

Reviews

FILM/DOCUMENTARY

Wasting Naples

nicol*angrisano, 2009, 77 minutes,
Insu^TV [www.archive.org/details/WastingNaples]
Reviewed by Alessandra Renzi



but no one had brought it all together, not even the judge involved in the ecomafia investigations who, at the premiere, (somewhat pompously) declared that he “will follow up on the evidence presented to the audience.”

Unlike much grassroots video work that neglects expression for content, the language of *Wasting Naples* is also constitutive of its production process. Aggressive in its pace, the movie also offers loving images of Neapolitan scenery and its deturpation. Violence and frenzy have been a marker of the garbage emergency. Still, the police beatings, expropriations and army incursions did not erase all the optimism of protesters. The real tragedy though is how, for years, these environmental struggles were portrayed by the media as the work of thugs recruited by the local mafia to maintain control of the garbage business. Adding insult to injury, the foul mountains of garbage in the streets of Naples became the mythical silver bracelet adorning the scapegoat banned from the city. Only now, through *Wasting Naples* connective practices, the goat comes back to tell her story, and to show us how to tell our own.

Alessandra Renzi is a post-doctoral fellow at the Infoscience Research Lab - Centre for the Study of Social Media, where she is looking at examples of dissent criminalization through the G8/G20 in Toronto. Alessandra's work emphasizes the development of radical research methodologies and collaborative creative practices that relay the links between academia and activist communities.

“Here the ‘state of emergency’ is another form of government, they should teach it in political science: there is monarchy, tyranny, democracy...and ‘Emergency!’” *Wasting Naples* narrator gives voice to some of our own experiences when he jokes about this new mode of governance. How often have we watched our sheriffs pull out the emergency gun from their holster whenever the star-shaped badge no longer did the trick?

More than a review, this is a tale of how some communities faced off against the gun, using video cameras to pose unwanted political questions about the environment. It is a tale because, once a documentary becomes a tool for collective narration, it is hardly possible to tell its story without contributing to the narrative. This contagious practice is now spilling out of the setting where a surreal tale about a 15-year-long garbage emergency originated. It is reaching other ears and mouths, because garbage does not only feed the dysfunctional (some would say dystopic) Italian state. What was once considered useless material has become a source of financial accumulation. It is the monetary afterlife of property, forever turned into gold from the (poisonous) ashes of (incinerator) hell.

Watching this movie, Naples' crisis may make Toronto's 2009 garbage strike seem more like a minor inconvenience, but shouldn't leave us feeling too good about the smell of our garbage. Who is behind the design and management of waste plans? Which communities are affected the most, and why? Where does the money come from and where does it land? Do we care where our garbage goes? We should, and *Wasting Naples* teaches us why through the voices of the communities affected by an emergency, those who caused it, the ones who tried to solve it, the ones who had no interest in solving it. It is time we stopped thinking that tree huggers should deal with recycling and green bins while we march to the drums of labour, war and other causes. It is time we brought garbage into our critique of capital: to see where it intersects with other issues and to use it as a way of acting politically. The effects are in the process. Use your imagination.

Documentaries have a director, producers, camera operators, editors, musician, and so on. They have huge budgets and copyrights. *Wasting Naples* has none of this, at least not how we know it. Mind you, this is not your usual grassroots movie either.

The name nicol* angrisano, appearing under the label “director,” is a collective identity for those behind the Insu^TV project (www.insutv.it). This non-profit, pirate television channel is a node in the Teletreet network (www.teletreet.it), set up in 2003 to bypass Prime Minister Berlusconi's control of 90% of the Italian media, and to enable different forms of expression through the language of television. Their public persona “stands for a multiplicity of visions and perspectives, it uses a low letter case because s/he refuses the concept of authorship; s/he takes the asterisk to inflect for all genders. It is a collective—a connective—identity radically searching for different reading cues to transform simple narrations into tools of struggle and liberation.” nicol* is as much a symbol as a mode of collaboration.

Catalysed through Insu^TV, under the guise of nicol*, hide countless helpers and volunteers: the communities, the bottom-up producers, a famous actor who lent his voice (and face), a couple of cinema personalities, post-production studio donors, independent musicians, promoters and so on. *Wasting Naples* condenses over 500 hours of recorded or borrowed tapes. During their collection, the director let herself be contaminated by the experience of the communities hit by these events, gathering more momentum and voices. Many more people joined nicol* as producers through the website *Produzioni dal basso* [bottom-up production] (www.produzionidalbasso.com). Here video collectives can post a trailer of their movie to buy on pre-order thus contributing to its production. What brought everyone together were not the expectations of box office revenues but an unstoppable need to tell a story about places we live in, and what we are doing to them while we assume that waste removal is merely a civic service. nicol* is now invited to screen *Wasting Naples* everywhere, to help support new struggles.

Framed like a story, with all the mean characters and heroes that belong to this oral genre, *Wasting Naples* presents a multilayered analysis of the relationships and conflicts among government, the media, the “ecomafia,” powerful corporations, and poisoned areas, crops and inhabitants. It does so by calling forth all the aspects and groups that intersect with garbage. Obviously, it was all there before the movie,