

Artists Residence as Spaces of Resistance and Catalysts for Social Transformation: The Case of *Dies Irae*

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Abstract

Questo contributo indaga il ruolo e il potenziale trasformativo delle residenze artistiche (Artists-in-Residence, AiR), intese come spazi liminali capaci di resistere alle logiche produttivistiche dello spettacolo contemporaneo e di sperimentare nuove modalità di relazione, creazione e coinvolgimento comunitario. Le residenze non sono concepite soltanto come luoghi di ricerca e creazione, ma come veri e propri laboratori di condivisione e co-creazione, in cui la corporeità e l'agency delle/i partecipanti assumono una funzione costitutiva sia nel processo artistico che in quello sociale. La ricerca prende avvio dal caso di studio *Dies Irae. Concerto per donne e martelli*, una residenza intensiva di sette giorni svoltasi presso L'Arboreto – Teatro Dimora di Mondaino, condotta dalla performer Gloria Dorliguzzo insieme al musicista Gianluca Feccia. Il progetto ha coinvolto un gruppo di donne in un'esperienza immersiva tra movimento e suono, orientata all'ascolto reciproco e alla creazione di una comunità temporanea. L'indagine si concentra sugli impatti trasformativi dei processi artistici partecipativi e sulle trasformazioni che emergono nelle relazioni tra artisti, partecipanti e processi creativi, mostrando come l'ecosistema della residenza favorisca nuove configurazioni di ruoli, poteri e pratiche condivise. L'approccio etnografico integra osservazione diretta, interviste, focus group e diari digitali via WhatsApp, delineando un'ecologia metodologica capace di cogliere percezioni, dinamiche collettive e processi riflessivi nei contesti performativi partecipativi.

This contribution investigates the role and transformative potential of artist residencies as liminal spaces that resist the productivist logics of contemporary performance and experiment with new forms of relation, creation, and community engagement. Far from being mere sites of artistic production, residencies are conceived as laboratories of sharing and co-creation, where embodiment and participant agency play a constitutive role in both artistic and social processes. The study focuses on *Dies Irae. Concerto per donne e martelli*, a seven-day residency at L'Arboreto – Teatro Dimora in Mondaino, led by performer Gloria Dorliguzzo and musician Gianluca Feccia. Through an ethnographic approach integrating observation, interviews, focus groups, and digital diaries via WhatsApp, the research examines the transformative dynamics emerging between artists, participants, and creative processes, showing how residency ecosystems enable new configurations of roles, power, and shared practice.

Parole chiave/Key Words

Residenze artistiche; arte partecipativa; trasformazione sociale; performing arts; metodologia digitale.

Artist residencies; participatory art; social transformation; performing arts; digital ethnography.

DOI: 10.54103/conessioni/30104

Introduction

This contribution is part of a broader reflection on the role and transformative potential of artistic residencies (Artist-in-Residence, AiR) understood as liminal spaces that resist the productivist logics of the performing arts and experiment with new forms of relation, creation, and community engagement. In this perspective, residencies are not only places of artistic research, but true laboratories of sharing and co-creation, where the body and the agency of participants play a constitutive role in both the creative and social process.

This study originates from the case of *Dies Irae. Concerto per donne e martelli*, a seven-day intensive workshop held at L'Arboreto – Teatro Dimora in Mondaino – part of the Emilia-Romagna Residency Centre together with La Corte Ospitale in Rubiera – and led by performer Gloria Dorliguzzo in collaboration with musician Gianluca Feccia. The project involved a group of women in an immersive experience of movement and sound, grounded in mutual listening and the creation of a temporary community. The research focuses on the transformative impact of participatory artistic processes on the participants, with particular attention to embodied and experiential dimensions. At the same time, it explores the shifts that occur in the relationships between artists, participants, and creative processes, showing how the residency ecosystem enables new configurations of roles, power relations, and shared practices.

Methodologically, the analysis adopts an ethnographic approach that combines direct observation, solicited digital diaries collected via WhatsApp (Hyers, 2018), in-depth interviews, and focus groups, together with the analysis of the WhatsApp group *Dies Irae*. This methodological ecology makes it possible to grasp real-time perceptions, uncover collective dynamics and shared meanings, and observe how digital tools – such as group chats and online diaries – can serve not only as valuable spaces for participant self-reflection, but also as effective elements for the qualitative observation of processes that unfold within participatory performance contexts (Gemini *et al.*, 2024).

Artistic Residencies: Evolutions, Models, and Critical Perspectives

Within the contemporary landscape of the performing arts, artistic residencies are no longer merely spaces of production, but places of research and creation that facilitate the circulation of resources, ideas, and practices. They offer artists «time, space and resources to work [...] on areas of their practice that reward heightened reflection or focus» (European

Commission, 2016, p. 8). Recent scholarship (Lehmann, 2017; Roberts, Strandvad, 2023; Desmet, 2023; Biondi, Donati, 2023; Basov *et al.*, 2024; Giuliani, 2024; Kaneko, 2025) highlights how residencies have evolved into collaborative ecosystems that foster distributed creativity and situated learning. These developments resonate with the social turn in contemporary art and with relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 1998), dialogical art (Kester, 2004), and participatory practices (Bishop, 2012). Alongside individual artistic research, participatory and community-based practices have become more prominent, with audience involvement becoming an integral part of the residency.

According to Lehmann (2017), residencies increasingly unfold within educational, professional, and community contexts, fostering collective learning, distributed creativity, and relational competences. In this perspective, the artist-in-residence is not only a creator of works but also a cultural mediator involved in informal and situated learning processes. This shift is part of a broader transformation in spectatorship and participatory practices within the performing arts, where the relationship between audience and performer is redefined through new modes of interaction (Gemini *et al.*, 2024).

Today, residencies can be understood as situated cultural elements that stand in tension with dominant logics of artistic production shaped by power, visibility, and neoliberal governance (Gaupp *et al.*, 2022). In this intermediate space between institution and autonomy, forms of symbolic resistance and renegotiation of power emerge, and artistic practice acquires political as well as relational value. Many residencies now adopt hybrid models that intertwine aesthetic research, social participation, and territorial engagement, thereby fostering processes of community transformation and social regeneration (Lithgow, Wall, 2017; Pinto *et al.*, 2020; Ernstman *et al.*, 2021; Allegrini, Paltrinieri, 2022).

In the Italian context, these hybrid models have become particularly evident. Ferraresi (2023) defines residencies as «interstices within the theatrical system [...] other spaces where communities invent or experiment with alternative forms of exchange» (Ferraresi, 2023, p. 39). Similarly, Donati (2023) describes the residency as a «laboratory of theatre», where value lies in the process and in mutual learning between artists and communities. More recently, this experimentation has also extended to online and hybrid forms of residency, where digital environments foster new modes of collaboration (Monteverdi, 2023)

and the emergence of mediated communities (Gemini, 2023), reflecting the broader transformations of liveness in mediatized contexts (Gemini, Brilli, 2023).

Embodied Practices and Generative “Frictions” within Creative Residency Contexts

Alongside this social dimension, recent literature emphasizes the role of residencies as ecological spaces of reflection, where somatic and embodied practices, rooted in an ethics of care and sustainability (Desmet, 2024), intersect with perspectives such as that of Kaneko (2025), who understands the residency as a condition of *betweenness*: a space in which humans and non-humans cohabit within shifting material configurations, generating relational and ecological transformations. In the case of the Aomori Contemporary Art Centre, «AIR emerges through the entanglement of everything involved. Humans, architecture, tables, trees, sunlight, and insects are all part of this entanglement» (Kaneko, 2025, p. 28).

Within this framework, the concept of embedded aesthetics (Lithgow, Wall, 2017) is central, as it allows AiR programmes to be understood not only as spaces for aesthetic research but also as places where the aesthetic becomes embedded within social and affective dynamics. Subjects – artists and cultural workers – are inscribed in space and time through networks of relation, and the residency contributes to generating new forms of relationality and evolving sensitivities. It is within these interstices that ruptures and unforeseen encounters occur, rendering visible what had previously remained unseen. Lithgow and Wall describe these moments as «productive frictions»: «productive, unprecedented and desirable outcomes which may challenge given values» (2017). In this sense, the artist acts as a social catalyst, activating processes that reconfigure sensibilities and bonds, opening up unexpected spaces of learning and frictions capable of transforming practices and values.

This participatory and ecological dimension, rooted in local territories, recalls Wenger’s (1998) community of practice, in which tacit knowledge and artistic poetics intertwine. Examples include community-based artist residencies (Arredondo, 2021), which emphasize relationships with local contexts through open studios, workshops, public encounters, and convivial moments, generating social capital, cultural citizenship, and a sense of belonging.

Artistic residencies are therefore not neutral spaces, but places of negotiation between ethics, aesthetics, and politics, where roles and forms of creative action are redefined. As also illustrated in our case study, they enable a move beyond the harmonious rhet-

oric of participatory art, valuing friction as a generative force (Bishop, 2012): not as a disruption to be avoided, but as a productive dynamic capable of unsettling and reorganizing values, practices, and imaginaries.

Case Study

Dies Irae. Concerto per donne e martelli is a project by artist and performer Gloria Dorliguzzo, with the musical collaboration of conductor Gianluca Feccia. The work is conceived as a performative reinterpretation of *Composition No. 2 “Dies Irae”* by Russian composer Galina Ustvolskaja (1919–2006), a radical and reclusive figure within twentieth-century Soviet music.

A student of Šostakovič, from whom she eventually distanced herself, Ustvolskaja developed a highly personal musical language, marked by extreme essentiality, ascetic tension, and a percussive use of sound. She was even described by critic Elmer Schönberger as «The lady with the hammer»¹ *Composition No. 2*, written between 1973 and 1975, is one of the most emblematic works of her style: it calls for an unusual ensemble of eight double basses, piano, bass drum, and a block of wood struck with hammers. The score evokes a ritual and apocalyptic atmosphere, dominated by obsessive, dark, and repetitive sonorities.

Dorliguzzo and Feccia’s reworking takes the form of a concert-performance, in which music and choreographic movement are interwoven. Echoing the radicality of the original work, the artists introduce hammers, anvils, wooden logs, and metal plates – materials that are not mere props but become sonic, choreographic, and bodily elements, in continuity with Ustvolskaja’s poetics. The work does not aim to represent the musical *Dies Irae*, but rather to translate its performative principle through the body, gesture, and friction with matter.

The project adopts the form of an itinerant laboratory, involving in each phase a different group of non-professional women selected via a public call. The residency analysed in this study took place from 14 to 21 November 2024 at L’arboreto – Teatro Dimora in Mondaino (Emilia-Romagna, Italy). It consisted of a seven-day intensive workshop involving seven women of different ages, cultural backgrounds, and professional paths, in an immersive experience of music and choreography led by the two artists, culminating in a public open rehearsal on 21 November 2024. During the residency, a WhatsApp group named *Dies Irae* connected the artist Gloria Dorliguzzo, the participants, and the organisers from L’Arboreto,

functioning both as a logistical tool and as a relational space that accompanied the process through daily exchanges, reflections, and affective resonances.



Fig. 1. Rehearsal moment captured during the residency week for *Dies Irae* at L'Arboreto – Teatro Dimora di Mondaino
Foto: Francesca Giuliani

Research Questions and Methodology

Despite the growing reflection on the role of artistic residencies in processes of cultural and social innovation, the transformative, relational, and community dimensions activated within participatory practices remain underexplored. Most studies focus on organizational, economic, or territorial aspects (Pinto *et al.*, 2020; Cidell *et al.*, 2025), overlooking the experiential and intersubjective changes generated by these practices in individuals and communities.

In recent years, evaluation models applied to participatory processes in artistic residencies have evolved. While most still privilege the measurement of outputs (works, events, collaborations), others have broadened the perspective by introducing multidimensional models and tools for participatory self-assessment capable of capturing the complexity of artistic, social, and territorial impacts (Costa *et al.*, 2024). Despite these advances, it remains challenging to grasp

the internal, affective, and community transformations that emerge in participatory contexts – dimensions that often resist reduction to quantitative metrics or standardized indicators.

From this perspective, the present study examines *Dies Irae. Concerto per donne e martelli* as a case that enables close observation of the transformations emerging through participatory co-creation and the evolving relationships between artists, participants, and the local context.

Based on these theoretical premises, our first research question concerns the transformations that emerge in the relationship between artists, the creative process, and participants within an artistic residency. To address this question, we adopted an ethnographic approach grounded in a multilayered qualitative methodology. This approach was chosen for its capacity to capture the relational, affective, and processual dimensions of participatory artistic practices, in line with current debates on multimodal and digitally mediated participatory research (Börner *et al.*, 2024; Mavhandu-Mudzusi *et al.*, 2022; Hyers, 2018). This approach integrates digital tools with traditional methods, enabling triangulation between different perspectives (participants, artists, staff members, and the researcher) and across different temporalities of the experience, both during the residency and in its aftermath.

Specifically, the study was conducted through:

1. the analysis of contents from the WhatsApp chat *Dies Irae* (texts, emoji, images, audio), with attention to tone, communicative style, and emerging themes. Given the contained size of the dataset, the analysis was carried out manually and developed through three sequential steps: (a) reading of the entire corpus with contextual annotations; (b) thematic coding of recurring elements; (c) mapping relational transformations along the timeline of the residency, linking the group's emotional peaks to key events such as days of intensive work and the open rehearsal;
2. the analysis of solicited diaries (Hyers, 2018), collected through private written or voice messages sent via WhatsApp, in order to capture participants' perceptions in real time;
3. in-depth interviews with artists Gloria Dorliguzzo and Gianluca Feccia, and two focus group sessions with participants, aimed at exploring their lived experience, transformations in their relationship with the creative process, and the emergence of collective dynamics;
4. ethnographic observation of the working phases, accompanied by the keeping of a field diary.

The analysis of materials was guided by several key themes: transformation, agency, and cohesion. On this basis, we formulated a second research question, more explicitly methodological in nature: what are the potentials and the limits of digital tools – particularly WhatsApp diaries and the group chat – as instruments of research-action within participatory art projects?

Introduction to the Findings

Before presenting the detailed results, it is helpful to briefly anticipate the main themes that emerge from interviews, focus groups, diaries, and chat analysis. The findings reveal recurring tensions related to the evolution of relationships and the gradual construction of trust, as well as the role of space, materials, and creative action in sustaining these dynamics and fostering individual and collective transformations.

Following the temporal unfolding of the residency, the analysis revealed a set of key themes that progressively traced the stages of an experiential journey. Over the course of the week, participants move through distinct yet interconnected phases: from initial disorientation to the encounter with difficulty, up to the construction of cohesion and the subsequent elaboration of the experience. This transformative process does not develop linearly; rather, it is sustained and made possible by a series of structural and relational elements that characterize the residency context: the extended and immersive duration, the role of materials, the dimension of the feminine, the tension between structure and freedom, and the approach adopted by Gloria Dorliguzzo.

In this section, we therefore distinguish between two levels of analysis: on the one hand, process nodes, which describe the experiential transformations experienced by the participants throughout the residency; on the other hand, structural elements, which highlight the factors, practices, and conditions that enabled this process to unfold without fragmenting. This distinction is not rigid, as elements act continuously within the process itself; however, it allows for a clearer understanding of how individual and collective experiences intertwine with the structural and relational dynamics of the context.



Fig. 2. Rehearsal moment captured during the residency week for *Dies Irae* at L'Arboreto – Teatro Dimora di Mondaino
Foto: Francesca Giuliani

Disorientation

The intensity and rigor of the residency, characterized by strong physical and emotional involvement, generated an initial sense of disorientation among participants, experienced as a threshold that had to be crossed. The first days were described as a phase marked by fatigue, anxiety, and loss of control.

That very evening I called a few people saying: I'm wasting my vacation, this is so hard. It wasn't just that we had to move correctly — we had to do it in time, and we had to do it together, with people we didn't even know. The atmosphere was really tense (participant, focus group).

The choreographic score, with its fast tempo and the need to perform precise gestures together with unfamiliar bodies, challenged both personal and relational limits. The challenges of coordinating with strangers, combined with the use of heavy scenic materials, heightened the sense of disorientation and turned it into a threshold of transition.

The first day was kind of traumatic. The atmosphere was really tense. I remember how exhausting it was, and the fact that we had to move together with people we didn't even know. All of that made me feel a bit out of control (participant, focus group).

This initial, highly embodied phase was experienced through the confrontation with physical resistance: the weight of the wooden log, the challenge of making the metal plate resonate, and the need to calibrate one's strength when striking the hammer against the anvil. On an emotional level, feelings of inadequacy, confusion, and isolation emerged – feelings that were gradually contained through the group dynamic and the progressive development of shared practice.

Bonding Through Difficulty

Once the initial threshold of disorientation was overcome, the sharing of difficulties became the condition that enabled the construction of trust and alliance within the group. Physical strain and emotional tension, initially perceived as obstacles, were gradually recognized as common elements and transformed into opportunities for mutual support.

The difficulty actually helped us communicate even more, to help each other, and even be able to laugh about it (participant, focus group).

A collective body began to take shape through the management of fatigue: coordinating movements, moving heavy materials, and maintaining a shared rhythm required collaboration and mutual adjustment. The group thus began to recognize and organize itself, transforming urgency and effort into resources for cohesion.

The group really started to come together when the real difficulties emerged: heavy objects, aching bodies, figuring out how to move without getting hurt. It's in that urgency that the group begins to organize itself, and in that organisation it takes shape (Gloria Dorliguzzo, interview).

Transformation

Over the course of the residency, participants describe a profound shift in their perception of their bodies, the group, and themselves – one that continues to act even after the experience ends.

You're not the same as before. It's what comes afterwards that really hits you. It's not exactly a sense of something missing, but something extra. I'm not the same person I was the day before I walked into that process (participant, focus group).

This change manifests first of all on a bodily level. The rigidity and fear of the first days gradually gave way to greater confidence and fluidity, to a kind of automaticity in movement – «almost like playing an instrument». Through the shared repetition of gestures, the body becomes more aware, more capable of responding, and of recognising itself within the collective rhythm.

At the same time, working with the materials nurtures a growing sense of determination and mastery. Interaction with concrete, heavy objects generate a «very strong internal determination», – a sensation of direct, concentrated energy that many participants recognise as a new kind of strength, one that emerged during the process and continued beyond the residency itself.

The Role of the Feminine

Alongside the dynamics of disorientation, unity, and transformation, certain structural and relational elements sustained the transformative process, allowing the group to navigate it without falling apart, while maintaining a balance between vulnerability and shared strength. Among these, the dimension of the feminine emerges strongly as a transversal quality of the experience. Participants describe a recognizable feminine energy in the form of solidarity, listening, and the absence of competition. Relationships between women take shape as spaces of encouragement and mutual care, transforming the stage into a place of alliance and support.

In these afternoons of work at Teatro Dimora, with a group of women I didn't know... I found myself asking who I am, and who we are. At the centre of the creative process there's the encounter with the Other (participant's diary).

This energy is also expressed as a form of attention towards members of the group who are less experienced. Those with greater familiarity with performance testify to an attitude of protection and care—a kind of symbolic motherhood that strengthens the collective bond. This care is shown especially towards those who feel more fragile or inexperienced:

When Gloria said, today is the first day and it's the hardest, I suddenly started worrying about the others, the non-professionals. I looked over at them, hoping they wouldn't walk away (participant, focus group).

The feminine dimension thus emerges as a relational element that softens fatigue, sustains trust, and supports the integration of different layers of experience.



Fig. 3. Rehearsal moment captured during the residency week for *Dies Irae* at L'Arboreto – Teatro Dimora di Mondaino
Foto: Francesca Giuliani

The Residency as a Transformative Setting

A decisive element in supporting the process lies in the spatial and temporal dimensions of the residency. The prolonged stay in a shared place, together with the experience of common rhythms and everyday life, turns the residency into a true factor of cohesion and collective growth. The long working days, punctuated by shared breaks and informal moments, help create an atmosphere of familiarity and participation that affects how participants perceive themselves and their place within the group:

For me, what really helped were those full working days – like, working all day with lunch in the middle, and even moments where we were working alone... it was a different kind of messing around compared to being in the rehearsal room with the choreographer (participant, focus group).

Sharing time and space fosters the emergence of a temporary community, in which relationships grow stronger even outside of the creative process. Daily coexistence – sleeping,

eating, and talking together – becomes an integral part of group formation. As Gloria Dorliguzzo notes:

For a group to come together, certain conditions are needed – you really have to share a lot. And so these residencies, where you spend hours and hours together, eating, drinking, even sleeping, are all part of that union. Because the earlier the group forms, the earlier these souls blend while working together, and of course, the sooner you get to the result. (Gloria Dorliguzzo, interview)

In this context, the transition from initial uncertainty and tension to trust and cohesion is closely tied to the temporal and relational dimensions of the residency. These act as relational elements of continuity and transformation, making the setting itself a constitutive element of the process.

Freedom Within Structure

One of the central themes that emerges from the experience is the tension between structure and freedom. The score, rigid and initially perceived as almost traumatic, gradually reveals itself as a generative constraint: a structure that does not restrict but enables agency. The women involved, although not professionals, do not merely execute instructions; they actively contribute to the creative process through their bodies, presence, and initiative. This agency is described as something progressively achieved from within the rule:

Freedom was exactly that — like an evolving process. That form, which was so guided and so rigid, allowed me, inside, to try so many things (participant, focus group).

Learning the score, at first experienced as inaccessible, becomes an opportunity to discover expressive possibilities. The music, relentless and shared, introduces a common discipline that demands constant presence:

It's a kind of music that gives you no escape – you can't hide behind it (participant, voice message).

Sound becomes a way to perceive the rule and the necessity of adhering to it collectively.

By trying and trying and trying, you find your own space of expression. If you know the rules, if you accept them, only after that you can allow yourself to break them. It's like

walking into an architectural structure and starting to breathe it (participant, focus group).

Some participants describe how rigidity did not feel like an obstacle, but rather a form of emotional and cognitive support:

I wasn't looking for an interpretative approach. I was actually relieved that everything was so structured, because it calmed me – it gave me this feeling of: okay, *she knows what she's doing*. And that form, inside, allowed me to try a lot of things. In a way, freedom was exactly that – it came as part of a process (participant, focus group).

During the initial stages, marked by uncertainty and the need for orientation, participants often turned to Gloria Dorliguzzo, looking for her gaze and guidance. Her presence functioned as a point of reference and support in learning the score. However, this guidance was intertwined with moments of autonomy and choice:

There was a kind of freedom – I mean, there were moments when Gloria would still give us movement proposals. She'd say: these are the options, which one do you choose? Like the prayer movements, or the hammer ones, or the lines. And I have to say, even when it wasn't total freedom – even when it was just a proposal – they were always really interesting proposals (participant, focus group).

Many participants therefore recognise the value of learning how to “stay within the structure” in order to later inhabit it freely. In this sense, rigidity is not a limitation to endure, but an enabling condition for co-creation. From the artist's perspective as well, choreographic precision opens spaces for interpretive autonomy. Within the constraint of structure, there opens: «a crack you can step into – because you have a task, but how you actually carry it out, that's where your personality is called to come through» (Gloria Dorliguzzo, interview).

The Role of Materials and the Artist's Intentionality

A central element of the residency lies in the materials themselves: hammers, logs, metal sheets, and anvils are not just props, but components that directly shape the practices and the way the experience is lived. In *Dies Irae*, the relationship with materials evolves over time: from unfamiliar and potentially threatening, they become familiar, meaningful tools, eventually taking form as elements of agency. Physical work with hammers, anvils, and

wooden logs does not simply generate technical skills – it reshapes how participants perceive themselves, the group, and the shared practice.

During this first day of the workshop, I think what struck me the most was actually using the hammers [...]. Power is disarming. I think it'll take me a while to hit without fear. I can't wait (participant's diary).

At a certain point, almost towards the end, I felt this really clear sensation – of power, determination, a kind of very strong inner determination, really directed towards the object. I could feel this thing inside me moving so strongly – when I was working with the hammers, or when I had to pick up the metal sheet, or in the moments with the log. It was like this growth of determination, and I carried it with me through all the rest of the work (participant's diary).

In *Dies Irae*, the laboratory takes a form in which aesthetics is rooted in material and embodied interactions, and artistic transformation develops alongside relational transformation.

The idea of making these tools resonate really intrigued me – holding the hammer, doing certain actions. It can be complicated to try to express strength without, you know, actually destroying something. It's not immediate to figure out how to dose your force, to still make a sound and make the action believable (*participant's diary*).

Here, the hammer is not just an unconventional sonic tool, but a threshold element that enables freedom within a rigid structure; it becomes both a medium of self-control and a catalyst for relationality. Its affordances to strike, to break, to produce a (credible) sound – lead participants to negotiate their involvement in the temporary community of the residency, placing them in a tension between power and restraint. The following extract shows how Gloria Dorliguzzo intentionally constructs this condition:

The hammer gives strength, power. You're sounding something that is a weapon. A weapon that needs to be played with a certain force, otherwise it doesn't work. At first, they don't know the weight of the hammer, they don't know what kind of strength or intensity the sound needs. When they gain that awareness, it becomes something else. It really becomes gripping and controlling a weapon (Gloria, interview).

The artist sets the conditions so that the tension between rigor and freedom – mediated by the materials – can generate transformation. In the phases when participants encounter the greatest difficulties, Dorliguzzo adopts an attentive but non-interventionist presence, allowing the group to find its own collective solution. The goal is not only the execution of the performance, but the emergence of a form of self-organisation.

The group really started coming together when they began to experience real difficulties – heavy objects, some people hurting themselves. Movement had to be managed in a way that you wouldn't get injured. So it's in that urgency that the group organises itself,

and in that organisation the group is formed. When these things happen, I let them handle it. I keep an eye on everything, but at a certain point the group's own intelligence shows up. And so – even if these are people who have never worked together and might never see each other again – they start to really feel the need to help one another. And that's when these collaborations open up, which for me are essential (Gloria, interview).

A Methodological Ecosystem: Integrating Digital Tools and Traditional Methods

The integration of materials collected during the residency (the WhatsApp chat, digital diaries) and after it (interviews and focus groups) made it possible to interpret the experience from different yet complementary perspectives. The interaction between digital tools and traditional qualitative practices shaped a complex methodological ecosystem, in which each element activated a specific mode of expression and reflection.

The WhatsApp group, opened by the organisation as an institutional channel, served mainly logistical purposes: coordinating schedules, materials, transport. Only marginally did it host emotional or narrative exchanges. However, as the final presentation approached, messages with a more affective tone began to appear, expressing anticipation, shared tension, and the emotional resonance of the experience. These elements later resurfaced in more articulated form in the diaries, interviews, and focus groups.

The reflective dimension was concentrated in the digital diaries, composed of written texts or voice messages privately sent to the researcher. The diaries functioned as an element of reflexive agency: not merely a form of recording, but a space of embodied self-observation (Bartlett, Milligan, 2015), where participants could name what was happening in their bodies, acknowledge emotions and conflicts, and allow the experience to sediment over time.

I'm realising, even just by answering these questions, that I still need to imagine things – it's as if the experience hasn't fully settled yet (participant, diary).

Voice messages became a significant expressive format: immediate and bodily, they gave shape to emotions that were difficult to translate into writing. Intertwined with diary texts, they expanded participants' expressive possibilities and subjective reworking.

Interviews and focus groups, conducted after the residency, extended reflection into a collective space. Narratives that first emerged in the diaries were revisited, discussed, or transformed through dialogue among participants and with the artists.

From this articulation emerged a recursive movement of contents: diaries and voice messages offered insights that resurfaced and were further developed in focus groups, just as collective dynamics first introduced in the chat reappeared in later conversations. These tools did not operate as separate channels, but rather as partially overlapping spaces. What changed was not only their function, but participants' responses: silent or reticent in one space, very active in another, depending on timing and context.

This configuration expanded possibilities for listening and observation, allowing different temporalities of reflection to emerge: from the immediacy of a voice message, to the delayed and thoughtful elaboration of the diary, to the collective negotiation of the focus group. Participants moved across public and negotiated spaces (chat, focus group) and private and reflective ones (diaries, interviews), contributing to a situated, distributed, and plural narration of the experience.



Fig. 4. Rehearsal moment captured during the residency week for *Dies Irae* at L'Arboreto – Teatro Dimora di Mondaino
Foto: Francesca Giuliani

Discussion

The analysis of *Dies Irae. Concerto per donne e martelli* shows how artistic residencies can be understood as transformative spaces where aesthetic experience intersects with social and relational dynamics. The results reveal that the initial friction – generated by the rigidity of the score and the encounter with materials, here considered as constitutive elements of practice, capable of orienting gestures, shaping possibilities for action, and contributing to the meaning-making of the experience (Reckwitz, 2002; Shove *et al.*, 2012) – gradually became a generative force, enabling openness, trust, and cohesion. This process echoes Bishop's (2012) reflection on the value of friction in participatory art: not as an obstacle to be overcome, but as a constitutive element capable of producing meaning and new forms of community.

The transformation observed involves not only participants but also the artists, who continuously renegotiate their authorial position within an asymmetrical yet co-generative relationship. In line with Kester's perspective (2004), agency is not conceived as absolute autonomy, but as a dialogical capacity that emerges through making, repetition, and shared effort. From this perspective, physical actions – initially experienced as alien or even “traumatic” – become opportunities for empowerment, transformation, and re-signification of the body.

This approach corresponds to what Kester defines as dialogical art: an aesthetic practice grounded in intersubjective communication and mutual listening. In *Dies Irae*, the laboratory adopts precisely this form, generating a performative community where learning is situated, embodied, and relational. Through choreographic and musical practices, the process questions the boundaries between artist and participant, and between artistic and everyday gestures.

Following Carpentier's (2012) participatory continuum, which distinguishes between minimalist and maximalist participation, the experience of *Dies Irae* can be interpreted as leaning towards the maximalist pole: a process that fosters active and transformative engagement of participants. It promotes active and transformative engagement by participants, even as the artist maintains a guiding role. The relationship, while asymmetrical, remains co-generative: the participants' bodily and emotional resonances actively influence the evolution of the work and contribute to shaping its direction.

What emerges is a creative field of negotiation, in which not only participants learn and transform, but artists themselves reconfigure their authorial boundaries. This dynamic

resonates in participants' reflections. One of them, for instance, describes the artists as «very deep roots, really grounded in the earth, supporting us», while the women involved are perceived as part of «the same trunk», engaged in «move the tree» in a collective process of union (participant's diary). This image effectively conveys the tension between support and freedom, asymmetry and co-creation that characterises the laboratory. In this sense, the maximalist pole does not imply absolute freedom, but rather a form of co-authorship in which aesthetic and symbolic decisions are shared and negotiated through the bodily and emotional contributions of the participants.

Over time, the group develops characteristics of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), built through relationships of support, mutual learning, and negotiation of roles and responsibilities. Despite the temporary nature of the residency context, this community cannot be considered merely a means to produce an artwork, but becomes an end in itself—an embodied space of learning and transformative relationality.

The concept of embedded aesthetics (Lithgow, Wall, 2017) allows artistic residencies to be read as spaces in which aesthetics becomes embedded within social, affective, and everyday dynamics. In *Dies Irae*, this perspective is realised through the intentionality of Gloria Dorliguzzo's curatorial stance. The artist not only frames the performative structure but consciously chooses to allow the group to move through the inherent difficulties of the process. This choice, which entails a degree of risk, is for her a fundamental part of the work's social value: difficulty is not an obstacle to be removed, but a generative passage through which solidarity, trust, and transformation can be experienced. In this perspective, the artist operates as a social catalyst and discursive innovator, activating frictions and transformative possibilities that extend beyond strictly aesthetic boundaries.

Conclusions

The analysis of the case study *Dies Irae. Concerto per donne e martelli* highlights the transformative potential of participatory artistic residencies, confirming their role as liminal spaces and as forms of resistance to dominant productive and distributive logics. The experience fostered the active involvement of participants, giving rise to a temporary community of practice grounded in care, solidarity, and mutual learning.

The emergence of relational and embodied forms of agency shows how the aesthetic dimension – far from being secondary – is intertwined with processes of empowerment and with the re-signification of bodies and relationships. In this sense, the impact of AiR programmes cannot be measured solely through the final artistic outcome, but through the transformation generated in the act of making together.

A further contribution concerns the methodological dimension: the integration of digital tools (chat, diaries, voice messages) with traditional qualitative methods proved particularly effective in observing and accompanying the temporal layering of processes, offering a parallel reflective space that extended and amplified the experience beyond the duration of the residency.

The main contribution of this study is therefore twofold: on the one hand, it enriches the debate on artist residencies as cultural and political spaces of transformation; on the other, it offers a methodological reflection on the combined use of digital and traditional tools in qualitative research.

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Double-blind peer-reviewed article