

***Utopia Dystopia: the myth of progress seen from the South*****Curated by Kathryn Weir****09.07 - 08.11.2021****Section Texts****Urban Space**

Francesco Rosi's famous film *Le mani sulla città* (1963) examines property speculation in Naples, the city he called the 'great capital of the south', in the post-war period, revealing the collusion between economic and political power, and those who cut corners to increase profits. The unruliness of the public sphere is evoked more recently in a lateral manner by Giulio Delvè, who with *Carazia* associates the human dimension of family relationships with the authority of law enforcement agencies. In *The Game*, Danilo Correale stages a three-way football match where you win only if you learn to collaborate. The shared, organic fabric of the city is underlined by Cherubino Gambardella who speaks of 'Supernapoli, the unconscious settlement, the superimposed city, the metropolis that moves in and out of the body that hosts it. All to prevent reality from establishing a supremacy over the present, restoring to utopia its right to exist, as a democratic practice in everyday thought'. Participation as a paradigm for the creation of shared urban space remains utopian in the face of the yawning gap between centre and periphery evoked by Domenico Antonio Mancini's *La periferia vi guarda con odio* (The suburbs look at you with hatred). Franco Silvestro similarly exposes a mediated vision of the urban fringe, while Rffaela Mariniello's lightbox image of the roofs of the Quartieri Spagnoli remind us that the centre of Naples has always remained a vital and culturally mixed space.

**Rural Space**

In approaching the rural space, Bianco-Valente defined a line of inquiry when they decided to pose the question to all the inhabitants of the village of Roccagloriosa in the Cilento region: *Cosa manca?* – 'What is missing?' – a question arising from the inexorable flight to the cities by younger generations. Abandoned farmhouses and symbols of rural life are evoked in works by Antonio Biasiucci and Bruna Esposito. In Michele Iodice's *Migrazioni*, the nest alludes to the precarious refuge of non-EU labourers, with a number of whom the artist collaborated in the construction of the work, those who today carry out fundamental agricultural work. The rural south as a crucible for historical, political and economic transformations, but also as the possible matrix of another reality, is underlined in Giulio Delvè's *Viva il brigantaggio*, capturing a recent call to reactivate the resistance of the Unification period. Maria Lai's performance *Legarsi alla montagna* involved the



inhabitants of Ulassai, in the province of Nuoro, in 1981, in reconstructing a relationship with place and the natural world through new forms of ritual. The intertwining of nature and organic urban development is investigated by Eugenio Tibaldi in *Anthropogenic Herbarium*: in drawings similar to botanical plates, maps of Addis Abeba's various neighbourhoods are juxtaposed with introduced plants and bordered with images of informal, unfinished buildings.

In his powerful series of photographs, *Gibellina*, Mimmo Jodice documents the project that, after the 1968 Belice earthquake, involved numerous artists and architects in the reconstruction of the destroyed city of Gibellina: what was conceived with utopian intent appears empty and desolate, with nature taking the upper hand in relation to human aspirations. In these two rooms, the natural world emerges as a set of forces resisting the logic of capital, and therefore not mastered through the sciences intrinsic to it. Mathilde Rosier's *Le massacre du printemps* quotes Stravinsky's ballet, transforming the rite of spring into its massacre at the hands of industrialised agriculture with its intensive, toxic processes. In order to recreate a relationship with the rhythms of the earth, Eugenio Giliberti sees the orchard as a site for long-term artistic research. To create the oxygen-rich air capsules of his *BREATHSCULPTURE*, John DiLeva Halpern lived for ten days in a sealed glass structure containing ten thousand plants, breathing once a minute. Salvatore Emblema investigates the aesthetic properties of natural elements of the Vesuvian territory: lava stone on canvas, natural pigments on trees.

## Peripheral Space

Throughout the post-war period, the habitations of the urban working class were relegated, along with those of newcomers from the countryside, to peripheral areas that had previously been agricultural fields, in a forced exile barely mitigated by the housing promises of INA-Casa modern social housing. At the same time, road and flyover construction was multiplying and community life was considered almost secondary to the road system. It was in this context from the end of the 1960s that figures such as Riccardo Dalisi began to experiment with utopian participative practices involving local communities in multidisciplinary artistic projects. His work with the children of Rione Traiano constituted a relational experience that demonstrated how art and design could have transformative social and political effects. Felice Pignataro's equally strong ethical commitment, born 'to awaken slumbering consciences', began in Secondigliano and then continued in Scampia, finding its greatest expression in collective murals created with local schools and community groups.

## Industrial Space

The former steelworks at Bagnoli are located on a part of the Mediterranean coast recognised since Greek antiquity for its immense beauty, which in the twentieth century became the site of this most toxic industry. From 1910 to 1992, in the 2000 sqm on the bay of Pozzuoli, this story of the mass production of steel elements unfolded its devastating environmental pollution across land and sea, bringing with it, among many other themes, the conflict between health and working conditions, which came to the fore in a different light from 2020, during the Coronavirus pandemic. Important historical works by Mimmo Jodice and Raffaella Mariniello interpret the history of the place, contrasting the toxic paradise of the bay with stark visions of industrial space. *Red rivers* and *Garden of Eden* by Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama link Bagnoli to certain areas of West Africa, one of the sources of raw materials used in the steelworks. Contradictions emerge in an economic system preaching free movement but channeling capital and toxic waste in different directions on north-south axes. The two works are part of a larger project by Mahama, *Parliament of Ghosts*, which explores how the utopian promises of failed technologies and infrastructures of the past can be activated differently in the present.

## Extra-territorial Space

The nation-state in the modern era promised individuals a set of protections pertaining to rights related to work and basic needs. The dynamics of the relationship between North and South tell a different story, one of structural inequality, extraction and liminality. Extrajudicial and frontier spaces create forms of extraterritoriality in which ethical, political and social voids intersect. Many artists interpret these suspended realities, particularly in reference to movements to the north. In the project *Inventory: the Fountains of Za' atari* Margherita Moscardini creates a visual catalogue of the fountains in the inner courtyards of a refugee camp in Jordan, affirmations of intimate and welcoming space. Francesco Arena comments on the drama of illegal immigration with *Orizzonte*, which reconstructs the point of view, from the sea, of the line of land. *Finis Terrae* by Monica Biancardi departs from the invisibility of Kurdistan on geographical maps to pose the problem of stateless peoples. The internal exile of more than a million villagers displaced when their homes were covered by water during the creation of the enormous Three Gorges hydroelectric dam in southern China, is evoked in a surrealist way by Patty Chang and David Kelley in their project *Flotsam Jetsam*, which fantasises about an alternative underwater existence to examine the relationship between landscape, identity and memory. The artistic reflection on belonging and territory is expanded by Kiluanji Kia Henda beyond the Earth, towards new colonies and extra-planetary frontiers, reflecting not only terrestrial colonial relations but also future schemes to privatise space, in the desire to exploit, for example, lithium reserves on Mars.

## Space of the Body

The modern promise of progress in social recognition for women and others discriminated against because of their sexuality or cultural origin becomes the focal point of artists' examinations of how the body interacts publicly and privately. The work of collectives such as Gruppo XX (founded in Naples in 1977, the name referring to female chromosomes), urgently opposed the marginalising manoeuvres of the patriarchal cultural model through performative actions. Tomaso Binga inserts offcuts of a polystyrene whitegoods box as a mechanism for viewing and displaying images objectifying women, while Melita Rotondo tramples on the fiction of constant female benevolence. Subsequent generations of female artists seek ways to experiment with and affirm other relationships to notions of gender. Betty Bee and Rosy Rox explore bodily performance to camera, while Roxy In The Box films Gennaro De Masco performing a moving gender fluid version of *Mater Annunciazione*. Catherine Opie comments on the iconography of the Madonna and Child in a formal portrait of her son on her niece's lap; the evocation of the social institution of the family and its rituals and constraints is at the heart of Romina De Novellis' performance *La Sacra Famiglia*. In Justin Randolph Thompson's film *doan yu tell noone i did it*, Florence city councillor Antonella Bundu performs the moving speech given by the first Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor in Palazzo Vecchio in 1962, condemning nationalism and dehumanisation and underlining the need to restore ethical principles now lost in imperialist cultures.