

Landscapes of care
the emergence of landscapes of care in unstable territories



SOPHIA
SCOPIO EDITIONS

volume 7, issue 1 | publication year: 2022
issn: 2183-8976 [print] 2183-9468 [online]
doi 10.24840/2183-8976_2022-0007_0001_7
homepage: <https://www.up.pt/index.php/sophia>

© SCOPIO EDITIONS

VISUAL ESSAYS

Collision course: Bagnara crumbling without care?

Bruna Di Palma, Mario Ferrara

Abstract

«Collision is the crash, the impact between two bodies in motion» (Treccani, "Collisione"). In the landscape, movement characterises both the evolution of built parts and the mutability of natural parts, and new balances or new imbalances are defined starting from the possibility of recognising stable or unstable lasting arrangements. The intermediate areas between city and nature are the place of contact between the different modes and speeds of transformation of the natural and artificial components of the landscape. The contact between these components can be defined as an encounter or a collision, depending on the greater or lesser level of acceptance or rejection that is produced by the intersection.

The collision is therefore identified as an extreme figure in order to understand the relationship between different phenomena that is difficult to translate, with the same power, into a design theme. «In the passage from analysis to design, it seems that the term collision tends to lose its precision to some extent. Its descriptive power rarely goes beyond the level of metaphorical evocation to become an operational design tool» (Corbellini 2015, p.69).

In Bagnara, a strip of coastline in Castelvoturno, indiscriminate construction has come into collision with the uncontrolled power of the sea. In this coastal landscape of southern Italy between the Volturno river to the south and the Agnena canal to the north, the unstable balance between land and water has created a narrow sandy strip dotted with houses' ruins and inhabited by bathers. The lack of breakwaters leaves the sea currents free to erode the beaches; the presence of houses built illegally on state-owned land put the inner linear city beyond the boundaries of stability. The current landscape of Bagnara consists on the one hand of a sandy shore, with unique characteristics on the Campania coast, which acts as an unstable base for crumbling ruins, and on the other, the water swallows up shreds of buildings that become artificial rocks. The sinuous curves of the sandy and watery nature of Bagnara are juxtaposed with the rigid folds of buildings broken by the slow catastrophe.

A social and aesthetic practice, photography, understood with Olivier Lugon as a documentary art, explores this landscape, becoming tangible evidence of a reality in oblivion that presents a multifaceted and complex pathological dimension. Illuminating, revealing and disseminating the state of health of Bagnara is the only cure currently in place for this landscape. The photos, like a "caress on the world" of this unstable strip of land, provide a therapeutic practice and a poetic vision of the crumbling reality of Bagnara.

Key-words: unstable landscape; waterscape at risk; architectural ruins and nature; documentary art; therapeutic photography

VISUAL ESSAYS

Bruna Di Palma architect and Ph.D., is research fellow in Architectural and Urban Design at the Department of Architecture of the University of Naples Federico II and research contributor at the Institute of Cultural Heritage Sciences of the National Research Council of Italy. Her teaching, research and professional activities focus on design for cultural heritage, public architecture, historic city and landscape at risk, with experience in international context.

Mario Ferrara architect, architectural photographer, master in Photographic representation of architecture and the environment at the La Sapienza University of Rome. PhD in Representation of architecture and the environment, he works in photographic campaigns for research about architecture, landscape and territorial contexts at the Department of Architecture of the Federico II University of Naples. He teaches Photography in public and private school and in national and international workshops.



VISUAL ESSAYS

Many concepts are included within the word "landscape": according to João Nunes it is a dynamic condition that registers a continuous overlapping of signals, induced or spontaneous transformative processes, involuntary and accidental movements, sometimes even collision phenomena.

"Collision is the crash, the impact between two moving bodies" (Trecani, "Collision"). In the landscape, movement and change characterise both the evolution of man-made parts and the mutability of natural parts. These alterations define imbalances, unstable arrangements, more or less lasting encounters. The intermediate areas between city and nature are particular places to observe this phenomenon linked to the contact between the different modes and speeds of transformation of natural and artificial components of the landscape. In the case of particularly catastrophic crashes, the collision between these components can define fractured and wounded soils, disrupted and necrotic spaces, mutilated buildings that define a disrupted landscape, "a suffering subject", according to Roberta Valtorta's definition.

Vulnerability and resistance, fragility and stability, temporariness and permanence, safety and risk are just some of the dual and opposite aspects that characterise landscapes on a collision course. Time plays a special role in these situations: the persistence of a collision condition that cannot be resolved crystallises instability as a fixed condition of a liveable landscape. When the collision is not the consequence of sudden catastrophes such as eruptions, earthquakes or floods, but of processes of slow degeneration of the landscape, the condition to be repaired is not identified as a state of emergency, "is not resolved in a plausible order" (Cavanna 2022, p.10), it takes on the character of an ordinary and perturbing condition to which one's everyday life belongs.

A particular case of vulnerability concerns the condition of coastal territories. The uncertain boundary between land and sea constitutes a specific fringe where different vulnerabilities coexist: erosion and deposition, formal and informal, identity and multiplicity, interscalarity and multiscalarity, resistance and interference, overlapping and repair. The shoreline, in particular, «is a hybrid space between land and sea, between empty and full, between nomadic and sedentary» (Careri 2021, p.62).

On the shoreline of Bagnara, in Castelvolturno, indiscriminate construction has come into collision with the uncontrolled power of the sea. In this coastal landscape in southern Italy, between the Volturno river to the south and the Agnere canal to the north, the unstable balance between land and sea has created a narrow strip of sand dotted with ruins and inhabited by bathers. The lack of breakwaters leaves the sea currents free to erode the beaches; the presence of houses built illegally on state-owned land projects the linear city behind it beyond the boundaries of stability. The current landscape of Bagnara consists on the one hand of a sandy shore, with unique characteristics on the Campania coast, which acts as an unstable base for crumbling ruins, and on the other, the water swallows up shreds of buildings that become artificial rocks.

The sinuous curves of Bagnara's sandy, watery nature are juxtaposed with the rigid folds of buildings broken by the slow catastrophe. The suffering of this disturbed and perturbing landscape is contrasted by the serene attendance of bathers. The people inhabit the shoreline in a paradoxically serene manner and bear witness to the real existence of this surreal landscape, giving Bagnara the status of a theatrical stage on which the scene of a pathological and stable contact between man, land and sea unfolds. In these cases, the perception of safety, which usually represents an essential condition of living, becomes a secondary factor, overtaken by the habit and familiarity of living in an uncertain landscape that, for the younger segments of the population, also represents the only form of landscape known and rooted in memory.

In this ruined landscape of Bagnara, one can trace with the aesthetic condition of ruin porn, reflecting on the condition of permanence of ruins in everyday landscapes that acquire a profound figurative force as a representation of a landscape in decline that nevertheless holds a hidden promise of redemption, "the possibility of transforming inhabitants from spectators into citizens" (McLain, 2016, p.10).

Reversing the logic of linear planning processes through which this promise could be realised, for landscapes such as Bagnara's, the time of waiting and suspension define a precise historical period, a long phase of involution, in which the intersection between nature and artifice defines permanent collision frameworks. As it is evident in this case, collision is thus identified as an enigmatic figure, a concept useful for defining a complex relationship between different phenomena. Before becoming a field of design experimentation, it finds in documentary photographic representation a possible vehicle for raising awareness, a descriptive operation that works on the potential of the gaze to focus attention, an aestheticising attention, on those landscapes that has a discontinuous and problematic identity, an identity that is difficult to define.

The photographic gaze dedicated to Bagnara works in the sense just described and follows the wake of historical international initiatives that have interpreted photography as the "author's documentation" of "secondary" and vulnerable landscapes. The Mission Photographique de la DATAR commissioned to almost thirty photographers by the French state¹, for example, aimed at documenting the French landscape of the 1980s restoring to it that beauty and formal dignity

¹ The photographic mission of DATAR (Délégation interministérielle à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Attractivité Régionale) is a public commission of the French Interministerial Committee for Regional Planning (CIAT) initiated in 1984 and entrusted with twenty-eight photographers, French and foreigners, including Doisneau, Koudelka, Basilico, Baltz, Hers, Fastenaekens, Garnell, Drahos, Trulsch, Depardon, with the aim of representing the French landscape of the 1980s. The mission became an opportunity through which the chosen photographers could free themselves from the need for an illustrative look at the urban and natural landscape and turn their research towards a more aesthetic or documentary activity. The photographers travelled all over France to create a collection of 2,000 images that is currently kept at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Before the photographers' investigation ended, some of the work was exhibited in the exhibition 'La Mission Photographique de la DATAR. Travaux en cours 1984/1985' held at the Palais de Tokyo in 1985.

VISUAL ESSAYS

of which economic development has robbed it. In addition, the exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man altered Landscapes* curated by William Jenkins with photographs by Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz, among others, emphasised the tension between the traditional beauty of the American land of the 1970s and the results of human presence within it².

A social and aesthetic practice, the photography, intended with Olivier Ligon as documentary art, explores this landscape, becoming tangible evidence of a reality in oblivion that presents a multifaceted and complex pathological dimension. The photo series, the inseparable concatenation of frames chosen to represent this coastal collision, «can become the most powerful weapon and at the same time the most tender lyrical note» (Moholy-Nagy 1975, p.131). Illuminating, recording and disseminating the state of health of Bagnara is the only therapy currently in place for this landscape. Echoing Gianni Celati's metaphor from an interview with Luigi Ghirri, these photos, like a "caress on the world", on this unstable strip of land, provide a therapeutic practice and a poetic vision of this crumbling shoreline reality in which «there are still adventures to be experienced» (Careri 2021, p.62).

Bibliography

Careri, Francesco, "Bagnasciuga urbani, oltre le città sedentarie." In *40 parole per la cura della città. Lessico dei paesaggi della salute* edited by Alessandra Criconia, Isotta Cortesi, Anna Giovannelli, 59–63. Macerata: Quodlibet, 2021.

Cavanna, Pierangelo, "Luoghi comuni." In Mario Ferrara. *Campagna periurbana. Tra Napoli e Caserta*, 10–11. Siracusa: LetteraVenticidue Edizioni, 2022.

"Collisione," Treccani, accessed December 26, 2021, <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/collisione/>

Costantini, Paolo and Giovanni Chiaromonte, eds. *Luigi Ghirri. Niente di antico sotto il sole. Scritti e immagini per un'autobiografia*. Torino: SEI, 1997.

McLain, Clutter, "Notes on Ruin Porn." *Avery Review* no. 18 (October 2016), <http://averyreview.com/issues/18/notes-on-ruin-porn>.

Ligon, Olivier. *Lo stile documentario in fotografia. Da August Sander a Walker Evans (1920–1945)*. Milano: Electa, 2008.

Nunes, João. "Landscape. Architecture." *AREA*, no. 127 (March/April 2013): 18–25.

Rondolino, Giovanni. *Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Pittura fotografia film*. Torino: Martano 1975.

Authors' work

The work is the result of research carried out jointly by the two authors, but the photos are by Mario Ferrara, while the text is by Bruna Di Palma.

² 'New Topographics. Photographs of a man-altered landscape' was conceived by William Jenkins and hosted in the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House (Rochester, New York) between 1975 and 1976. Jenkins involved ten photographers (eight North Americans and two Europeans), Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, Henry Wessel Jr. and Bernd and Hilla Becher, with the aim of documenting the anthropised American landscape, the encroachment of human beings, nature as a no longer pristine power.











