THE ART OF MAKING DO IN NAPLES

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Detail of the Palazzo dei Telefoni, designed by Camillo Guerra and completed in 1924. The building was the location of the former state telephone company offices, and the ground floor once hosted telephone stations open to the public.

INTRODUCTION

The Contact Zone

Where Organized Crime and Everyday Life Comingle

A MAN WITH A DEEP-LINED CHARCOAL TAN is leaning against the wall of a corpulent, prerationalist-style palazzo at Piazza Nolana. Once white, now covered in soot, the building's two marble caryatids (figured as Mercury the trickster, messenger of the gods, patron of commerce, and guide to the underworld) can barely hold up the second-floor balcony. Next to the man lies his filthy blanket of ceramic trinkets, rusted alarm clocks, and twisted shoes that look like the evidence of unseen violence. He is gesturing with outstretched, needle-marked arms at a man propped against a dented blue car. The other man is talking to him loudly, elongating his vowels and finishing his sentences with intonation that sounds like bellicose whining. A third man is squatting beside his own discolored blanket, which is littered with box sets of pliers, nails, shiny watches of dubious working quality, and limbless nude Barbies. He is playing with a pair of long, black-handled scissors, opening and closing them, entranced by the *slice-slice* of the blades.

Passersby pick their way through the crowded, narrow sidewalk, some choosing to step off the curb into the busy street, bypassing the motley assortment of undesirable objects for sale and the piles of ashen newspapers leftover from the street fires that warm heroin junkies at night. Their main destination is the market known as 'Ncopp' 'e Mmura (Above the walls), the magnificent fish market that begins at the crumbling fifteenth-century Aragonese city gate, Porta Nolana, one of whose towers (the Tower of Faith) bears the weight of a modern three-story apartment building that someone likely built without a permit. Through the arch and past the gate, women with large green plastic bags make their way to the wide shallow crates of mussels, clams, oysters, squid, sardines, anchovies, swordfish, grouper, cod, bass, and eel. Their sacks are stuffed with kilo-loaves of hard, crusty bread, long-stemmed artichokes, leafy lemons, and knotted bags of mozzarella balls in cloudy white water. A woman stops before a vendor who, with already bloodied

hands, majestically takes hold of a live octopus, lifts it into the air and, with a long shout and a swing of his machete, massacres it. He promptly cleans it while calling out in song for the next customer.

The windows of the shops flanking the market are lined with bottles of olive oil and the sulfurous wines of the region, split bread loaves, and inverted dangling bouquets of salami with skin blotched powdery-white with age. Inside the shops are stacks and stacks of pasta—long, short, twisted, ridged, smooth, toothed, rounded, fat, and bulbous. It's lunchtime, and every other pedestrian has some kind of delicacy in hand, wrapped in yellow paper napkins, half peeking out: oily bread filled with prosciutto, provola, and tomato or mozzarella and red peppers, a square slice of pizza, or a buttery phyllo-dough treat filled with escarole and olives. Some are standing and eating while talking on cell phones, gesticulating with food in hand. Others are walking slowly, weaving leisurely through the kinetic fervor as they go.

A stray dog with patches of missing fur is arching its back, keeping its hind legs close together as if preparing for a graceful Olympic dive. Instead, it shits on the cobblestones, already strewn with pedestrians'

grease-stained napkins. Around a corner in a narrow *vicolo,*[1] a young man, shirtless and in shorts, is sitting on the threshold of his *basso* (ground-floor dwelling).[2] He points a bottle at his baby's mouth, and the infant gulps hungrily. The bottle slips, and with a slurp the nipple and infant separate. In an instant, the baby lets out a wide scream. It sounds in tune with the numerous other extended vowels sung at full throttle by market vendors announcing in aggressively plaintive, undulating tones *Fresh fish! Lemons of Sorrento!* The vocal performances are so extravagant and competitive that they seem just as orchestrated as that of the sexy, olive-skinned thug in tight pants who sings "The strength to decide" to a full-figured teen strutting by in an even tighter ensemble of low-cut jeans and a half-shirt. Effortlessly, she ignores him. Or it may be that his melodramatic serenade is for the young man walking behind her. "What I don't have / is the strength to decide / I'd erase you if I could / from my heart."[3]

These life-scenes might convey to visitors that Naples is flush with the sensory intensities that smolder mainly in the "lower bodily stratum."[4] Indeed, many Neapolitans say that 'Ncopp' 'e Mmura is part of the "belly of Naples," as the popular writer Matilde Serao famously described the city's poorest quarters in 1884.[5] To me, a white middle-class American man, 'Ncopp' 'e Mmura, host to both heroin packets and baby bottles, sumptuous foods and animal filth, the avid shouts of vendors and the naked songs of lovers, felt precisely like the "promiscuous public space" identified by the nineteenth-century European bourgeoisie who sought to circumscribe it.[6]

The fish market, however, is not merely a place where undisciplined passions and interests run amok.[7] Here a brutal and occulted territorial system undergirds these forces. 'Ncopp' 'e Mmura, and the *quartiere* (quarter) Mercato in which it is situated, is dominated by a crime clan that, together with several rival and allied clans that claim other parts of the city and the wider Campania region as their territories, are commonly called "the camorra." For now, the dominant clan in Mercato goes by the surname of its leaders: Mazzarella.

The heroin comes to Piazza Nolana by way of the Mazzarella clan, which shares with other clans the services of independent broker–traffickers to import the drug from the Balkans. When the broker arrives with the delivery, each clan takes its share, then cuts, packages, and sells the heroin to the *spacciatori* (drug dealers) who work the piazzas in

its territories.[8] Spacciatori usually operate as independent entrepreneurs who pay *tangenti* (tributes) to the crime clan affiliates in whose territory they conduct business. Additionally, uncountable tons of the market's fish are defrosted or contaminated contraband coming from Tunisia, Turkey, Thailand, China, and Australia. They are sold by vendors in 'Ncopp' 'e Mmura who label the fish as "fresh" and "from the Gulf of Naples."[9] Moreover, some of the vendors are affiliates of the Mazzarella clan, which also owns a fishmonger's shop in the neighborhood. The clan's affiliates also run an extortion racket by paying nonaffiliated residents to demand access fees from the drivers of fish delivery trucks and parking fees from anyone else wanting to use the area's public lots.

Heroin and counterfeit fish are just two of the many illegal goods that change hands in 'Ncopp' 'e Mmura. The DVDs and CDs of Neapolitan, "Italian," English, and American videos and music that men and women lay out for sale on card tables among the fish vendors are counterfeit and pirated. In fact, the quartiere Mercato is a major hub for the mass reproduction, warehousing, citywide distribution, and sale of these recordings.[10] Since at least the time of the audiocassette, the barons of this illicit commerce even certify, whether ironically, earnestly, or arrogantly, the authenticity of their pirated products. Until the late 1990s one locally renowned mixtape "brand" label contained the "mixed message" seen in the figure.

The dominant genre of these recordings is *la musica neomelodica*. Its voicy Neapolitan-language lyrics, disco-pop tones, and melodramatic (and ironic) melodies resound through 'Ncopp' 'e Mmura and many of the city's poorer quarters in its center, in the urban *periferia* (periphery), throughout Campania and other southern Italian regions, such as Sicily, Puglia, and parts of Calabria. Neomelodica music and musicians also circulate in southern Italian diasporas in northern Italy, Belgium, Germany, and other countries.[11]

Neomelodica music can be heard anywhere in Naples and its surrounding provinces, and well beyond. Adults sing along with the radio at home or in the car, and kids play songs to each other on their cell phones while at school. Singers perform neomelodica music at modest baptism celebrations and at ostentatious wedding parties, and they lip-synch their songs on local private television broadcasts and sometimes on nationally popular television talk shows. Additionally, neomelodica music is the inspiration for transnationally circulating, low-budget, Neapolitan-

"Warning: Tapes with photocopied inserts are not mixed by Erry, the ideal dimension for clean listening. P.S. For any kind of party with karaoke and dancing, go to your TRUSTED reseller." ***Pulito*** **(clean) in this context denotes good sound quality.**

language musical films. It even dominates the soundtrack of the feature film *Gomorra* (Gomorrah), the 2008 Grand Prix winner at Cannes.

Neomelodici singers and their associates, together numbering in the hundreds, maybe even thousands, compose, record, publicize, and perform their growing repertoires within overlapping "legitimate," do-it-yourself (DIY), and clandestine fields of practice.[12] Some of the big players on the scene are powerful crime clan affiliates; they operate as talent managers and songwriters. Most of the scene's protagonists, however, are young men in their teens and twenties who have little formal education, and at best irregular employment and limited access to resources.[13]

They linger in this milieu for years, following uncertain opportunities while negotiating the risks of contact with criminal associations.

The Art of Making Do

I began research on the neomelodica scene in 1998, at the tail end of the "Neapolitan Renaissance," the hoped-for result of Mayor Antonio Bassolino's ambitious project of urban renewal. For decades Naples had been wracked by soaring unemployment, infrastructural collapse, a cholera epidemic, a calamitous earthquake, rampant illegal rebuilding, and spiking intraclan violence.[14] This turmoil was enmeshed with local and national political upheaval. In 1992 a team of magistrates in Milan launched the *Mani pulite* investigations (Operation Clean Hands) into corruption networks entangling organized crime affiliates, public administration, all ranks of political office, and business elites throughout the country. Milan, and by extension the entire Italian state, was popularly renamed Tangentopoli (Bribesville), where politicians collected "a second layer of taxes" that they systematically solicited or extorted as bribes in exchange for public works contracts, public-sector employment, and business-friendly legislation.[15] In a little over a year, the magistrates, armed with the confessions of many business leaders and urged on by a disenfranchised and indignant public, convicted nearly one-third of Parliament's deputies and toppled the ruling political elite. Although the trials demonstrated that corruption was a nationwide problem, between 1992 and 1993 twenty-six Campanian regional councils were disbanded for mafia infiltration, far more than in other regions.[16]

When Bassolino became mayor of Naples in 1993, it appeared he had a cleaner slate for urban renewal. He aimed to change the city's image within Italy and in the G7 nations.[17] His primary target was the immense and densely populated *centro storico* ("historic center"). He focused on Neapolitans' relationship to public space by curbing the sprawl of illegal parking, clearing away trash, and reopening architectural landmarks that had long been shuttered and ignored.[18] His intention was to replace the collapsing industrial economy with a self-sustaining tourism industry that drew on the cultural resources of Naples and Campania.

One of these local cultural resources is Neapolitan-language song. Song is an allusive and alluring language of great historical significance

in Naples. The city's mythological name is Parthenope, the siren who drowned herself in despair when she failed to lure Ulysses. The earliest Neapolitan-language vocal music texts date back to the thirteenth century. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Naples was home to a proliferation of single-voice and polyphonic villanelle, ironic and lurid songs from whom "gentlemen" collectors gathered the inspiration for the comparatively formal madrigals that they diffused in cities of the north such as Florence and Venice. At the end of the eighteenth century, Naples was considered throughout Europe Italy's music capital, and Neapolitans were believed to have an "innate" capacity for artful song. At the end of the nineteenth century, Naples was the center of an international popular song industry commanded by bourgeois lyricists. For nearly half a century, they composed a massive repertoire of romantic and picturesque poems, later named *la canzone classica,* or "classic song." These songs circulated transnationally with the mass migrations of Italians from all over Italy to Europe, the Americas, and Australia.

By the 1950s the Neapolitan song culture industry had declined. Television connected the dominant pop music scenes of Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States and inspired new musical forms, lyrical content, and types of composition in Naples. In the 1970s many new musical styles emerged from Naples, but one genre in particular has had an enduring afterlife among the popular classes: *canzoni 'e mala,* or "songs of the underworld." Although many were composed decades earlier by the very same bourgeois poets of the canzone classica, the canzoni 'e mala resonated, perhaps for some listeners too much, with the tumultuous day-to-day realities of the 1970s. In the 1980s neomelodica song, a genre described as "erotic-sentimental," emerged from this same milieu. Strikingly, these songs were composed not in the poetic language of the middle classes but in the everyday vernaculars of the popular classes. In fact, the composers, performers, producers, distributors, and the fans all, on the whole, came from the same milieu. Through the availability of private and pirated television and affordable recording technologies, the protagonists of interconnected DIY music scenes began to make themselves more audible and visible. Their audiences grew to the hundreds of thousands across southern Italy and among southern Italian "emigrants" in the north and transnationally.[19] By the mid-1990s hundreds of independent singers, songwriters, and technicians crowded into these scenes,

For years counterfeit and pirated music CD vendors have worked this spot in La Pignasecca (The Dried Pinecone), a market in the centro storico. I also have photographed them for years. On one occasion, I realized years later, I captured Ciro Petrone, who played a protagonist in *Gomorra* (2008). Ciro helps his father working as a fruit vendor in the market.

hoping to make a living or even make it big in what looks like an alternative culture industry. Today in 2012, for hundreds, maybe thousands, of people, song is a prime cultural resource for making do.

Neomelodici protagonists say that maneuvering in the scene is a precarious business that requires artfulness and artifice. For them, this means being on alert for the resources and tools that might enhance their ever-emerging plans for a better life. It means speculating on the future even as the camorra colonizes or kills it. They adapt to events and relations as they emerge, prepared to leverage multiple forms of value—publicity, favors, and varieties of social capital. Shaking off encumbrances like rigid ethical codes, they apply instrumental reason to ethical practice.[20] People in the neomelodica music scene call their creative pragmatics *l'arte di arrangiarsi,* or "the art of making do." Making do

means more to them than simply "getting by." Many people in the scene want more than to merely live with chronic indeterminacy. They seek self-determination and a life that escapes precarity altogether.

In the melodramas of making do in the neomelodica scene, peoples' desires for self-determination crystallize in the figure of the personal sovereign.[21] The personal sovereign (in this scene typically male) makes for himself and his (actual or potential) family a life of security and a path to something even better. He transforms chronic indeterminacy into unqualified potential. He enacts a "sovereign decision" that "springs out of a normative nothingness and from a concrete disorder."[22] This figure is a fantasy that is not necessarily mimed in everyday practice, but it lures people into its shoes from where it stands, just beyond the limits of speculation. It activates "the perception of one's own vitality, one's sense of aliveness, of changeability (often signified as 'freedom')."[23] The personal sovereign fully exploits his field of potential.

Contact Zones

The neomelodica music scene is one of many instances where the so-called formal, informal, and illicit economies overlap in Campania and beyond.[24] The scene is a contact zone where the art of making do brushes up against organized crime. In a contact zone, where heterogeneous epistemologies, sensibilities, and practices comingle, it is not readily apparent who or what dominates.[25] Everyone and everything is potentially deterritorialized in this transient space of encounter.[26]

A contact zone is a field of potential where the rules of engagement are suspended. People enter the scene in search of self-determination while avoiding ensnaring debts and obligations to criminal associations. To do so, they must attune themselves to the occulted dimension of the market and to the very real possibility that things are often *more than* what they seem. For them, this surplus, rather than being the "hidden" or "real truth," is the unregulated and undocumented vitality—and the death throes—of things. Its potency is registered in volatile events and shapeless suspicions.

Attuned to the pulsions and tensions of this contact zone, people communicate, interact, and create in ways that extend its rhythms. They harness or deflect this potency with melodramatic flamboyance and seductiveness, ironic playfulness and dissimulation, suspicion and secrecy,

and overdrawn hopes—the aesthetic qualities of the art of making do. These qualities resonate in musical performances and in day-to-day engagements. They form a "porous, affective scene of identification among strangers," or an "intimate public."[27]

The art of making do is a speculative performance, the staging of a better life. Enacting it requires creative tactics for seizing opportunities and negotiating risk. Excessive speculation, however, can lead to violent determinations: the ad hoc art of making do has the potential to transmogrify into organized crime. Under these conditions the figure of the self-realized sovereign incarnates as a *camorrista* (crime clan affiliate). This is because organized crime in Campania works through contact, forever roping in new associates and affiliates. While in Sicily the mafia *padrino* (godfather) is the embodiment of a single hermetic and enduring center of power, the Campanian role of *capoclan* (clan boss) shifts or is shared among members of a family generation.[28] Clans can also splinter into autonomous, even rival groups, inciting extraordinary levels of violence. In Naples dozens of clans have carved out and then parsed numerous territories of control as they forge federations, undergo scissions, and form new alliances. Organized crime in Naples is shape-shifting and volatile, rendering "organized" a tenuous attribution.

More importantly, crime clan affiliates extend association to thousands of residents in their territories in the form of flexible employment opportunities. While association with a crime clan through part-time and temporary employment does not entail the same commitments as affiliation, it constitutes an ambiguous relationship that can easily shift into deeper entanglements such as indenture. One major source of non-affiliate employment is pirated music and video sales. Another source of employment—the focus of this story—is singing neomelodica music at weddings, baptisms, and piazza festivals.

The Camorra Is Not a Thing

It's a unique challenge to write about organized crime in southern Italy because it has a potent affective allure. In Naples criminal organizations cloak themselves in mystery while engaging in spectacular acts of self-exposure. Organized crime affiliates cultivate fearful secrecy by making their faces and their uncapped potential for violence known among the residents of their territories.[29] While "captive" publics are gripped with

fear, broader publics are captivated, at best, by the spectacle. Indeed, journalists, artists, scholars, and their publics contribute, unwittingly and willfully, to the affective allure of "Italian" organized crime by rendering it an object of fetishizing, even eroticizing attention.[30]

As an object of fear, fascination, and fantasy, organized crime in Naples has acquired thinglike qualities.[31] It has been depicted as a determinate organization that honors a precise code of silence and controls a circumscribable "shadow" economy through ritualized violence. It has been described as an illegitimate entity, an alternative state that attacks the nation-state like a predator or a parasite, or a cancer to be cut out of the life of the nation.[32] While some of these qualities can sometimes be attributed to crime clans in Naples, they do not capture a *thing*. Neapolitan crime clans engage in illicit economic practices and compete with the state's legitimated monopoly on violence, but they are not exactly distinguishable from the nation-state. Crime clans operate antagonistically *and* collaboratively with legitimated authorities as extortionists and as partners in the private exchange of public resources. It is difficult, if not impossible, to clearly discriminate between formal, informal, and illicit economic activities or, for that matter, between crime clans and big business. The blurriness of the borders is, in fact, the binding material of these groups' interdependence.

Another, related reason why it is challenging to write about organized crime in Italy is because, particularly among Italophiles and Italianists, it always already constitutes a discourse. Inevitably, references to "southern Italy and organized crime" conjure the criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso's racialized figure, the "violent criminal type."[33] They also summon the political scientist Edward Banfield's "amoral familism," distilled in the figure of the amoral Family, or the crime clan. In the master melodrama of modernization, amoral familism is supposed to be defeated by the "Western" figure of "civil society."[34]

Writing about southern Italy and organized crime also conjures the "Italian South," the original figuration that grounds all the others. In 1875, fifteen years after Italian unification, the historian Pasquale Villari (a liberal revolutionary who was exiled from Naples and settled in the northern city of Florence) and his intellectual contemporaries raised what he called the "Southern Question," the problem of the socially and economically underdeveloped south. Amid his searing depictions of poverty and ignorance in the former Kingdom of Naples, Villari argued

that liberal intellectuals had shirked their national responsibility to lead southern Italians out of their backwardness and misery. In this way, he helped ground the figure of "the South" in a broader Italian nationalist program.[35] Since Villari and his contemporaries, southern Italy has been consistently impugned by northern Italians and Europeans as the exception to the laws of modernization and to the rule of law itself.[36]

In contemporary political, popular, and scholarly discourses on organized crime in Italy, the north–south distinction often surfaces more or less in its denigrating mid-nineteenth-century figuration. This "moral geography"[37] is reproduced across an array of binaries: in law (legal vs. illegal), economics (free markets vs. rackets), civics (associations vs. clans), and ethics (right vs. wrong). This binary thinking continues to affect how the South is imagined and how its people figure themselves.

Affective–Aesthetic Effects

Binary thinking cannot draw the line between the camorra and the noncamorra. A crime clan holds together through forms of social organization and has determinate material effects in its territories, but it also activates potently indeterminate relations and affects. A crime clan has an atmospheric presence. An atmosphere is an object of perception, but one that is elusive and illusory, particularly when localized, identifiable *things* are a person's primary objects of attention.[38] An atmosphere is apprehended through other forms of perception, through situatedness and sensitivity in a "qualitative, quasi-energetic and affective field of forces."[39]

In turn, a crime clan is animated by the affective–aesthetic relations it activates with its territorialized residents and their relations with one another. People "find themselves" in a state and communicate and act in highly aestheticized ways.[40] They are attuned to the occulted potency of things, and they harness it in melodramatic, ironic, and seductive performances. In doing so, they also generate and reproduce the atmosphere.

Like Mercato, the broader centro storico immediately hit me like a welter of aesthetically and affectively charged activity. Outside 'Ncopp' 'e Mmura, the market of narcotic, gustatory, olfactory, and sensual desires, a tumult of visual stimuli also becomes noticeable. Foremost is the disarray of architectural splendor and atrocity: from the unearthed ancient Greek ruins to the aboveground palazzi revealing Byzantine, Gothic, and Angevin strata; from the upward-sprawling and chipped pale-pink

baroque churches, marred by black graffiti and the gray of loitering seagulls, to the crumbling Renaissance villas with faded ceiling frescoes that peek through sooty windows and decades-old scaffolding; from the cavelike medieval arcades to the illegal steel-roofed shacks, overgrown with antennae, erected atop buildings everywhere, regardless of their historical significance. Here the "Italian North" and "the camorra" continue to produce "the South" through ongoing ruination.[41]

Outside the market, the aural density and kinetic vitality of Naples also attracts attention. Foremost are the vociferously performed life-scenes that seem to overinhabit the porous spaces throughout the centro storico:[42] from the unseen singing that accompanies, or overwhelms, the latest recording of a neomelodica song to the clanking of dinner dishes and cheering-in-unison during Sunday TV soccer matches; from the long, exaggerated horn-honking of eternal traffic jams at intersecting vicoli to the whizzing and weaving of *motorini* (scooters) stacked with man, woman, and child, and sometimes only the latter, chatting at maximum volume over the roar of engines on a cell phone or with another *centauro* (half person, half motorino), whose hand she holds while riding beside her; from the hyperbolic threats and tragic or indignant wailing that accompany scuffles, slaps, stabbings, and occasional shootings to the elaborate gestural contact among pedestrians who engage in exuberant, loving reunions and disengage again in the narrow cobblestone streets and across the unseen barriers of windows, balconies, the traffic, and other people doing the same along their own vectors.

Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis noted something similar in 1927, when they wrote of Neapolitans, "In everything they preserve the scope to become a theater of new, unforeseen constellations. The stamp of the definitive is avoided. No situation appears intended forever, no figure asserts its 'thus and not otherwise.'"[43] Although everyday life is never mere theater and *no* life, for that matter, is "definitive," I could not simply dispel my initial impressions or the stereotypes composed by the many northern European and American travelers who have been taken by the atmospheres of Naples. Instead I attended to some of the affective–aesthetic events that animate these impressions and stereotypes.

Take, for instance, the bullet holes that appeared on the outside walls and steel barriers of some of the neighborhood shops on New Year's Eve of 2008. Every year, San Silvestre invokes a cataclysmic celebration in Naples, where people throughout the area launch heavy fireworks, set

off explosives, and fire guns. That is why residents in the area of Mercato might have interpreted the damage on some of the storefronts in the morning as the work of errant bullets—but they knew better. The bullet holes, a resident who works for a social policy initiative told reporters under the condition of anonymity, were likely warning messages issued by clan affiliates to shopowners who had resisted paying tangenti. When a bomb exploded in front of a *pescheria* on the same street two days later, the message was less ambiguous. New Year's celebrations last for days, but the police believe that clan affiliates used the continuing clamor as their cover. As is often the case, the shop owner, the person perhaps in the "best" position to interpret the explosion, knew nothing.[44]

Take, for example, how commonplace sounds and ordinary speech acts can assume added significance. For five minutes every Friday at around midnight, fireworks explode from the rooftop of an apartment building in the historic center. Some of the neighbors say clan affiliates are signaling the arrival of a drug shipment and beckoning local spacciatori to fetch their shares. Relatedly, every day and at any hour, residents call out for their kin from apartment windows and balconies. Some of them are employed by drug handlers as their lookouts. They are beckoning *Maria!* and *Pascà!* to signal the approach of intruders.[45]

Crime clans are determinate political economic forces that reproduce themselves in indeterminacy. Crime clans do not simply impose their rule on everyday political economic life; they also insinuate themselves as affective–aesthetic effects. On the one hand, they exact violence to extort from residents their personal resources while interpellating them in tyrannical systems of deprivation and reward. They seize control of the distribution of public resources and broker dependent relationships that ensnare the resourceless. On the other hand, crime clans accomplish a great deal without doing any*thing*. An important part of their work is affective and aesthetic—composed in patterns of bullet holes and names called from balconies. Ephemeral, polysemous, and unreliable gestures and performances capture affect to generate an atmosphere. The atmosphere has a particular affective register that in turn registers itself in the sensory experience of its territorialized residents.

The radial effects of clan affiliates' violence traverse residents' lives in overdetermined and unsettlingly indeterminate ways. Crime clans create the atmosphere that they dominate, territorializing residents in an affective–aesthetic world suffused with fear, seduction, and "epistemic

murk."[46] In this sense, "the camorra" is not a circumscribable thing but a part of everything, the atmospheric state of things.[47] In fact, crime clan affiliates and associates do not use the term *camorra*. Instead, they refer to *sistemi* (systems).[48] People who find themselves in the atmosphere of a system are alert to its indeterminacies and unruly forces.

The Art of Making Do in the Field

When I first made contact with the neomelodica music scene, I sensed atmospheres charged with fear and seduction. This had a direct impact on how people interacted with me. Interviews were out of the question; they inspired only the shellacked performances of endearing *napoletanità,* or "Neapolitanness," that, evidently, outsiders affectionately expect when they go to Naples. Casual conversation while hanging out was rarely a straightforward communication practice. Communication was often saturated with irony, flirting, warnings, and histrionics, and often all of these at once. If speculations and affirmations were not preposterously exaggerated or categorically dismissed, as they often were, they were lodged in metaphorical, allegorical, and proverbial language that resisted most of my attempts at disambiguation. My efforts to clear things up, in fact, only solicited less subtle forms of evasion, from omissions by ellipsis to dissimulation and bald-faced lies.

If talking was problematic, so was silence. When I was silent, people regarded me with suspicion. When they were silent, even if I asked them direct questions, their refusal to answer meant that I had crossed a line. I was not an investigative reporter or an infiltrator, but I felt that I was becoming one by default. And if that was how I also appeared to the people I met, then I demonstrated laughable ineptitude.

The people I met on the neomelodica scene expected me to study classic Neapolitan songs such as "Torna a Surriento" (Come back to Sorrento) and "'O sole mio" (My sun)—or much older music forms such as the villanella, the tarantella, and the tamurriata.[49] Folklore is abundant in Naples, and self-folklorizing tactics are part of the poetic repertoire some people use to gracefully keep strangers at a distance. This is one reason why many people were vexed—and some notably unnerved—when I explained that my interest was contemporary Neapolitan music, *their* scene.

It did not help matters that I carried a video camera with me, but how could I resist? There was so much to register. But to many people, "an

American with a video camera" meant opportunity. They heaped on me their hopes that I would connect them to a better future while anxiously wondering when I would go back to the future, the America of their dreams. They puffed up and self-dramatized, both courting and evading my video camera in a singular performance. They created distracting scenes to capture my attention while they made me the medium for their clichéd and self-aggrandizing autobiopics.

I was dumbfounded by how little control I had over my lens and stunned by the hours of "colorful" and "melodious" footage it accumulated. For months I frequented recording studios and TV stations, attended festivals, weddings, and baptisms, and visited the homes of composers, songwriters, managers, singers, and their fans, but it seemed I learned virtually nothing. How was that possible? Seduced by my mere presence, people opened their homes and studios to me. At the same time they feared I might get too close. The reason was in part that I, despite my better judgment, wanted to know more about the role of the camorra in the scene. I was not interested in unveiling the dirty truth about neomelodica music, but I could not help wondering whether the scene really was dominated by crime boss–impresari. If so, what did that mean for the hundreds of people who transacted with them on a regular basis?

It was clear that no one was going to talk straight with me, so I began to instigate conversation through indirection. I made music videos and TV commercials for broadcast on pirated television. I developed a portfolio with which to launch a business. I partnered with a recording studio, and through it I met a boss–impresario. Before long, I became the boss–impresario's in-house "American music video director," stepping quite effortlessly into the ad hoc performances that awaited me. These included writing my own songs and preparing, before I was interrupted, my debut as a neomelodico singer. Like others on the scene, I gave myself over to surges of becoming-sovereign. Like my associates, I was alert to the scene's uncertainties, duplicities, and potentialities, oscillating between the rush of affect and paranoiac entrenchment.

Between vitality and fear in the contact zone, "the camorra" resonates across multiple relations. These include ambivalent tolerance, wary forgiveness, mutual recognition, ironic playfulness, homosocial excess, erotic allure, creeping obligation, ensnaring indebtedness, burning resentment, competition, subjugation, paralyzed passivity, willful unknow-

ing, and adamant disavowal. My participation in these relations fired up the "attentional activities" that "traverse" cognitive processes, entraining me to the neomelodica scene's atmospheres.[50]

The Melodramatic Mode of Attention

This book stages a melodrama of contact. Contact is an affective–aesthetic happening, a commotion. It is the crossing of wires and short-circuiting of "perspective." Rather than privilege sight, contact summons multiple senses, including kinesthesia, intuition, and the sympathetic sense, opening you up to being affected. It also encompasses states of inattention such as deferred knowing or unknowing.

Contact is what happens in the zone where the rules are suspended and moral uncertainty can reign—and where play, threat, seduction, and histrionics are often the only resources for acting your way through scenes of intensity.[51] In the milieu where I lingered, contact describes how people interact in an atmosphere of fear, titillation, opportunity, and risk, drawing each other into performative entanglements. It is a modality through which meaning effects are communicated, negotiations wrought from indeterminacy, and self-determination and prepotency, at least momentarily, achieved.[52] Contact happens when people reach for the figure of the personal sovereign, but instead brush up against an excessive limit: the camorrista. In the neomelodica scene, contact describes what happens during the musical performances of an intimate public that has contact with the camorra.

Contact necessarily also describes the entanglements of fieldwork and of meeting things proximally, laterally, and through indirection. It is a "contaminated critique" that unfolds in the affective–aesthetic time and space of complicity.[53] When contact happens, identifications and representations give way to the qualities and qualia of relation.[54]

In this story, I dispose myself to affective–aesthetic atmospheres. I yield to events of the senses that flare up like "profane illuminations," as Benjamin described the productive disorientations that puncture the seamless sameness of bourgeois ("formal") capitalist experience.[55] By performing these dis-positions in writing, I want to conjure a contact zone charged with seductive vitalities and uncertain threats, leaving you to make your way among camorristi, people who behave like camorristi, and people (including me) who perform the art of making do.[56]

This book is about the production, performance, and consumption of a tremendously popular Neapolitan-language music genre of the contact zone. How do neomelodica music and organized crime make contact and spark an "underground" culture industry? This question has led many people to read in the neomelodica scene a melodrama of cultural hegemony and consent, a.k.a. complicity. However, the assertion that organized criminals use neomelodica music for the amoral education of hundreds of thousands of fans presumes a clear etiology of contact. It is the denouement of the didactive melodrama that defeats ambiguity.[57] Instead, the questions I pursue in my melodrama are as follows: What modes of attention let organized crime and neomelodica music become entangled? What worlds form through these shared experiences? What economies take effect and how do they feel to inhabit? What modes of attention let crime clan affiliates, crime clan associates, and people who simply live in the same milieu share affective–aesthetic experiences?

Like any other Italophile or Italianist focusing their attentions on Italy, I came into contact with the neomelodica music scene through affective, aesthetic, and interested entanglements. In this book, I bring them into relief. I offer my understanding of crime clan affiliates, associates, and nonassociates without evacuating the ambiguities. My understanding is modulated by paranoid fear, anger, revulsion, intense curiosity, erotic allure, the desire to belong, the injury of being exploited, and the determination to carry out and "complete" my research, just as many of these forces have modulated others' understanding of me. Rather than look "'before' or 'beyond'" these modulations for "narratives of origin and telos," I struggle to train, and not without lapses, my attention on atmospheres.[58] Instead of telling sovereign truths, these stories perform truths in the transient affective–aesthetic time and space between speculation and unknowing. They invite contact with an atmosphere saturated with the intimacies, vulnerabilities, and indeterminacies of fieldwork.[59]

Notes

Introduction

1. A *vicolo* is an alleylike street flanked by four- or five-story buildings with *bassi* (ground-floor dwellings), where sunlight can be blocked for much of the day. In the *vicoli* (pl.), domestic spaces overlap with the semipublic domain of the street, conjuring an affective–aesthetic space and a particular social geography of the popular classes.

2. *Basso* literally means "low."

3. Da Vinci, "La forza di decidere" (The strength to decide).

4. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* 184.

5. Serao, *Ventre di Napoli*. Serao founded the most important Neapolitan daily newspaper, *Il Mattino*.

6. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics*.

7. Hirschman, *Passions and the Interests,* shows how liberal intellectuals during the Enlightenment argued that taming all the passions but avarice would yield a productive capitalist economy.

8. Gribaudi, "Clan camorristi a Napoli."

9. Two nonprofits, Legambiente and La Rete Salute & Gusto del Movimento Difesa del Cittadino, reported these findings, citing Campania for the highest number of incidents of incomplete or false labeling in 2004, although incidents are widespread in many regions in Italy ("Pesce Fresco," *Alimentazione News*). See Nordstrom, *Global Outlaws*.

10. In 2009 police raided warehouses containing one hundred thousand pirated copies of CDs and DVDs and duplication equipment (La Penna, "Porta Nolana"; "Centrale dei cd falsi"). Pirated software also circulates among them.

11. Newer urban areas built in the 1960s–1980s are called the *periferia*. Neomelodica music and performers also circulate in Switzerland, France, Spain, and, to a lesser extent, the United States, Canada, Argentina, and Australia.

12. *Neomelodici* is the plural form of *neomelodico*; both are used as adjectives and substantives.

13. There are far fewer female singers and, to my knowledge, no female composers or songwriters, and only two female talent managers. There is an old guard of male (and some female) singers (at the time of writing, in their thirties, forties, and fifties) and a number of "baby neomelodici" as young as eight.

14. In 1994 Naples had 42.7 percent "official" unemployment, and Scampia (of the periphery), 61.7 percent. In 1992, complying with European Union policies protecting fair competition, Prime Minister Giuliano Amato dismantled state–capitalist protectionist institutions, including the Southern Development Fund, created in 1950 to stimulate economic growth. In the 1990s Naples deindustrialized with increasing speed, losing about one-third of its manufacturing industries and employment with the closings of the Italsider steel mill and Alfa Sud car factory. The service economy has not filled the gap. The Agency for the Southern Promotion and Development, subsidizing agricultural and fishing development, the artisanal sector, small and medium businesses, large industry, and infrastructural development, was dissolved in 1993 (Scaramella, "Case of Naples").

15. Stille, *Sack of Rome,* 121.

16. Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia, Doc. XXIII, no. 3 (2003). Between 1991 and mid–2007, seventy-five councils were disbanded in Campania, again significantly more than in other regions (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia, *Consigli comunali sciolti*).

17. Dines, "Urban Renewal, Immigration, and Contested Claims"; Pasotti, *Political Branding in Cities.*

18. Bassolino, *Repubblica delle città.*

19. People in the milieu I frequented often described moving to northern Italy as "emigration."

20. For ethical practice, see Agamben, *Homo Sacer.* See Pardo, *Managing Existence,* who includes religious ethics in his analysis of everyday economic and social life among some segments of the popular classes in Naples.

21. On figuration, see Haraway, "Birth of the Kennel."

22. Schmitt, "Drei Arten," 23–24, cited in Kalyvas, "Hegemonic Sovereignty," 348.

23. Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect." "Capture" describes the confinement or closure of vitality (potential or virtuality): "Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality or potential for interaction, it is. Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage, are the capture and closure of affect. Emotion is the intensist (most contracted) expression of that capture—and of the fact that something has always and again escaped" (96).

24. Saviano, *Gomorra,* tracks the comingling of Milan-based haute couture fashion houses, undocumented and unregulated factories in Campania, and internationally organized crime networks that manage the circulation and sale of counterfeit goods.

25. Pratt uses the term to describe "the social spaces where cultures meet and clash in often highly asymmetrical relations of power" ("Arts of the Contact Zone," 1).

26. Tsing, *Friction.*

27. Berlant writes that intimate publics shape conventions of belonging and "provide a better experience of belonging partly through participation in the relevant commodity culture, and partly because of its revelations about how people can live" (*Female Complaint,* viii).

28. Gribaudi, "Clan camorristi a Napoli."

29. See Siebert, Secrets of *Life and Death,* and Di Bella, *Dire ou Taire.*

30. In an episode of the MTV series *The Vice Guide to Everything,* produced by Alvi Hunter and Ciel Suroosh, the hosts visit Naples, "a city known for pizza, trash and the mob," to follow "the mafia's own music industry" and Alessio, a singer "owned by the mafia." Relatedly, New York City's Little Italy was an early-twentieth-century risqué tourist attraction for middle-class *flânerie* (Gabaccia, "Global Geography").

31. Lamberti, "Così governa la camorra."

32. Italian president Carlo Ciampi, quoted in Phillips, "Fifth Mafia Boss Is Killed."

33. Positivist social hygienists identified two distinct "races": the "Mediterranean" in the south and "European" in the north, the former predisposed to committing violent crimes and the latter, property crimes (Lombroso-Ferrero and Lombroso, *Criminal Man*).

34. Banfield writes that the "backward" society, an excessively inward-looking, kin-structured society (and the predominance of distrust of "strangers") is the binary opposite of "modern civil society" *(Moral Basis).*

35. Villari's writings, particularly *Lettere meridionali* (1875), influenced many intellectuals and politicians, including Pasquale Turiello and Serao.

36. Moe, *View from Vesuvius,* shows that in the northern European imagination the south of Italy was depicted through both picturesque and denigrating terms.

37. Ibid.

38. Böhme, *Aisthetik,* 45, cited in Pritchard, "Contemporary German Aesthetics," 122. Pritchard summarizes Böhme's idea that atmospheres precede objects, signs, symbols, "physiognomies," and "scenes."

39. Diaconu, "Patina—Atmosphere—Aroma," 136. See also Dufrenne, *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*; Böhme, "Atmosphere"; Anderson, "Affective Atmospheres."

40. I draw on the notion of *Befindlichkeit* in Heidegger, *Being and Time.*

41. Stoler describes ruination as the aftershocks of empire: "Imperial formations persist in their material debris, in ruined landscapes and through the social ruination of people's lives" ("Imperial Debris," 194). Naples was capital of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies before it was annexed to the northern Italian Kingdom of Piedmont–Sardinia in 1860. Political economic developments accompanying Italian unification contributed to a decline in southern Italy's economy and the rise of organized crime.

42. Benjamin and Lacis described the city as "porous" ("Naples").

43. Ibid., 166.

44. Rotondo, "Pallottole"; Rotondo, "Altra pescheria"; Rotondo, "Raid incendiario contro pescheria."

45. Saviano, *Gomorra*. Many of these voices are women's, indicative of their role in the domestic labors of organized crime. Women assist as *vedette* ("lookouts"), cut and package drugs, harbor fugitives, and protect affiliates. Women sometimes take leadership roles in crime clans, issuing orders and exacting violence. See Allum, *Camorristi, Politicians, Businessmen*; Gribaudi, *Donne, uomini, famiglie*; Longrigg, *Mafia Women*; Siebert, *Donne, la mafia*.

46. Taussig, *Shamanism*.

47. Blok, *Mafia*.

48. Saviano, *Gomorra*.

49. De Curtis, *"Torna a Surriento"*; Di Capua, "O sole mio."

50. Depraz, "Where Is the Phenomenology of Attention," calls attention to an embodied modulator of cognition. Attention has been a focus in philosophy (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty), psychology (Gendlin, James), neurology (Damasio), geography (Anderson), and anthropology (Csordas, Desjarlais, Jackson, Katz and Csordas, Geurts, Klima, Reddy, Stewart, Wikan). See also works by Candea, Latour, and Tarde, for forms of social attention.

51. Fernandez, "Dark at the Bottom of the Stairs," calls this zone the "inchoate"; Bateson, "Play and Fantasy."

52. For "meaning effects," see Bakhtin and Emerson, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

53. Stewart, "Politics of Cultural Theory." Massumi offers the term *productivism* to describe an alternative to critique that does not disavow its own "inventiveness" (*Parables for the Virtual,* 12–13).

54. Related notions: Herzfeld's "local social theory" in *Poetics of Manhood* and Klima's "philosophical ethnography" in *Funeral Casino*.

55. Stewart, "Arresting Images"; Benjamin, "Surrealism."

56. This work resonates with performance-based and/or embodied ethnographies (Conquergood, Denzin, Linder, Samudra, Taylor, Wacquant) and dialogical ethnographies (Caton, Rouch, Stewart, Tedlock). It also dwells in contexts of uncertainty and ethical ambiguity (Bourgois, Nordsrom, Venkatesh, Williams) and grapples with empathic contagions and entanglements in the field (Behar, Caton, Favret-Saada, Rosaldo), including those centered on gender and sexuality (e.g., the contributors of Lewin and Leap, *Out in Field*).

57. Fernandez, "Dark at the Bottom of the Stairs," 221.

58. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling,* 8.

59. Steinbock calls this "phenomenological reflective attentiveness" ("Affection and Attention," 41); Maurer calls it "post-reflexive anthropology" (*Mutual Life, Limited,* 17).