in order to catch past and future, like two birds with one stone [Cianelli 2014, 166].

Opening the archive implies here a move into the critical terrain of interrogation and re-composition, which invests both the self and the other, the personal and the collective, the familiarity and the strangeness, the here and the elsewhere. In Cianelli's videos as well as in her entire project, the attempt to narrate one's own lost memories and past traumas and silences ends up configuring as a sociological practice, since the data and meanings of the narration acquire a notable social relevance. In this sense, Cianelli's overall project can be considered as a visual autoethnography about our relationship with otherness and identity, processed through a practice of searching for, unpacking and questioning the colonial archive, which allows confronting and sharing one's own experiences and narrations. This occurs on multiple levels: those of the cultural imaginary, social interactions and historical connections as well as those concerning disciplinary languages and methodologies. As we shall see more in detail in the next paragraph, *The Country of the Overseas Territories* is in fact a research-by-art project based on reflexivity, performativity, relationality, and participation. Moreover, the project recalls the colonial missions and highlights their cultural proximity with anthropological, ethnographic and archaeological expeditions: they were all characterised by a desire for exoticism mixed to a greed for conquest, and they are all part of a social and cultural archive of knowledge and power.

Thus, the project's process of de-archiving assumes wonder and fieldwork as its main procedural and aesthetic methods, but it combines them with a sense of displacement and repositioning, articulating a real practice of critical re-appropriation and subversion. In an emancipatory perspective of social theory, Cianelli's project represents an original challenge and an opportunity, as it exemplifies how the different research fields of art and sociology, and the respective actors, languages and practices involved, can cooperate and contaminate each other. This is not simply a mere question concerning visual sociology and the many innovative consequences that visual tools have brought in the field of social theory, as different studies show [Rose 2001; Spencer 2010; Harper 2012; Stagi, Queirolo Palmas 2015; Frisina 2016]. Most significantly, *The Country of the Overseas Territories* shows how art research can contribute to question and renegotiate the disciplinary and methodological limits of both visuality and sociology, in creative and critical ways.

2. *The contribution of visuality to social theory*

The *Country of the Overseas Territories* is a collective and constantly in progress art project, mainly based on visuality, which concretely contributes to social research. The choice of rendering a personal and collective research within the visual domain of filmmaking is not casual. Departing from vision as a central sensory channel of knowledge, a visual approach to social theory can enrich the research and investigate the crucial role played by images in the public discourse, as we know from a solid tradition of sociologists and communication theorists [Harper 2012; Shevchenko 2017; Tota 2017; Zelizer 2004]. We claim that the world imagined and conveyed visually by Cianelli's filmmaking artwork opens to new insights and discoveries, suitable for sociological study.

Such a perspective does not intend to speak about the images, rather *through* the images and close to them. Images can be investigated as a primary medium of the intersubjective transmission of memory that involves both the artist's perspective and the viewers' reception. Moreover, these aesthetic codes propose alternative and effective strategies of making sense of the past, or as Barbie Zelizer would say, visuals can contribute to shape the public knowledge of a controversial event and intervene in the process of meaning creation [2004]. Yet, meanings change according to the viewers' interpretations and negotiations. Here, we confront a new relation between viewing subject and viewed object, which questions the demarcation lines of the disciplines as well as those of the institutionalised contexts where such practices take place, i.e. academic institutions, educational settings, contemporary art museums or galleries.

The realm of visuality becomes an interdisciplinary and transversal interpretative field of inquiry, in which social interactions of knowledge and power are debated and contested, a problematic space, where it is possible to re-think the logic of belongingness and location. This development in social theory suggests an enhanced significance of spatiality, that insists on "the multi-inhabitation of spaces through bodies, social relations and psychic dynamics", in contrast with nation-states that insist on a singular inhabitation under one dominant rule [Rogoff 2000, 23]. Since space is always differentiated and characterised by boundary lines, visuality aims to repopulate space with all the unknown images

removed by the illusion of a transparent locality. In this sense, visual arts suggest ways to experiment and reconfigure social theory, because they register the crisis of boundaries and the coexistence of multiple belongings.

The Country of the Overseas Territories has been, in fact, a creator of new spaces and spatialities, from which a new knowledge, otherwise unimaginable, perspectives, connections and meanings have emerged. The collective operational matrix of the project is crucial. It is based on a main collaboration, that between an artist (Cianelli) and a number of fellow researchers and different artistic collaborators, coming from several areas of expertise, which have been involved during the many stages of the project's development. These include institutional support from members of the Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies of the University of Naples "L'Orientale" and the Academy of Fine Arts of Naples, as well as local "activist-producer" entities, such as the ex-Asilo Filangieri. Then, the project has created a network of institutions and people participating in the same process of memory-making. It follows the artistic orientation towards participation and collaboration that has grown exponentially since the early 1990s, and has been addressed by art historian Claire Bishop as "participatory art" in which social actors constitute the central artistic medium [2012]. Different from interaction that involves the spectators physically, the notion of participation relates to the collective experience activated in non-object-based art practices while recognising the political and oppositional potential of art. We cannot forget that, in this context, the notion of participation brings with it the issue of authorship and the all-pervasive technologies of media, together with the tools used for improving efficiency in the work contexts. Rather than calling for an active engagement that is still permeated with an unequal binary logic of teaching/learning, capable/incapable, participation implies that all those who are involved are already active as interpreters. In stressing the idea that individuals usually make connections between different pieces of memory and information that come up, the participatory dimension advocated by Cianelli's work claims that we all appropriate works for ourselves and create our own versions.

The Country of the Overseas Territories propels us into a more global phenomenon, where the work of art as a finite item is reconsidered as a long-term and open-ended project, and the spectators are participants who actively produce and

share meanings. We can speak here of a social dimension of art-working and cultural production, which is also evident in the same procedures through which the project develops. It has been carried out through a series of performance-outputs in collaboration with different fellow researchers and in public dialogue with people. Each output has configured a step in the development of the theoretical and methodological premises of the research, with a specific focus of enquiry.

In particular, within the general fieldwork of the entire project, the 2015 fieldwork, “Working the Archive” (“Lavorare l’archivio”) signals a crucial stage in the project’s progress. Developed on the basis of an interview/conversation about the archives of the future, taken in 2012 between Cianelli and the artist Stefano Roveda⁴, “Working the Archive” was constituted by two workshops: one, theoretical, about the nature and function of the archive, and involving researchers from the different above-mentioned institutions, among whom one of the authors of the present article; and another one, practical, involving students and different participants, which was essentially based on a series of “expeditions” to the Exhibition of the Overseas Territories in Naples, in order to document and then narrate the experience of that particular urban archive. Against the classical modes of sociological inquiry, based on distance and impersonality (and anonymity, as well), here the artist, in collaboration with some researchers, invites participants to share their own experiences by asking them to consider and reflect on the ways the colonial archive connects or reminds of personal memories.

Here the fieldwork actions such as walking, writing, videotaping, audio recording, photographing, interviewing and narrating are part of both the research practice and the artistic process. The moment and data of restitution end up coinciding both with the fieldwork in progress itself and the further developments stemming from it. Restitution is thus a stage within a wider process, and it is always shared and public. For example, a performing action originated from “Working the Archive”, directly inspired by the students’ responses to that experience, which have been then articulated by the artist in a new work in 2016. This is *On the Practice of Wonder and the Necessity of an Archive*, a video-audio performance in the form of a dialogue-interview between Cianelli and Ferrara at the Nitsch Museum, in Naples.

4. See the conversation on Cianelli’s website: https://ilpaesedelleterredoltremare.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/gli-archivi-del-futuro_conversazione-con-stefano-roveda.pdf.

More recent developments of the project are focused on sound, as for example Cianelli's live radio performance *The Land of the Overseas Territories (correspondances and archeotechnological radiosonic souvenirs, searching for the traces of the missing grandpa)*, within Documenta 14, in 2017 in Berlin. Currently, the artist is working at a video, in collaboration with the English artist, Christopher Thompson, on the basis of her radio experience in Berlin.

This brings us directly into the operational praxis of Cianelli's project, revolving around a series of collective artistic and performing actions, made up of multimedia materials, concerning archiving practice, aiming not simply at recovering or repairing but rather at re-acting memory on both a personal and social process of re-membling and questioning. From this perspective, Cianelli and Ferrara, as the main authors of the project, claim their critical positioning at the interplay and reciprocal interpellation between research and practice, underlining that *what* is said (researched, acted) is inseparable from *how* it is said, and that their on-going methodological research is the core of their artistic-theoretical research about *what* and *how* to archive, and ultimately the archive itself as a *dispositif*. If art is not to be considered as simply an object, but rather a process contaminated, interrogated and enriched by research, the latter, affected by art, can similarly disengage itself from the strict and disciplining parameters of academy and opens itself toward a different and perhaps more innovative and liberating field of theoretical legitimacy.

As Zolberg underlines [1990], anthropological field methods can be part of the toolkit of the sociologist; in this regard, James Clifford's work has been particularly inspiring [1983]. Indeed, social science could stop being fixed on distanced objects and instead focus more consistently on the stories, the bodies, the cultural crossings, and the collective formations associated with those objects, thus following Clifford's intuition to consider a crucial and critical passage from objects to processes [2013]. In so doing social theory can incorporate more imaginative and unpredictable interpretative methods and tools to make sense of the world. Artworks, in particular, if considered as texts to be read, can contribute to discover meanings that are unforeseeable and expressions of other cultural formations of society [Griswold 1986; Heinich 1987].

3. *The common grounds of emancipation*

The art project examined here as an archiving practice bringing renovation and critical cut in social theory also concerns the relevance of this project to the formation of a specific postcolonial perspective emerging “from the South”, hence highly relevant to the broader Mediterranean area. This would help conceive the “Mediterranean” as a mobile network of interconnected relations, itself a living archive crossed by global fluxes and a variety of stories and memories, rather than simply a geographical space on a map. The Mediterranean perspective propels us into the wider frame of contemporary migrations, where globalisation and movement create disconnections and relocations between identity and location [Ianniciello 2018]. There emerge alternative worlds of imaginative selves, and the recombination of lives under the condition of migration. The work of imagination and aspiration, therefore, is not a privilege, but becomes the essential condition for sharing new debates and narratives of loss.

According to Arjun Appadurai [2016], for modern migrants the archive is a “map”, an on-going research tool (and not a pre-ordained place), a space where collective memory offers an ethical basis for the construction of cultural identities in the often-unfavourable conditions of a new society. In the spirit of Foucault, Appadurai’s proposal offers us the opportunity to view the archive less as a container and more as a socially produced project activating forms of everyday intervention: conscious sites of debate and desire. In this sense, the case study presented here plays a special role because it allows new forms of auto-ethnography and the construction of imagined communities. *The Country of the Overseas Territories* works on the connections between different migrant histories, different communities, a common cultural heritage, and shared and collective practices of imagination-archiving-narrations. It produces new forms of sociality, which emerge from the encounter and friction between the local and the global, the actual and the imaginary, the past and the future.

In this sense, the concrete, collective, in-progress archiving practices of *The Country of the Overseas Territories*, along with its performances and video outputs, represent an example of innovative collaboration and contamination not only among institutions, social actors, professional figures, roles and expertise, but

also and above all between different disciplines and apparently distant fields of knowledge. In this sense, opening up the archive as a dispositif of power also means to interrogate the divisions, separations (if not conflicts) between the disciplines and within themselves, where research is subjugated by a capillary subdivision in sectors and sub-sectors that de facto obstacle any effort of the so largely advocated “interdisciplinarity”, and by a series of (neoliberal) quantitative parameters of value, which often end up with the annihilation of any attempt at alternative practices of knowledge, different criteria of analysis and “verification”, ultimately experimentation itself.

This brings us directly into the current Western crisis of the academic institution, in general, and the human and social sciences, in particular [Perulli 2015; Chesta, Streeck 2016; Chambers et al 2018]. If crisis is also an opportunity, then this lies in opening up the disciplines and knowledge to a reciprocal critical dialogue, interrogation, questioning and establishing a common ground of belonging and development. In a work of and between art and research, *The Country of the Overseas Territories* proposes a way toward a disciplinary as well as a social and cultural emancipation, recalling Jacques Rancière’s description of emancipation as a process of liberation from one’s own inability or impossibility. Discussing the relationships between aesthetics and politics, and the emancipative potential they can generate, the French philosopher explains that art can create emancipation when it is able to provoke a movement between ignorance and knowledge, between one word and another, one creative act and another, thus producing new forms of commonality and equality between people, images, words, spaces, times [Rancière 2016].

It is in this porous field of encounters that research, in its turn, can re-launch itself, beyond the regime of restrictions to which it is often subjected. It is significant here to underline that *The Country of the Overseas Territories* has found its operative inspiration in Derrida’s claim of a university without conditions [Derrida 2002]. Some traits of the Derridean deconstruction led to a reflection on the necessity to re-found the humanities, and a starting point toward this change lies in embracing the faith in a possible radical independence of the academic institution, thought as a place of unconditioned research practice. This would develop through what can be defined as a methodology of independence,

that is, “as if” the university were without any condition. A creative, literary, artistic “as if”, which the Humanities are called to profess for their same nature and vocation, differently but not in opposition to other sciences. If in the Sixties and Seventies the Humanities experienced a theoretical and productive questioning and critique of the notion of “work” – classic, canonical, authorial – by a semiological conceptualisation of the “text” [Barthes 1964, 1973; Derrida 1967; Foucault 1966, Kristeva 1969], today they are witnessing more and more a return to the “work” in a performative and creative sense: that is, “making work” [Derrida 2002] or “art-working” [Ettinger 2006]. Thus, social and human sciences, in a claimed independence of the university, should be able to experiment, as in the case study analysed here, the innovative value – for themselves, for the knowledge that they produce, preserve and transmit – of “making work” and “artworking”, opening themselves to a public and cultural performativity of their necessary renovation.

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