

Chapter 14

Music and Countercultures in Italy: The Neapolitan Scene

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Following the Second World War Italy slowly recovered democratic life after 20 years of fascism. Despite this, in cultural terms, only the elites who lived in big cities like Rome, Turin and Milan could fully taste the openness brought about by democracy: the rest of the country was split between a Catholic conservative stance, with the Christian Democrats (DC) in power, and the strong influence of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), notably the biggest communist party in the Western world. During the 1960s Italy lived the so-called 'economic boom' and became an affluent society: mass production and mass consumerism expanded enormously, the circulation of ideas and cultural products reached an intensity never experienced before and the Italian way of life, still largely provincial in many areas, was totally upset by this revolution (Ginsborg 1990).

In music, after the war, jazz had returned to radio programmes but the Italian traditional song descending from the 'romanza' was still at the forefront, receiving the seal of approval of a popular national song contest, the 'Festival di Sanremo'. Then in 1958 Domenico Modugno shocked the audience with 'Nel blu dipinto di blu' ('Volare'), a song new in form and content, which was destined to become one of the most famous Italian hits in the world. At the beginning of the 1960s the first seeds of rock and roll began to take root in Italian popular music with the first beat groups ('complessi', as they were called). Moreover, in the wake of what was happening in the United States and in other European countries, the counterculture was also beginning to make a mark. After 1968, a crucial year in many places, youth culture and music in Italy took a giant leap: from that year onwards, British and American rock stars started to include the country in their tours and Italian rock bands found a more well-defined identity as beat declined in favour of progressive rock. At the time, though, Italy experienced the development of a grave social conflict that would reach its height in 1978 with the tragic outbreak of terrorism. During this turbulent period, a new radical political culture emerged outside the Communist Party that began to appeal to students and young workers, with criticism addressed to 'the system' in all its articulations: family, education, politics, work, entertainment – in short, what Louis Althusser called 'ideological State Apparatuses' were all strongly questioned (Balestrini and Moroni 1997). Against what was considered the official discourse of the establishment (not only the conservative Christian Democrats in power, but also the traditional working-class

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culture of the Italian Communist Party), a more politically militant stance emerged, marginalising what had been the creative and visionary alternative thought of the 1960s. In this new political climate, a rediscovery of folk music represented a renewal of class culture and an explosion of the political song genre indicated the development of an engaged popular song to suit the times. Among the galaxy of ideas floating around in those years, often in conflict with each other but sometimes forming original combinations, many of the ideas aimed to be complete visions of the world and hence also aspired somewhat to take on the mantle of 'counterculture'. The term 'counterculture' will here be used in a wide sense, without splitting hairs over the difference between 'countercultures' and 'subcultures', accepting that, generally, 'subcultures' are oriented more towards a symbolic rebellion through 'style' (Hebdige 1979), while 'countercultures' are more inclined to active political protest (Maffi 2009). In Italy the former frequently slipped into the latter, particularly in the 1970s and in the 1990s, primarily due to the morass caused by the heated political climate.

Music was obviously a privileged vehicle for countercultures: functioning as a marker of identity, acting as a powerful means of collective aggregation and benefiting from a growing technology that allowed unprecedented circulation, music found itself in the contradictory position of being a much longed for agent of real social change and, at the same time, a virgin and potentially gigantic market into which the cultural industry could expand. Such a contradiction exploded, more than anywhere else, in the widespread idea that music had to be 'free', liberated from the tentacles of the industry and available to everybody. For a long period rock concerts in Italy were often the scene of riots with the police, with demonstrators protesting against ticket prices (or just because tickets were required), clashing outside, and sometimes inside, the venues. The disorder began in the early 1970s (for example at Led Zeppelin, Milan, 1971; Jethro Tull, Bologna, 1973; Soft Machine, Naples, 1974; Lou Reed, Rome, 1975), becoming more and more frequent such that, after 1977, the most popular foreign acts left Italy out of their itineraries for years. Many Italian musicians, on the other hand, were involved in political militancy and in countercultures; they can be roughly divided into two categories: 'cantautori' (singer-songwriters) and 'gruppi rock' (rock bands). Singer-songwriters exist everywhere but the Italian 'cantautore' was a very peculiar figure for the social role that the more politicised audience attributed to him (female singer-songwriters – 'cantautrici' – were rare): that of being a sort of lay saint, expected to be uninterested in success, transparent and ideologically coherent, only dedicated to his art and to its social role and, most of all, prepared to undergo periodical 'ethical examinations' by his audience. Rock bands, on the other hand, were expected, by the same audience, to be 'experimental', not commercial and, obviously, politically committed. 'Cantautori' were meant to be more valuable for their lyrics, 'gruppi' for their music.

Naples, in all this, found itself in a very peculiar position. In a nation full of evident regional differences, the late unification of the state, the economic distance between North and South, and the geographical influences caused by the North

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being closer to Europe and the South nearer to the Mediterranean areas, a great variety of specific cultures have been produced. Yet Naples is probably the only Italian city in which its traditions and history are almost impossible for local artists to ignore or avoid. As the capital of a kingdom before the nation came into being, Naples was home to rich traditions in music, theatre, the visual arts and literature. Moreover, these traditions were about to become powerful symbols of the whole Italian culture, but Naples was deprived of the role of nation's capital in favour of Rome. As the largest city of southern Italy at the time of unification, Naples was also the main city of a largely depressed area. It was big, overcrowded and had a vast subproletariat without any kind of stable employment, somewhat the legacy of the *Ancien Régime* of the Bourbon monarchy.¹ In the 1950s Naples found itself in the hands of a highly reactionary middle class of *parvenus* who elected as mayor the ship-owner Achille Lauro, a demagogue who gave the green light for gigantic urban speculation that devastated the city. In the 1960s the city came under the rule of the Gava family, a local conservative Christian Democrat power group that continued Lauro's urban politics, creating a much tighter connection with the central government in Rome (Allum 1973).

Song has a central place in Neapolitan culture, and although the city was considered one of the capitals of opera, it is here that Italy can boast its most famous repertoire of modern songs. Born between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries as the product of a bourgeoisie of continental taste, the Neapolitan song was a product of a massive project of modernisation involving culture as well as city planning: the latter set the streets free of the local folk culture in order to transform Naples into a proper capitalist environment, while the former provided the new social scenario with its own form of entertainment. Neapolitan song thus grew up as an important part of the identity of the local emerging middle class, but at the same time was taken up and continuously revisited by the lower classes, for example by itinerant musicians known as 'posteggiatori' (Artieri 1961), who adapted the songs to folk styles thus making them immediately recognisable to the common people. Through the charm of the Neapolitan song, the conservative values of the bourgeoisie became locally hegemonic, creating the so-called 'napoletanità' (a sort of 'Neapolitan vision of the world') – an amalgamating ideology that upheld internal cohesion, prevented class conflict and generated a sort of inter-class city pride. Nevertheless, as remarked by writer Raffaele La Capria, it is 'napoletanità' that has given the citizens of Naples, even those of the lowest classes, their European spirit, sense of humour and typical sense of irony (La Capria 1986).

Neapolitan song, although always sung in the Neapolitan dialect, is now considered the 'classic' Italian song and one of the foremost repertoires of popular music in the world, widely recognised as one of the most relevant components

¹ The philosopher Antonio Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks* observed the peculiarity of Naples, which appeared to be reluctant to adopt any kind of rational organisation of work (Gramsci 2007, III: 2142).

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of Italian culture. Neapolitan song has also always pervaded the city: whistled on every street, reproduced through records heard from the windows of the buildings in the streets (particularly in popular areas), performed in restaurants and at every ceremony (private parties, especially marriages) and mentioned in everyday conversation. But in the 1960s, when its creative cycle seemed to have come to an end, it was employed more and more as an ideological tool by the most reactionary forces active in Naples, so that it weighed like a stone on the creative potential of Neapolitan musicians as it symbolised a certain Italian song (melodic, traditionalist, sentimental) that they perceived to be outside modernity. Young musicians, then, had to fight against such hegemony in order to regain their freedom, to attach their music to what was going on in Italy and in the rest of the world and to feel, instead, inside modernity. This chapter aims to investigate the growth of Neapolitan music over the last 50 years in parallel with the influence that new musical trends – particularly those thought of as countercultural – had on Neapolitan musicians, and the relationship this music has had with this ‘object’, which needed first to be distanced and deconstructed, to be afterwards critically recuperated and used as a model for new compositions. Thus, in the beginning, while young musicians were experimenting with new creative ideas, the Neapolitan song had to be violated, debunked, stripped bare of its stock conventions and bent to unheard of expressive possibilities.

Among the first Neapolitan performers to try working outside the format of the Neapolitan song were the Showmen, a band who, though they were active for only a short period in the late 1960s, left a mark on Neapolitan music; some of the band’s members (James Senese and Elio D’Anna) were later to form prominent bands like Napoli Centrale and Osanna. Jazz and rhythm and blues were the main musical influences for the Showmen and the fact that Senese and bass player Mario Musella were the sons of American soldiers and Neapolitan mothers (both were born when American troops occupied Naples in 1945: Senese’s father was an African American and Musella’s a Native American), seemed to give them a natural affinity for the music of Black America. Although the Showmen wrote their own songs and often sang in Italian, they intentionally confronted the Neapolitan song tradition. A meaningful example is their recording of ‘Catari (marzo)’, a classic love song written by Salvatore Di Giacomo and Mario Pasquale Costa in 1893. The Showmen’s version of this romantic and melodic composition is stretched and performed dramatically in a ‘black mood’. With Senese being a central protagonist of the music scene for some years (Musella died in 1979), his origin helped build the myth of the new Neapolitan music being the music of Italian ‘niggers’. Furthermore as Neapolitans were considered the despised race of the ‘meridionali’ – that is, the people of the South discriminated against by those of the North (Teti 1993) – young musicians of the 1960s, and the growing number of journalists specialising in music, began to associate marginalisation with cultural subordination and creative energy. And just as the renewal of American music was seen to originate in the African American community, so the renewal of Italian music was seen to originate, for the press of the time, among those referred to as ‘the niggers of Vesuvius’. ‘Why did they take so long to appear?’ asked journalist

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and rock producer Renato Marengo. ‘Because the obscurantism of the Neapolitan song – unpopular, not folk, not genuine, a flirtatious and touristic knock-off, giving a decadent, false, uncultured vision of Neapolitan music – meant nobody gave the Neapolitan credit. Consequently young Neapolitans felt frustrated and lacked the courage to “come out”’ (Marengo 1974 my translation).

Black music was not the only foreign trend in which young musicians were interested, as both progressive and psychedelic rock were highly influential at the time. Bands like Osanna and Il Balletto di Bronzo looked towards the English progressive scene, the first to Genesis and Jethro Tull (Osanna’s live acts were highly theatrical, incorporating face paint and dramatic light shows), the second, with piano virtuoso Gianni Leone, towards ‘keyboard heroes’ like Keith Emerson and Rick Wakeman. Both groups recorded concept albums, like Osanna’s *L’Uomo* (1971) and *Palepoli* (1973), and Il Balletto di Bronzo’s *Ys* (1972). Other artists included Alan and Jenny Sorrenti (both from a Welsh mother), who were considered the most unusual singers of the time. Jenny founded Saint Just in 1973, a band combining English folk influences with classical sounds, and later became one of the few Italian ‘cantautrici’ (female singer-songwriters), recording a number of popular albums as a solo artist. According to producer Lilli Greco, Jenny has been one of the most outstanding musicians to record on the RCA label, ‘an exceptional singer ... far above her possible competitors’ (Becker 2007; my translation). Jenny’s brother Alan recorded his first album, *Aria*, in 1972 and his second, *Come un vecchio incensiere all’alba di un villaggio deserto*, in 1973 and both, like the Saint Just albums, were published by Harvest, the English label created by EMI to promote progressive rock. Alan’s music was highly experimental, ethereal and rarefied, comprising long psychedelic compositions accompanied by cryptic lyrics; in 1974, though, he recorded ‘Dicitencello vuje’, a Neapolitan song written in 1930: his vocalised version, delivered in falsetto style (thus challenging established purists), was both original and astonishing and showed how young interpreters could perceive and work with classic songs. Two years later he wrote ‘Sienteme’, still a popular song that could be classified as an attempt to write a ‘modern’ passionate Neapolitan song. In his song ‘Vorrei incontrarti’ (1972), Sorrenti also wrote one of the most concise couplets to encapsulate the ‘spirit of the time’: ‘*Vorrei incontrarti fuori i cancelli di una fabbrica/vorrei incontrarti lungo le strade che portano in India ...*’ [‘I’d like to meet you outside the gates of a factory/I’d like to meet you on the roads that lead to India’]. The factory and India represented the two major poles of the counterculture in Italy: the factory (that is, the ‘Fordist’ factory, with a conveyor belt production line, which had developed quickly in Italy) was at the centre of the theoretical Marxist speculations of the radical left wing active outside the Communist Party. According to the ‘operaisti’ (Wright 2002, Tronti 2009), the most influential radical group, a young, unskilled working class, mainly of Southern origin, was reacting to the pressure of factory life with a new subjectivity and an alternative, ‘autonomous’ community lifestyle that would eventually end up refusing to work and instead take up illegal means to acquire goods that were impossible to buy on ordinary salaries. India, on the other

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hand, represented the myth of an alternative civilisation, custodian of an ancestral wisdom lost in the industrial world; many Italian hippies in those years, just like the Beatles, travelled to India looking for gurus.

It is interesting to observe the different connections the Neapolitan scene had with the British and American one: for example, Senese and his 'genetic' predisposition to be drawn to jazz; Jenny and Alan Sorrenti recording for the Harvest label; the presence of American musicians Shawn Phillips and Patrizia (née Patricia) Lopez – Phillips a long-haired American singer embodying the spirit of the American counterculture who, before he moved in 1967 to Positano, on the Sorrento coast, not far from Naples, had worked with Donovan and the Beatles (and even performed at the Isle of Wight Festival); and Lopez a singer-songwriter born in Los Angeles who had also moved to Naples, bringing with her the songs of Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Joni Mitchell and David Crosby, mixing them with Raffaele Viviani's songs and the Neapolitan 'Villanelle'.² It is thus suggested that American and English connections meant for Neapolitan musicians not only faster access to international trends in rock music, but also a closer link to what the English-speaking world was producing in terms of countercultures. Bob Dylan, and all that he was able to absorb and give back in his songs, for example, inspired Edoardo Bennato, one of the most successful Italian 'cantautori' of the 1970s: curly-haired, with small dark glasses and a degree in architecture, Bennato originally performed as a one-man-band, playing 12-string guitar, harmonica and kazoo, while hitting a tambourine with a device attached to his right foot. With his croaky voice, Bennato appeared a cross between Dylan and 'Pulcinella', a folk mask typical of the Naples area that, like all masks, mocked power and symbolised the real voice of the everyman – and Bennato certainly mocked the power and official values of the Italian state: corrupt politicians, the Communist Party, the president of the Republic, even the pope ended up in the barbs of his harsh and anarchic criticism. Bennato immediately targeted a national audience and only occasionally sang in the Neapolitan dialect; nonetheless, he remained closely linked to Naples (the cover of his album *Io che non sono l'imperatore*, 1975, carried the layout of his project for a new Naples underground system that he, provokingly, opposed to the official one). Bennato reached the height of his notoriety in the late 1970s, when he produced three albums (*Burattino senza fili*, 1977, *Uffà Uffà* and *Sono solo canzonette*, both 1980: the first and the last being enormously successful) and, as the first Italian 'cantautore' to achieve such success, managed to sell out stadiums. His 'Cantautore' (1976), which ironically underlines the excessive expectations people had of singer-songwriters in Italy and the unnatural role they had assumed, still stands as a most intelligent song.

² Raffaele Viviani (1888–1950) was one of the most popular Neapolitan playwrights and the author of many songs for his theatre works. The 'Villanella' is a Neapolitan polyphonic genre of compositions of the sixteenth century. Patrizia Lopez recorded her first Italian album in 1976.

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Eugenio Bennato, Edoardo's brother, was one of the founders of the Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare (NCCP), a folk revival group to which Neapolitan music owes the unearthing of a huge corpus of folk songs that became the backbone of the Neapolitan folk music revival. The revival of traditional music had been, since the 1960s, a key feature of Italian left-wing culture: rejected by immigrants because they reminded them of the misery of their origins, folk songs were re-evaluated as a repertoire of songs free of commercialism and thus a possible component of a progressive culture. It was folklore itself (investigated by both Antonio Gramsci and the ethnologist Ernesto de Martino) that was seen, with its country festivals, its rituals, its traditional medicine, as a possible repository of anti-capitalist values (and, as such, a counterculture in itself). Folk music was also regarded as the only original and 'authentic' music Italy had, and the only one capable of competing with rock music and its craze – an attitude also found in other folk revivals. For the NCCP, the Neapolitan song, with its lack of originality, was responsible for the elimination of folk music from people's consciousness (and with it the social conditions of the poorest sections of society that expressed it, especially the peasants of the countryside around Naples). To address this and to suggest a possible new direction for Neapolitan music the NCCP took the classic 'Tammurriata nera', written in 1944, and treated it with a folk arrangement.

In 1977 Eugenio Bennato took a further step by leaving the NCCP to launch Musicanova, a folk group that proposed writing new songs based on traditional modes with lyrics criticising the official history of the unification of the country. Here, Bennato's research on the southern peasant resistance of the 1860 Piedmontese conquest of the South that aimed to unify the country was also an attempt to rediscover an alternative culture: that of the bandits – and the communities of small villages that supported them – that opposed the modern lifestyle introduced by the new rulers. In contrast to the NCCP, a group of workers at Alfa Sud, a car factory located in Pomigliano D'Arco, in the Neapolitan hinterland, gave birth to the Gruppo Operaio di Pomigliano D'Arco 'E Zezi ('E Zezi Workers Group), who adopted a polemical stance, singing political lyrics and rejecting the 'philological' research of the NCCP (Vacca 1999).

In the 1970s Naples continued to produce jazz-rock. James Senese, together with performers inspired by black music, formed Napoli Centrale, a more mature project than the Showmen, that was influenced by artists like Weather Report and Miles Davis in his rock period. Between 1975 and 1977 Napoli Centrale recorded three albums. In 1976 the band recruited a young bass player who was destined to become the most popular and probably the most innovative Neapolitan musician of the last 50 years, although the really meaningful part of his career lasted little more than 10 years: Pino Daniele. Guitarist, singer and composer, from a poor family from the centre of Naples, Daniele is a key-figure in Neapolitan music. As a poet, the lyrics of his first songs combined the local dialect with American English to create delicate paintings in the tradition of the classic Neapolitan song as well as passages describing the chaotic life of contemporary Naples; as a musician, he managed to integrate foreign musical influences (rock, jazz, blues, funk) with the

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melodic profile and the harmonic structures of the classic Neapolitan song; as a singer, he had an expressive nasal voice with blues inflections; and as a guitarist, he played both acoustic and electric guitar with equal proficiency. Last but not least, he was symbolic in embodying Neapolitan music at its most ripe, namely in tradition, in the creative assimilation of new trends, with a strong link to the city, and with the ability to attract a national audience without necessarily singing in Italian. Daniele seemed to represent, at that time, the critical consciousness of a new generation of young people who had completely assimilated modernity and who wanted to rescue Naples and the whole of the South from their old conditionings. In contrast to the work of Edoardo Bennato, who was more vague and generic in his protest, Daniele's first songs seemed to mirror more faithfully the massive changes the city and its youth had been through since 1968. In the mid-1970s, for example, Daniele's song 'O mare' echoed the aims of the workers' movement *Disoccupati Organizzati* [Organised Unemployed], which had broken with the traditional policy of patronage with the political power that the Neapolitan subproletariat had been obliged to accept. His first album, *Terra mia*, was recorded in 1977,³ while his first big hit, 'Je so' pazzo', appeared a year later. Daniele had clearly felt the creative spirit of 1977, a year which marked another turning point for Italian contemporary society; he also demonstrated his commitment to the more widespread concern regarding pollution (another trend of the time), which he invoked in many of his compositions. In tune with his times, Daniele's work also seemed ingrained in the city's deepest folk culture and in the performing style of the 'posteggiatori'. With Pino Daniele, the classic Neapolitan song ceased to be a problem for Neapolitan musicians: the gap had finally been filled and nobody would ever feel uneasy with it in the future.

The Italian 1980s were the reverse of the 1970s: following the neo-conservative wave started by Ronald Reagan in the US and by Margaret Thatcher in the UK, Italy underwent a long period of 'restoration'. The defeat of workers at the Fiat automobile factory in Turin, following a month-long struggle against the announced dismissal of almost 15,000 employees, signalled an imploding political situation: the march of a number of white-collar workers (the so-called 'march of the 40,000') in favour of breaking the picket line to re-open the factory meant the acceptance of a change in the relationship between the trade unions and industrialists. In reality change had already taken place inside the factory: automation had reduced the need for large numbers of workers and the conveyor belt production line was progressively being substituted by a new form of

³ In 1977, together with political radicalism, the vindication of private needs emerged from a new generation that refused to distinguish between the public and private sphere in life. This marked an explosion of ideas and practices in which, through countercultures, the languages of the visual avant-gardes of the beginning of the twentieth century penetrated into popular arts: originally utilised in alternative forms of political communication, comics, magazines, cinema and theatre, they are now the common languages of advertising and mass culture.

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production where cars would be produced on demand and not on a mass scale for a market that was close to saturation.

At the same time, outside the factory, society was invested with a new ideological trend, that of disengagement: the so called 'anni di piombo' (the 'years of lead', the 1970s, with their deep class conflict and terrorism) were replaced by the 'anni del riflusso' (the 'years of reflux' – the years of individualism – a metaphorical wave rolling back to leave only scattered remnants on the shore). These years, with the development of large commercial television networks, the dismantling of the Welfare State, and an emphasis on personal success, prepared the ground for the most recent Italy – an Italy characterised by the cultural hegemony of an aggressive right wing, which found its undisputed champion in the tycoon-politician Silvio Berlusconi. In this new context countercultures became much less fashionable and were driven back into the distant corners of society (in terms of music, mainly in the post-punk and hardcore circuits). In the 1980s, Naples also saw the explosion of the 'camorra', the Neapolitan mafia, with its transformation from an old illegal asset connected to the smuggling of cigarettes into a modern and perfectly organised criminal holding associated with the trafficking of drugs and the control of public works through collusion with political power (Marrazzo 1984). The climate again became highly conservative, with local politicians supporting the central government and the city pushed into social desertification. Music mirrored the situation: while the rest of Italy turned to disco music, the folk music revival disappeared and the political song became unfashionable. Moreover, little of note emerged from Naples in those years: Bennato abandoned his original acoustic satirical folk rock for a trite early rock and roll with watery lyrics (for example 'Viva la mamma', 1989). In 1992, though, together with the blues band Blue Stuff, he recorded a brilliant and original album under the guise of a bluesman named Joe Sarnataro; the NCCP turned to a simplified world music; Teresa De Sio (former singer with Musicanova) hit success with 'well-made' pop songs; and Daniele concluded his golden years to become what he is now, an 'ecumenical' mainstream pop singer for families and television. The suicide in 1983 of Luciano Cilio, a Neapolitan avant-garde composer, appeared to epitomise the decade, and although some artists of note emerged during the period (Enzo Gragnaniello, Enzo Avitabile, Avion Travel), only the Bisca, an underground rhythm and blues band that began working in the 1980s (and who would later play a notable role in the 1990s), can be said to have been part of an underground scene. In the 1990s, in Naples and across Italy as a whole, the alternative popular music scene became once again stimulating and inspired.

The beginning of globalisation is conventionally located in the period between the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the end of the First Gulf War (1991): both events mark a time when the old division between East and West could be said to have come to a close and the planet was unified under the rule of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the two institutions in charge of universally expanding the laws of capitalism. In Italy, furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union caused the dissolution of the Communist Party and its transformation into

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the PDS (Left Wing Democratic Party), later the DS (Democrats of the Left). The old Christian Democrat politicians, and their allies, the Socialists, were both swept away by enquiries into political corruption made by a pool of judges in Milan. Fearing a possible victory at the elections by the PDS, Berlusconi decided to enter politics, organised his party (Forza Italia) and, with the support of his media empire and his wealth, won election in 1994 (Ginsborg 2003).

Meanwhile, the fragmentation of big factories and the re-allocation of industrial production to faraway countries, where labour costs are less, resulted in growing unemployment and the transformation of what were once working-class areas into wastelands. Abandoned schools, disused cinemas, forsaken buildings, old and derelict slaughterhouses and similar spaces became occupied by people expelled from the processes of production and by immigrants and off-site students to become *Centri Sociali Occupati Autogestiti* (CSOA), that is, 'Occupied Self-Managed Social Centres' (see Adinolfi et al. 1994; Moroni, Farina and Triopodi 1995; Consorzio Aaster et al. 1996). CSOA activists quickly understood the danger of a right-wing turn with Berlusconi in power, and the places they took possession of were soon transformed into spaces of alternative cultural activity and centres of political antagonism. Thus while occupants of CSOAs were not exactly squatters, it was in such places that aspects of the political radicalism of the 1970s – defeated on the surface of society – managed to survive, and that subcultures and countercultures found new ground to develop. In CSOAs people could drink beer at a reduced price, obtain free legal assistance from militant lawyers, socialise and use digital technology, attend concerts at low prices (roughly 20 per cent of the usual rate or less) and so on. CSOAs were also against copyright and refused to pay the Performing Rights Society for music performed inside their premises (frequently musicians also allowed CSOAs to record their concerts and make records or audio cassettes to sell for support). CSOAs further claimed to boycott multinationals and to fight heavy drugs, which the Italian radical left wing has long argued are an instrument of the establishment aimed at defeating social protest. Originally shunned by the authorities, some CSOAs have managed, with the passing of time, to gain recognition from and be aided by municipalities. Yet, they weren't short of a few contradictions: while Coca-Cola was vehemently banned as a symbol of imperialist capitalism, American cigarettes were welcome.

While the Leoncavallo in Milan is probably the oldest CSOA, dating back to the 1970s, in the 1990s they spread like mushrooms in many of the big cities and in some of the smaller ones too. And it was in such places that the new Italian music of the 1990s was born, and Naples soon turned out to be one of the most important cities for the trend: rejecting the isolated figure of the 'cantautore', young performers active in CSOAs started to join groups they themselves often named 'posse', after the name used by black rappers in America. Rap, ragamuffin and reggae were references for musicians based in CSOAs, many of whom worked with samples and montage.

The most singular peculiarity, though, was a new rediscovery of Italian folk music. With globalisation and the digital revolution, there was also a growth in the circulation of the sounds and traditions of world music: as a genre, however problematic its definition may be, its expansion into the Western world, where

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most of it (especially music originating in the East) constituted previously unheard music, now made it easier to obtain and drew attention once again to traditional musical idioms. It is probably due to this collateral effect of globalisation that Italian musicians rediscovered local dialects and traditional Italian music: all of a sudden, from North to South, bands, even those inspired by the black American posses, started to develop reggae and ragamuffin sung in local dialects with folk music forms. This new folk music revival was very different from the earlier ones, as now folk music was not the object of philological or critical research but was incorporated into new songs in a manner similar to 'bricolage': sampled, treated electronically or by asking folk musicians to join in. As a consequence, old, long forgotten folk musicians, like the 80-year-old Antonio Sacco or the 70-year-old Uccio Aloisi, both from the Puglia region, became the idols of a new generation of teenagers (with Aloisi singing in CSOAs): in short they became 'stars', just like the old bluesmen like Mississippi John Hurt or Son House had become stars in America in the 1960s.

In Naples, where in the 1990s a new left-wing administration worked to do away with the old politics and start up something different (a process that became known as the 'Neapolitan Renaissance'), two bands were destined to find fame: 99 Posse and Almamegretta. Both made their first appearance in *Officina 99*, a CSOA established at a deserted works on the periphery of Naples. *Officina 99* took its name from the number of the building and 99 Posse was basically the house band. Here, subcultures and counterculture coincided even more than in the 1970s. 99 Posse were involved in political action but also exhibited strong symbolic elements of subcultural styles (Mohawk haircuts, heavy-duty boots, chains and nose rings), while Almamegretta's singer Raiz (bald, muscular, aggressive) adopted full identification with Afro-American culture, quoting Malcolm X and sometimes appearing like a gangsta rapper.⁴ In Naples there was no 'rediscovery' of the dialect: for local performers it was absolutely natural to sing in Neapolitan, and it was considered exceptional, or defying and innovative, on the contrary, to sing in Italian (as Edoardo Bennato did); thus it was obvious for 99 Posse and Almamegretta to sing in Neapolitan. 99 Posse aligned themselves with 'operaismo', the political stance of the Italian radical left wing of the 1960s and 1970s: their epoch-making hit 'Curre curre guagliò' (1993) was about a love of CSOAs and the struggle to defend them, while their 'Rigurgito antifascista', from the same album, was a violent call against resurgent fascism.⁵ 99 Posse was essentially a rap/ragamuffin band, except when they collaborated with the powerful rhythm and blues band Bisca, who joined them on the successful 'Incredibile Opposizione Tour', a long tour of CSOAs around Italy that resulted in the release of a double album in 1994.

⁴ Raiz came to encapsulate the culmination of a long history of interest in black music and culture shown by Neapolitan musicians.

⁵ Many 99 Posse songs were extremely aggressive and caused reactions (once, even a Parliamentary question). The CSOA movement, in general, has often been accused of being connected to political violence.

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The collaboration between Bisca and 99 Posse constituted probably one of the most significant moments of Italian music in the 1990s, although the double disc doesn't quite do justice to the exciting atmosphere of the live shows.

Almamegretta's musical inspiration was more elaborate, taking in references to British trip-hop and the dub scene (Massive Attack, Asian Dub Foundation, Adrian Sherwood). Their ant-racist song 'Figli di Annibale' (1992) imagined Hannibal as a black general coming from Africa, ruling Italy for 20 years with his soldiers and generating the 'bastard' Italian race: although probably far from historical truth, the song was forceful, accompanied as it was by a bass riff that sounded like elephant steps. When 99 Posse and Almamegretta began their careers, the controversial relationship Neapolitan musicians had to the classic Neapolitan song had, as mentioned, already been settled.⁶ Yet both groups still found it necessary to address the issue: Almamegretta wrote a couple of new songs in the format of the classic song ('Nun te scurdà', 1995, sung with Giulietta Sacco, a famous singer of Neapolitan song, and 'Pe' dint' 'e viche addò nun trase 'o mare', from the same album, with lyrics written by Salvatore Palomba, a local poet who wrote songs for Sergio Bruni, one of the most prestigious interpreters of the classic song); 99 Posse, on the other hand, furiously anti-American, covered 'Tu vuò fà l'americano', a song written in the 1950s to poke fun at Neapolitan teenagers who followed American fashion at the time. Both 99 Posse and Almamegretta, after an initial period in which they recorded for small and independent labels, decided to sign for majors; both collaborated with Pino Daniele and, accordingly, both achieved lasting enormous notoriety.

'Where have all the flowers gone?' What has happened to almost three generations of Neapolitan musicians? Most of them are still around, often transformed in proportion to the success they achieved. Pino Daniele is still the biggest star, filling theatres wherever he goes but with nothing of his original countercultural strength: his songs have for 20 years been the most hackneyed one can possibly imagine. In 2007, the last time I saw him in concert, on a beach near Rome, the audience was composed mainly of families with prams and children, the set list consisted almost entirely of new songs and the three songs he performed from the old repertoire resembled spaceships landing from another planet. Edoardo Bennato is no longer a rock star: though still active, he is unable to reignite the inspiration that made him so important in the 1970s. Alan Sorrenti, after turning to disco music and hitting the charts in 1977 with 'Figli delle stelle' and in 1979 with 'Tu sei l'unica donna per me' (also translated into English), soon disappeared, following stormy personal events, to reappear from time to time without much success. His sister Jenny, instead, continues to work on projects combining her two roots, English folk and Mediterranean traditions. Osanna have been re-formed with a new line up by the singer-guitarist Lino Vairetti and the support of David Cross (ex-King Crimson). James Senese still plays his angry jazz-rock but his

⁶ In the early 1990s, even Roberto Murolo, an 80-year-old, long-forgotten singer-guitarist of classic Neapolitan song, was rediscovered and celebrated.

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music is not as surprising as it once was. Eugenio Bennato rides the wave of the most recent folk revival, popularising a folk music he himself composes but without much substance. Raiz left Almamegretta but has had little success as a solo artist so far. 99 Posse disbanded in 2005 and reformed in 2011 after the singer underwent drug rehabilitation, but they don't make headlines anymore. Bisca are also alive, still exploring their rhythm and blues and still performing in CSOAs, but they never attract the same size audiences that they had in the 1990s when they toured with 99 Posse.

Countercultures and subcultures are dynamic: they help the stagnant and moribund to get going again, and they have often been the ground on which the market has experienced new trends and obtained new possibilities of expansion (Buxton 1975). In Naples, they had a liberating effect, it having taken three decades for Neapolitan musicians to find their own way into modern song and popular music and, at the same time, to recover Naples' glorious tradition. Countercultures were a powerful aid in the task, acting as a means of emancipation from what had become an ossified repertoire that brought with it a vision of the world that risked causing the city to be cut off from what was happening in Italy and the rest of the world. As such, Neapolitan music has grown in the last 40 years, detaching itself from its parents' hands and starting to walk alone. Today the legacy of the Neapolitan song is no longer an obstacle and a new generation of performers has chosen it as a favourite genre and has even extended its interest to the repertoire from before the 'classic' period (1880–1945): Brunella Selo, for example, or Gianni La Magna, the latter originally a folk musician who has recorded an album (*I Cottrau a Napoli*, 2005) on which he sings the old songs contained in *I Passatempi musicali*. These were a number of music albums containing songs published between 1824 and 1845 by Guillame Cottrau, a musician of French origin who worked in Naples and collected, re-wrote and composed songs mainly for an international market of foreign visitors and aristocrats who came to Naples and wanted to bring back with them mementos of the city.⁷

While musicians rediscover classic songs, the considerable number of scholars attracted to the Neapolitan song means that attitudes towards it have definitely changed and this is certainly very positive, as only through its history can Naples look to its past and better understand its heritage, consciously integrating Neapolitan song with the new sounds of a global music.

⁷ The work of Guillame Cottrau was continued after his death by his son Teodoro (1827–79). Many of the songs of the 'Passatempi' derived from folk songs or from songs written by artisans of the old city, a repertoire which often circulated on broadsides and which is now largely forgotten, owing to the success of the 'classic' song.

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