

*“Why save the world when you can design it?” Precarity and fashion in Milan.*¹

Abstract

Precarity is a concept applied widely both in academic and non-academic accounts of work in the creative industries to capture the assemblage of social, political, cultural and material aspects associated with contemporary forms of labor casualization. This paper focuses specifically on precarity and the fashion industry, taking as its case study Serpica Naro: a fictitious designer invented by a Milan-based fashion collective involved in social research on intellectual property, subjectivity in the creative industries, and precarious forms of labor in the fashion system.

This paper marks Serpica Naro’s tenth anniversary by offering an analysis of her intervention at Milan Fashion Week 2005. The show, titled “Precarity is in Fashion” is discussed in terms of a critique of the biopolitics of precarity and as a contestation of the fashion industry as a system that produces “brands”. This article contends that Serpica Naro re-appropriates the tools and forms of the fashion industry to contest it, and create an alternative to its system of production.

Keywords: Precarity, fashion activism, metabrand, Milan, Serpica Naro,

Ten years ago, in 2005, a group of activists and precarious workers in the Milanese fashion industry created the fictional persona of an Anglo-Japanese designer named Serpica Naro, and registered her for a show in the prestigious Milan Fashion Week. A

¹ “Why save the world when you can design it?” was a slogan part of Serpica Naro’s first biography on the website <http://www.serpicanaro.com>, 2005. This version of the biography is no longer available online.^f

look book, website, media clips and controversial media campaign were also produced in order to give a history to the unknown designer. Serpica Naro's show was held at the end of Milan Fashion Week in February 2005, in front of an audience of national and international media, activists and professionals in the fashion industry. The show comprised of a line of outfits designed specifically for precarious workers, and eventually revealed that Serpica Naro—the edgy Anglo-Japanese designer promoted through the official channels of Fashion Week and media—did not exist. Instead, it revealed Serpica Naro was a “metabrand” (Serpica Naro 2013), the creation of local activists wanting to draw attention on the precarity intrinsic to the fashion system.

The existing critical accounts on Serpica Naro concentrate on the media, ludic and activist aspects of the appearance of the designer on the Milanese fashion scene, including tactics such as cultural jamming, détournement, pranks, fakes, and multiple-user names (Tari and Vanni 2005; Gattolin 2006; Mattoni 2008; Deseriis 2010). More recently, other scholars have analyzed the event as a form of urban learning aimed at elaborating on collective forms of self-organization and resistance in the face of growing precarity engendered by neoliberal economic reforms (Gherardi and Murgia 2013: 5).

While precarity is a concept circulating widely both in academic and non academic accounts of work in the creative industries today (Lovink and Rossiter 2007; Gill and Pratt 2008; Ross 2009; Raunig, Ray and Wuggenig 2011), it is critical to stress that Serpica Naro's show at Milan Fashion Week in 2005 was the first public intervention

to draw attention to the precarious conditions at the core of the fashion industry (Tari and Vanni 2005).

This paper reflects back on the Serpica Naro's fashion show after ten years, and moves on from an analysis of activist and media practices to focus instead on its critique of the fashion system. It maintains that the importance of Serpica Naro goes beyond the initial media event and détournement of Fashion Week, and contends that Serpica Naro's critical contestation of fashion's system of production anticipated the awareness of the spreading of precarity and its effects in the creative industries. At the same time, this article argues that Serpica Naro's show matters because it offered a blueprint to re-appropriate and deploy towards alternative and collective ways of production the professional, social and emotional skills required in everyday precarious work in the fashion supply chain.

To that end, this paper follows two intertwined aspects of Serpica Naro's contestation: on one hand the critique of the biopolitics of precarity as embodied, everyday experiences; and on the other the critique of the ideology of creativity as self-valorization of fashion workers and of the fashion system intended as the nexus of material labor producing material commodities, and immaterial labor producing brands. These two key elements are discussed later in the paper, which starts with an introduction to the context of Milan fashion system.

Critical writing about Milan's fashion industry highlights its distinctive character by placing fashion production in relation with the historical, social, and cultural life of the city, as well as to its economic and industrial context (Pomodoro 2009). In turn,

the city as a contextual space is the milieu for the development of particular professional types of fashion designers, who share a similar understanding of fashion (Volonté 2012). A characteristic of Milanese fashion is its development in relation to the industrial system. Valerie Steele, writing about the development of Milan as a fashion city, notes how it had never been a glamorous center of art and culture, like Rome or Florence, and that its strength was to be found in the links between design and industry (2003: 59). Similarly Simona Segre Reinach, describing the rise of Milan as “the city of prêt-à-porter”, attributes the reasons for such rise to the combination of the manufacturing industry with the service industry and the geographical location of the city at the center of areas of highly specialized production, or industrial districts (2006: 125).

This system of production can be identified as based on industrial districts of localized and diversified small firms able to provide specialized and skilled labor, distinguished by knowledge sharing and spillovers, cooperation and contribution to the same production chain. In this system, the city itself is seen as part of the cycle of production and as a resource constructed by the accumulation of history, culture, tacit knowledge and communication channels of the peoples and institutions in its territory (Rullani 1997, 2003). Part of this productive city is constituted by “autonomous forms of urban social effervescence” that used to be among the drivers of social and cultural innovation (for instance, artists and designers leading the process of regeneration of urban areas), and that are now subsumed and included in the production

cycle of creative industries in the form of communication work (Arvidsson, Malossi and Naro 2010).

Considering the assemblage of resources, professions, workers, skills, events and economies that made Milan the capital of Made in Italy, researchers in Milan have also addressed another characteristic of *il sistema della moda* (the fashion system) in the city: its organization relies on the contractual flexibility of all the human resources that contribute to the fashion system (Marchetti and Gramigna 2007; Gherardi and Murgia 2013). Workers and activists working in the fashion and media sector have been among the first to contribute to these findings, starting with a political reflection on everyday working, and social and activist practices. These activists, as a counterpoint to the productivity of the creative city described by Rullani (1997, 2003), have developed an understanding of the city as a resource crisscrossed by relations and characterized by cooperation between individuals with different expertise, skills and knowledge (Romano 2010).

Similarly, activists and researchers have recognized that the concept of contractual flexibility at the core of the fashion production system needs to be further explored, in order to include diverse empirical definitions of precarity. They have, for instance, advocated the need to distinguish between high-paid consultants and the majority of workers who, while pleased with their jobs in terms of fulfillment, creativity and autonomy, are also deeply dissatisfied with their work organization and schedule, and their salaries (Romano 2010; Arvidsson, Malossi and Naro, 2010).

In this context, in 2005, a group of anti-precarity activists and precarious workers from the fashion industry and the industries that are part of the fashion system (such as marketing, communication, event production, retail design, user experience architecture) intervened directly in one of the main events of *il sistema della moda*: Milan Fashion Week. Adopting the multiple-use, collective name of Serpica Naro, they created an elaborate series of actions that brought to the fore the precarious nature of the fashion system. While previous researchers have focused on Serpica Naro as a media event (Tari and Vanni 2005; Mattoni 2008; Gherardi and Murgia 2013), this article is concerned with Serpica Naro's collection of eight designs in reference to the biopolitics of precarity as embodied everyday experiences; and with the theoretical reflection on the idea of metabrand: a method to share and to produce similar to open source software.

Precarity on the catwalk

Serpica Naro show took place under an overpass near one of Milan major train stations in the evening of 26 February 2005. In the weeks preceding the show, activists had organized a media strategy (Despontin 2007; Mattoni 2008; Naro 2013; Pasquinelli 2005) and had manufactured a complete fashion identity for the fake designer (Naro 2013). This campaign required the understanding of fashion as a system of material (garments, accessories), and increasingly immaterial (images, advertising, media, events) production. This understanding mirrors the early 2000s shift in the fashion production system "from the tangible production of clothing towards the

immaterial production of design and communication” and the consequent change in types of jobs in the fashion industry in Milan (Romano 2010).

As a hoax, Serpica Naro infiltrated the mediascape of the Milanese fashion industry and created a disturbance in its order of things. This disturbance deconstructed the fashion system and highlighted its double nature as production both of goods and a social imagination within which these goods are located. In addition to this, Serpica Naro used the catwalk to offer a humorous critique of precarity through the combination of its social, material, affective and biopolitical dimensions. As it is outlined in this section, it did so through a form of sartorial semiotic bricolage: by slightly altering the look, functionality and meaning of everyday clothes.

Staged under the banner “Precarity is in Fashion”, the show was divided in two parts. The first portion presented eight designs that captured the sartorial needs of precarious workers. In the second the collections were auto-produced by precarious workers in the fashion industry in collaboration with a network of similarly minded fashion designers. The show included three independent street labels whose production was based on remixing and bricolage. These were: the British Sailors Mars, who presented a collection entirely made with waste and trimmings from London East End; the Milanese Industrial Couture, which introduced aerographed outfits; and the Catalan Yomango (Alberto 2005).

The name of the last group is a word play on the popular label Mango and the Catalan slang verb *mangar*. ‘Yo mango’ translates roughly as ‘I shoplift’. Yomango advocates *una forma de desobediencia social y de acción directa contra las empresas multi-*

nacionales, “social disobedience and direct action against multinational corporations, as total lifestyle” (Yomango 2011). They produce actions and collections to facilitate re-appropriating items in supermarkets, department stores and shops as a performance, remix and rebranding of shoplifted designs (Deseriis 2010).

Before I analyze the eight outfits produced by Serpica Naro for Milan Fashion Week, it is useful to explain how I define biopower and biopolitics. My use of the two terms follows the reading of the Foucauldian concept by post-autonomous theorists, such as Michael Hardt, Maurizio Lazzarato and Antonio Negri (Foucault 1978, 1980 and 2008; Hardt 1999; Hardt and Negri 2000; Lazzarato 2002; Negri 2008).

These theorists consider not only Foucault’s 1970s writing on biopower, but also his revisitation of the concept of power in the 1980s. As is well known, in the late 1970s Foucault theorized biopower as a practice aimed at a social body that becomes the object of government, rather than as a practice aimed at disciplining individual bodies. Biopower, in this definition, is the prerogative of a government’s power to manage and control the life of entire populations (Foucault 1978: 134-145).

Biopower can be considered as the management of life as a system of preemptive measures to maximize productivity. Life, and its control or modification, takes center stage in political and economic strategies. In the early 1980s Foucault rethought the concept of power (which assumes the existence of one single source of sovereign power) in terms of power relations among a multitude of forces. In this shift, biopower as “the organization of a unilateral power relation” is supplanted by biopolitics, as “the strategic coordination of forces” (Lazzarato 2002: 103-104). Laz-

zarato goes on theorizing “the biopolitical field,” which in addition to labor and natural resources includes the management of place and of conditions of life (Lazzarato 2002: 102).

Crucially, resistance is located in this field of multiple power relations. No longer a simple negation or in an external position in regard to power (as there is not one single source of power to oppose), resistance becomes a constituent and creative process able: “to create and recreate, to transform the situation, to participate actively in the process, that is to resist”. This inversion in the dynamic between power and resistance where “resistance comes first” (Foucault 1997: 167-168) plays a central role in the formation of subjectivity. Michael Hardt also contends that “biopower is the power of creation of life; it is the production of collective subjectivities, sociality, society itself” (Hardt 1999: 98). And Antonio Negri asks:

Is it a question of thinking biopolitics as a set of biopowers? Or, to the extent that saying that power has invested life also signifies that life is a power, can we locate in life itself — that is to say, in labor and in language, but also in bodies, in desire, and in sexuality — the site of emergence of a counter-power, the site of a production of subjectivity that would present itself as a moment of de-subjection (*désassujettissement*)? (Negri 2008)

The literature outlined above delineates the ambiguity of the concepts biopower / biopolitics that informs my analysis of Serpica Naro’s designs. Serpica Naro presented eight “allegorical” and parodic outfits inspired by shared experiences of precarity,

and by the skills developed in return as acts of resistance to the conditions of precarious work. Each design represents in parodic form tricks and strategies to survive precarity. The eight outfits respond to the demands of perennial availability, flexibility, autonomy, self-organization and engagement with work and the resulting social and affective order engendered by the fashion industry, and, as is documented by critical writing, by the creative industries in general (McRobbie 2000; Lovink and Rossiter 2007; Gill and Pratt 2008; Christopherson 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008; Ross 2009; Arvidsson, Malossi and Naro 2010).

The eight designs added a new element to the critique of the precarious nature of work in the creative industries, showing how precarity becomes inscribed on the body. In this sense, precarity can be understood as a modality of biopower, as a set of governmental technologies ranging from legislation to everyday work practices that taken together regulate the bodies, desires, affects and life of precarious workers. The resulting strategic relations between precarious workers and power, however, are not “crystallized and fixed in asymmetric institutionalized relations”, but “they open up to the creation of subjectivities that escape biopolitical power in fluid and reversible relations”(Lazzarato 2002: 108).

Each garment isolated a particular aspect of precarity and the way this is experienced as an embodied effect, and was documented on a website (<http://www.serpica-naro.com/serpica-story/serpica-naro-il-media-sociale>). Taken together, the eight outfits represent through a selection of everyday garments bodies that do not conform, that make visible the less than satisfying work conditions in the fashion supply chain,

and that disrupt the narrative of blissful, autonomous self-actualization that is a core trope of creative labor. Arvidsson, Malossi and Naro (2010) carried out in-depth research among fashion workers in Milan, unveiling their everyday reality and forms of exploitation. The findings of this research reveal precarious (short term, flexible, casual) employment; hierarchical work structures, with the possibility of accessing and exercising creativity only at the top; low salaries; low mobility; lack of management transparency; periods of feast and famine, characterized by moments of intense work (including nights, weekends, lunch breaks) and periods of unemployment; fragmentation and lack of structure and direction, leading to the necessity of hyperflexibility; loss of autonomy and of possibility of planning ('I do whatever my boss tells me' being one the most common description of work, 2010: 304); menial and supportive, "uncreative" jobs; and the subsumption of all forms of sociality by industry networking. Unsurprisingly, this research concludes that creativity, rather than being an actual practice, becomes a matter of identity and that identifying as creative and its connotations of coolness is in itself the main reason for job satisfaction (Arvidsson, Malossi and Naro 2010: 300-305).

Serpica Naro analyzed these aspects and practices from the everyday, embodied experience of precarity (not just in the fashion industry) and designed them into eight garments. Ironical at first sight, the meanings of these garments exceed the prank, to suggest that precarity is not simply a condition of employment whose effects invest the social sphere, but, as a biopower, is a gendered and racialized practice of the body. According to Silvia Federici the precondition of capitalist develop-

ment was the disciplining of the body and transformation of individual powers into labor power, through a battle against the body to break the barriers of its natural limits (2004: 133-135). Building on this insight, precarity can be considered to be a set of biopowers to mold the body into a productive unit. This is done through legislation that normalizes flexibility and of vulnerability, which in turn create a system of discontinuous, intermittent employment requiring particular body practices.

Tsianos and Papadopolous in their 2006 essay on precarity and embodied capitalism identify the following characteristics of these body practices:

The embodied experience of precarity is characterized by: (a) vulnerability: the steadily experience of flexibility without any form of protection; (b) hyperactivity: the imperative to accommodate constant availability; (c) simultaneity: the ability to handle at the same the different tempi and velocities of multiple activities; (d) recombination: the crossings between various networks, social spaces, and available resources; (e) post-sexuality: the other as dildo; (f) fluid intimacies: the bodily production of indeterminate gender relations; (g) restlessness: being exposed to and trying to cope with the overabundance of communication, cooperation and interactivity; (h) unsettledness: the continuous experience of mobility across different spaces and time lines; (i) affective exhaustion: emotional exploitation, or, emotion as an important element for the control of employability

and multiple dependencies; (j) cunning: able to be deceitful, persistent, opportunistic, a trickster. (Tsianos and Papadopolous 2006)

The characteristics identified in the quotation above are common to all precarious workers. And as feminist scholars have argued, they are also the elements of work historically experienced by women, in waged and unwaged labor (Federici 2008). On this point Cristina Morini (2007, 2011) has maintained that the generalized precariousness, which has become a structural condition of work under contemporary forms of capitalism (such as cognitive capitalism) is a feminized condition. This is not limited to the growing role of women in the global economy. Elements of the dominant model of work, such as flexibility, vulnerability, adaptability, fragmentation of work time in multiple jobs, erasure of difference between work and life, multitasking, relational and affective skills, and pliability are part of the traditional baggage of female experience (Morini 2007: 43)

The eight designs part of the Serpica Naro fashion show addressed all traits of the model described by Morini. The first outfit on the runway, for instance — called *Se 60 giorni vi sembrano pochi*, (If you think 60 days are not many, *Figure 1*) — consisted of casual trousers and many, layered and numbered t-shirts. These, we read in the online documentation, can be individually removed at the end of each working day to be ready for the next one with a new t-shirt, and to mark the lack of employment continuity in short-term contracts (typically of 30, 60 or 90 days).

The second outfit on the catwalk was an illustration of another type of temporary contract, the “job on call”, introduced in the Italian legislation with the 2003 bill Law 30/2003 Legge Biagi (Tarì and Vanni 2005; Hernanz et al. 2008). To respond to the demands of constant availability, the ability to juggle multiple activities at the same time and the capacity to move smoothly between jobs, Serpica Naro presented a simple solution, a *Tutta T Job On Call* (Figure 2): a reversible garment that can be worn as pajamas at night and as working overalls during the day.

Similarly, the challenges of both material and immaterial labor, and the necessity to switch between different jobs, are captured in another look, the *Call Donald/ Mac Center* (Figure 3). This design remixed the uniforms of call center operators and MacDonald workers and consisted of black trousers and vest worn with a shirt and bow tie, accessorized with a hamburger flipper, microphone and visor.

While these outfits comment on the vulnerability of temporary jobs enacted by Italian legislation, other designs addressed the practices engendered by such vulnerability and the trickster-like responses to survive them. This is the case of a red and pink wide-legged pants and top outfit with soft squishy toys attached for the wearer to squeeze to reduce stress, called *Mobbing Style* (Figure 4). This design critiques the corporate representation of the emotional and affective exhaustion, stress and bullying experienced by precarious workers as an individual weakness rather than a social and structural problem.

A coat with fur trimmings that could be used either as long hair, or as a mustache, enabled the worker to quickly become a woman or a man, depending on the gender requirements of specific jobs (*Bisex Tenderness*, Figure 5).

Other designs presented on the catwalk directly confronted the issue of gender in precarious employment. One was an abdominal binder to be worn to hide pregnancies that could otherwise lead to being fired (*Pregnant Lady*, Figure 6); another was a skirt accessorized with a mousetrap (*Mouse Trap*, Figure 7), as defense against common practices of sexual harassment.

The third and last design, as it is customary in fashion shows, was a bridal gown (Figure 8), a comment on the only possible solution to the problem of double precarity faced by the many migrant women. Legal residency in Italy is only possible through a legal contract of employment, or, as is suggested here, through marriage to an Italian man.

“Serpica Naro is a Metabrand, a Community, a Methodology”

However valuable as a creative intervention exposing the precarity at the core of the Fashion Week system is, Serpica Naro cannot be interpreted solely as a temporary operation designed to reveal and scramble the code of a particular cultural and market grammar. Serpica Naro was primarily a site of experimentation. As such, at first it took from the Fashion Week system the wealth of cooperation, social relations, collaboration, sharing of ideas, knowledge, emotions, desires and skills brought by precarious workers and normally put to work in the creative industries. Second, it

used this reclaimed social and cultural capital to found a designers collective dedicated to the remix of theory and practice, to the critical experimentation with new technologies, and to the creation of learning spaces, events, workshops and exhibitions.

The set of practices and methods Serpica Naro deployed in 2005, and continued to refine in the following years, was also encapsulated in the concept of the metabrand. The theorization of metabrand followed partly from the critical success of the show “Precarity is in Fashion”, as the collective voice of the designer recounts:

After the show many people approached us to know where to buy Serpica Naro’s clothes. Clearly it was part of a fascination with the glamour of the operation that led to the creation of the designer, but also a desire to evade serial fashion and the anxiety of being universally branded, and a desire to reclaim a cleaner and more ethical personal style without necessarily being wrapped up in solidarity hessian bags. People were looking for a place where they could find clothes free from exploitation because produced by small artisanal firms not enmeshed in the fashion industry. A place where free and non-profit exchanges of clothing and ideas could be promoted and encouraged. (Serpica Naro 2013)

Partly to respond to the need for such a place, partly as an ongoing self-reflexive practice, Serpica Naro’s creators embarked on an analysis to carry the project for-

ward. This self-reflection took two interrelated directions. One was the elaboration of the idea of the metabrand. The other was the development of pedagogical practice, which transformed Serpica Naro “into a collective grandmother”. Like a grandmother teaching a grandchild how to knit without asking anything in return, Serpica Naro would become a site of invention, a laboratory to define a precarious style, to collect *l'autoproduzione* — self-produced fashion — and to socialize professional skills and information at the juncture of creativity and social experimentation (Serpica Naro 2013).

A key step in the production of the fake designer and the collection was the creation of Serpica Naro’s trademark, one of the requirements of the application to Fashion Week. The making, at least in legal terms, of the metabrand started with the liberation of the trademark. This meant to: “share all the rights that by law belong to the owner of the trademark” (Serpica Naro 2013) in the belief that Serpica Naro’s trademark was the result of a collective social process, based on the sharing of knowledge, experience and skills.

The metabrand license was written drawing inspiration from hacker culture, free software, open source and existing Creative Commons licenses. Unlike software development, music, writing or images, Serpica Naro’s creators had to think of a license that would work not only with ideas, code, and reproducible creative output, but also with the material production of items that could be reproduced and serialized freely. This called for a new license, as they explain:

The shift from immaterial labor to material production made it necessary for us to consider serialization on the one hand and on the other the relationship between free and autonomous production and industrial production. Because what we want to valorize through the brand Serpica Naro is not the output of a famous designer, but the virality of the mechanisms of participation in social processes. Serpica Naro is a MetaBrand! (Chain-workers 2005)

The new, liberated, trademark can be used by anyone who recognizes the value and imaginary produced by Serpica Naro. It can be used in association with another trademark, but requires that whatever bears the trademark be free to be reproduced and shared under the same license: the Creative Common Share Alike license. In case of industrial production, the Serpica Naro trademark can be used only if workers' entitlements such as paid, sick and maternity leave, insurance, superannuation and so on are put into place. The trademark must always be paired with the Serpica label, which is distributed freely as a printable file through Serpica's website. Those prohibited from using the Serpica trademark include: political parties, unions and organized religions; those who use GMO, and produce garments using leather or fur; and gun manufacturers (Serpica Naro 2005).

The conceptualization of the Serpica Naro metabrand was based on the appreciation and personal experience in the fashion (and related) industry in Milan, on a critique of fashion as brand and on tinkering with ideas inspired by open source soft-

ware. The experience of creating Serpica Naro as a tactical incursion in the fashion industry, as well as the involvement in anti-precarity activism, led also to the understanding of the metabrand as a set of relational, participatory, collaborative and sharing practices.

To fully understand the conceptual and practical value of the idea of metabrand, it is necessary to briefly go back to the transformation of the Milan fashion industry, which began in the early 2000s: from an industry grounded in the production of material garments to one based on production of fashion as design, events and communication. This, as has been argued by Arvidsson, Malossi and Naro, reflects a general shift from fashion as creativity and production to fashion as brand (2010: 299). Arvidsson, Malossi and Naro locate this shift in the early 2000s. They identify a previous model of production based on the ability of designers to interpret the effervescence of counter-culture and consumers' trends arising outside the fashion industry and to transform them into trends in the fashion markets. To this model they oppose a new brand-centric one. This hinges upon the fashion system's ability to incorporate urban effervescence into its cycle of production, and thus to control the invention and production of trends themselves through communication strategies and the creation of user experiences (2010: 300).

The invention of the media persona of Serpica Naro as a young designer exploiting a variety of urban trends is, in this sense, paradigmatic. The subsumption of urban social effervescence into the productive cycle of fashion as the immaterial elements of communication and marketing is reclaimed and taken apart in the concep-

tualization of metabrand. In other words, the idea of the metabrand finds its origin in an urban effervescence that is put to work outside the fashion system, and that in this process reclaims the elements of autonomy and creativity that are identified by fashion workers as the positives aspects in their jobs.

Work in progress

Since after its 2005 event, Serpica Naro has expanded into a collaborative project, which in the intervening years, has become a research and learning laboratory on issues concerning precarity in the creative industries, intellectual property, new technologies, strategies to share practices of making, and of course, design. Part of an international ecosystem of designers and makers, Serpica Naro has organized, generated and participated in events and workshops, and since 2013 has opened a laboratory in Milan. In these actions and events, readily available digital technologies are combined with machinery traditionally used in manufacturing (such as for instance the design of software to customize punch-cards for knitting machines, <http://oknitme.serpicanaro.org/>). Low-tech solutions, such as stenciling, or portable, renewable energy tools, such as the *cucicletta* — from the Italian words *cucire*, to sew, and *bicicletta*, bicycle — that combines a bicycle with a sewing machine, and a solar powered sewing machine, are used to demonstrate how to modify and upcycle old clothes in outdoor events and festivals. Open source patterns are made available and sold as part of a simple kit to encourage everyone to understand how to make their own clothes. Opposite to the current trend for expensive, boutique hand-made /

home-made goods, the use of new and inexpensive technologies is key here to the democratization of the process of making. Together with the practice of knowledge sharing, the use of digital technologies, produces a model of distributed creativity, and blurs the lines between producer and consumer, user and maker.

By embedding a political reflection and a participatory ethos in the design and production of objects, Serpica Naro is thus at the forefront of emerging forms of “adversarial” design that open up new spaces for democracy in their capacity to question and contest the political and social status quo, beliefs and values (Di Salvo 2012). Similarly, in its experimentation with open source, new and remixed technologies to deploy sustainable strategies and blur the distinction between user and maker, Serpica Naro dialogues with designers who on an international scale are engaged in the Maker Movement (<http://makerfaire.com/maker-movement/>) and in Open Design (Van Abel, Evers, Klaassen and Troxler 2011).

Conclusion

I have described how as a trade show, Milan Fashion Week is not simply about presenting, buying and selling clothes: Fashion Week creates and controls a fashion imaginary, desire, belonging, social relationships, and life style. Fashion as a system is deployed in its fullness during Fashion Week and relies on an ecosystem of industries and professions, material and immaterial labor, along the entire supply chain, ranging from building to public relations, hospitality, services, and media.

In this context, the necessity to rethink work in the fashion industry beyond the happy hype of self-fulfilling creative work has sparked a wealth of research and critique in the last decade. Serpica Naro's contribution to this reflection started from the everyday, embodied experience of the biopolitics of precarity of workers in the fashion supply chain. Serpica Naro deconstructed the structure of Milan Fashion Week, and analyzed and reimagined the mechanism of fashion as the production of events and of brand. In addition to this, Serpica Naro suggests that the fashion industry, at the intersection of intense, manual, virtuoso labor based on individual skillfulness and the production of affects, desires and imaginary, might be one of the most privileged sites in which to observe the operations of contemporary labor processes.

A major preoccupation of Serpica Naro has been the re-appropriation of skills, knowledge and creativity: Serpica Naro specifically developed a methodology for production, and actions that targeted the sharing of collective knowledge. Building on the experience of San Precario and the organization of May Day Parades, Serpica Naro from its beginning has been engaged in a process aimed at raising political awareness in a not-yet politicized public. It has done so intervening in a shared cultural grammar and in the media spectacle of Fashion Week, and pooling together individual knowledge and a multiplicity of skills to reclaim those affective, imaginative and communicative marks of urban social effervescence absorbed by the fashion supply chain. While perhaps this hasn't resulted in macro-changes at a political and legislative level in matters of precarity, it has shown the potential for creative inno-

vation and self-organization, and has opened up ways to think and make fashion independently from the pervasiveness of the fashion system.

References

- Arvidsson, Adam, Giannino Malossi, and Serpica Naro. 2010. "Passionate Work? Labour Conditions in the Milan Fashion Industry." *Journal for Cultural Research* 14 (3) (July): 295–309. doi:10.1080/14797581003791503. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14797581003791503>.
- Chainworkers. 2005. "Reader – Uno schema per leggere quello che si è scritto." www.precaria.org. http://www.precaria.org/wp-content/plugins/downloads-manager/upload/chainworkers_reader.pdf.
- Christopherson, Susan. 2008. "Beyond the Self-Expressive Creative Worker An Industry Perspective on Entertainment Media." *Theory , Culture & Society* 25 (7-8): 73–95.
- Deseriis, Marco. 2010. *Improper Names: The Minor Politics of Collective Pseudonyms and Multiple-Use Names*. Thesis, New York University.
- Despontin, Marco. 2007. "Marchiati a vuoto." *Paginauno. Bimestrale di analisi politica, cultura e letteratura*. <http://www.rivistapaginauno.it/marchiati.php>.
- Di Salvo, Carl. 2012. *Adversarial Design*. Cambridge MASS and London: The MIT Press.
- Federici, Silvia. 2004. *Caliban and the Witch. Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.

Federici, Silvia. 2008. "Precarious Labor : A Feminist Viewpoint": *In The Middle of a Whirlwind: 2008 Convention Protests, Movement, and Movement*. Los Angeles: Journal of Aesthetics & Protest Press. Available at www.inthemiddleofawhirlwind.info.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Random House.

Foucault, Michel. 1980. "The Politics of Health in the 18th Century." In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, 166–182. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, Michel. 1997. *Ethics. Subjectivity and Truth. The Essential Work of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: The New York Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*. Edited by Michel Senellart. Translated by Graham Burchell. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gattolin, André. 2006. "Serpica Naro." *Multitudes* 25 (2): 187. doi:10.3917/mult.025.0187. <http://www.cairn.info/revue-multitudes-2006-2-page-187.htm>.

Gherardi, Silvia, and Annalisa Murgia. 2013. "Staging Precariousness: The Serpica Naro Catwalk during the Milan Fashion Week." *Culture and Organization*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2013.837051>.

Gill, Rosalind, and Andy Pratt. 2008. "In the Social Factory?: Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25 (7-8) (December 1): 1–30. doi: 10.1177/0263276408097794. <http://tcs.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/0263276408097794>.

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass. and London, UK: Harvard University Press.

- Hardt, Michael. 1996. "Introduction: Laboratory Italy." In *Radical Thought in Italy*, edited by Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hardt, Michael. 1999. "Affective Labor." *Boundary 2* 26 (2): 90–100.
- Hernanz, Virginia, Federica Origo, Manuela Samek Lodovici, and Luis Toharia. 2008. "Dreaming of a Permanent Job: The Transition of Temporary Workers in Italy and Spain." In *Flexibility and Employment Security in Europe*, edited by Ruud Muffels, 79–106. Cheltenham, Glos. UK and Northampton, Mass. USA: Edward Elgar Publishing Inc.
- Hesmondhalgh, David, and Sarah Baker. 2008. "Creative Work and Emotional Labour in the Television Industry." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25 (7-8): 97–118.
- Lazzarato, Maurizio. 2002. "From Biopower to Biopolitics." *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 13: 112–125.
- Lovink, Geert, and Ned Rossiter, ed. 2007. *My Creativity Reader*. Amsterdam: Institute for Internet Cultures.
- Marchetti, Aldo, and Emilio Gramigna. 2007. *Produttori di stile. Lavoro e flessibilità nelle case di moda milanesi*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Mattoni, Alice. 2008. "Serpica Naro and the Others. The Media Sociali Experience in Italian Struggles Against Precarity." *Portal. Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 5 (2): 1–24. <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/portal/article/viewArticle/706>.
- McRobbie, Angela. 2000. "Fashion as a Culture Industry." In *Fashion Cultures. Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, edited by Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson, 253–263. London and New York: Routledge.
- Morini, Cristina. 2007. "The Feminization of Labour in Cognitive Capitalism." *Feminist Review* 87 (1): 40–59. doi:10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400367. <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/doi/10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400367>.

Morini, Cristina. 2011. *Per amore o per forza Femminilizzazione del lavoro e biopolitiche del corpo*. Verona: ombre corte.

Negri, Antonio. 2008. "The Labor of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics." Translated by Sara Mayo, Peter Graefe, and Mark Coté. *Mediations* 23 (2): 8–25. <http://www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/the-labor-of-the-multitude-and-the-fabric-of-biopolitics>.

Pasquinelli, Matteo. 2005. "Operation Serpica Naro. Milan Fashion Industry Spoofed by Anti-precarity Activists." *Nettime*. <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0502/msg00066.html>.

Pomodoro, Sabrina, ed. 2009. *Position Book M2 Milano&Moda Ricerche e analisi sulle trasformazioni culturali e d'impresa della moda a Milano*. Osservatorio per Le Politiche Pubbliche Sulla Moda a Milano. Milano: Fondazione Università IULM.

Raunig, Gerald, Gene Ray, and Ulf Wuggenig. 2011. *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the "Creative Industries"*. London: MayFlyBooks.

Romano, Zoe. 2010. "Passion and Fashion: The Highly Qualified for Work." *Digicult. Digital Art, Design and Culture*, February. <http://www.digicult.it/digimag/issue-051/passion-and-fashion-the-highly-qualified-for-work/>.

Ross, Andrew. 2009. *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times*. NYU Press. <http://www.amazon.com/Nice-Work-You-Can-Get/dp/0814776914>.

Rullani, Enzo. 1997. "L'evoluzione dei distretti industriali: un percorso tra decostruzione e internazionalizzazione." In *Il distretto industriale tra logiche di impresa e logiche di sistema*, edited by Luca Ferrucci and Riccardo Varaldo, 54–85. Milano: Franco Angeli.

Rullani, Enzo. 2007. "Cluster: Tendenze e scenari nell'economia globalizzata" conference paper In *Patterns of Clusters Evolutions: modelli, pratiche, tecnologie e politiche*. Mestre.

Segre Reinach, Simona. 2006. "The City of Prêt-À-Porter in a World of Fast Fashion." In *Fashion's World Cities*, edited by Christopher Breward and David Gilbert. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Serpica Naro. 2005. "La Licenza." Serpica Naro. <http://www.serpicanaro.com/la-licenza-del-marchio>.

Serpica Naro. 2013. "Serpica's Story." <http://www.serpicanaro.com/serpica-story>.

Steele, Valery. 2003. *Fashion, Italian Style*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Marcello Tari and Ilaria Vanni. 2005. "On the Life and Deeds of San Precario, Patron Saint of Precarious Workers and Lives." *Fibreculture* (5). <http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-023-on-the-life-and-deeds-of-san-precario-patron-saint-of-precarious-workers-and-lives/>

Tsianos, Vassilis, and Dimitris Papadopoulos. 2006. "Precarity: A Savage Journey to the Heart of Embodied Capitalism." *Transversal Journal*. <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/tsianospapadopoulos/en/print>.

Evers, Lucas, Roel Klaassen, Peter Troxler, and Bas Van Abel. 2011. *Open Design Now: Why Design Cannot Remain Exclusive*. Amsterdam: BIS Publishers.

Volontè, Paolo. 2012. "Social and Cultural Features of Fashion Design in Milan." *Fashion Theory* 16 (4): 339–432.

Yomango, 2011. "¿Qué Fue de Yomango?" Yomango. <http://yomango.net/2011/07/¿que-fue-de-yomango/>.