

The Redevelopment of the Working Class Neighborhoods through Artistic Creativity: The case of Jorit Agoch

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Abstract—Starting from the second half of XIX century until the half of the twentieth, the areas adjacent to the city of Naples, once cultivated and exploited as agricultural basins, experienced a gradual form of urbanization. The recovery of these areas provided for targeted project for the construction of new centres of expansion so as to improve the sanitary conditions of a city centre extremely overcrowded. It was about an economic and social housing that it gave up artistic ambitions and totally changed the urban planning of these old agricultural areas. Although over time several urban planning regulations have been drawn up, the suburbs have experienced an expansion careless and uncontrolled building, especially from World war II and after the earthquake of 1980. Forgotten by public administration, today these areas appears degraded and marginalized.

Jorit Agoch's artistic creativity and work aim to redeem the dormitory suburbs of Naples. The Italian-Netherlander artist, with a complex formation behind, now chooses to intervene in these areas with the modern means of graffiti. This popular technique is devoted to a complex kind, historically destined for more elevated social classes: the portrait. With his hyper-realistic work of great visual impact, Jorit prefers the representation of characters dear to Neapolitan people, taken from the sacred and the profane world, Saint Gennaro and Diego Armando Maradona are a clear example. Characterized by a great expressive charge and bright colors, his work, can so to dignify Spartan ugly suburbs buildings in which the artist intervenes. The project is clear: if isn't possible (for lack of funds and interest) to rationalize the urban fabric and/or realize architecturally dignified buildings, art intervenes on environment and requalify it.

The theme of social housing in Naples appeared since the second half of XIX century as a priority to meet the life needs of the lower class, born in concurrent with the Restructuring and Expansion Plan of 1885 expected for the historic centre of Naples which anticipated the decongestion of population towards the eastern part of the city, eliminating for this reason the chronic overcrowding of the city centre and proliferation of dilapidated housing. At the beginning of the XX century, while in the industrial area, located to the east of the city, they continued the work of Redevelopment, at the same time it was thought to planning economic and public housing, by now

provided by the low Luzzatti, assigning the task to the nascent Autonomo Case Popolari Institute.

On this path, starting from 1910 they proceeded to the realization of cheap and popular houses both to the east, with the district of Poggioreale, considered more a hunting residence than a possible urban development area, in part marshy and agricultural, Luzzatti and Arenaccia, both to the west with the Duca d'Aosta neighborhood and Fuorigrotta at that time a waste land and a sleazy place. The dream years of a great Naples are those which mark the rise of the fascist regime, and the interventions were almost based on the aesthetic care of the buildings and "urban decorum", so that, after the establishment of the High Commissioner, they interested mainly, central area, public works and strengthening of the harbor area with the realization of the harbor station, promoting between 1925 and 1927 the annexation of autonomous municipalities of Barra, Ponticelli, San Giovanni a Teduccio, San Pietro a Patierno, Secondigliano, Chiaiano, Soccavo and Pianura.

That is the entire territorial belt around the city, thus becoming centres of attraction for the growth of the city. The period between the two wars and immediately after left Naples mortified by physical and social-economic degradation levels. In the post-war years, in fact, interventions were planned aimed at the realization of new popular district placed on the outskirts of the historical city, also affecting surrounding municipalities as for example the area between Barra and San Giorgio a Cremano and later also the residential blocks of Ponticelli and Capodichino. The Economical and public housing of these years represents in the history of Neapolitan planning on large scale design of new neighborhoods, creating so a wild and uncontrolled expansion, which goes to intersect with the question of some old areas of the city, which present a scenario, as old as degraded at least until last two decades of twentieth century, when after the earthquake 1980 were provided special programs of housing construction after the earthquake. Many were the scholars and the protagonists who took part in the integration of peripheral rings of Naples with

The urban centre. Among the current prominent personalities, we remember Jorit Agoch, a young artist born from a Dutch mother and an Italian father, in the suburb north of Naples, Quarto.

Since he was thirteen he painted on the walls of his city with paint spray and, when he grew up, to improve his technique attended Academy of Fine Arts in Naples. In addition to academic study, fundamental for his training and the development of his art, are trips to Africa and United States of America, he gets in touch with tribal culture, reinforcing the belief that despite differences of race, sex, religion and social class, all human beings belong to a unique "community".

In the U.S.A, however, he has the opportunity to deepen the study of the origins and history of his favourite technique, the graffitiism. This language, in fact, born in the sixties in Philadelphia; in the seventies, spread in New York and in the eighties knew its moment of maximum development, taking shape as a social phenomenon that allowed to give voice to the hardships of the weakest people, young people and ethnic minority (among the main protagonists of this movement we find Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring). In U.S.A Jorit Agoch realizes five graffiti. On his return from abroad, he exhibited twenty-five large paintings in Italy, inspired by African culture, with the intent to donate the proceeds to the construction of a maternity ward of a hospital near Dar es Salam. His works attracted the public's attention and critics and Jorit is requested to exhibit in some of the most important Italian museums[5] and participate in important events in the outline of contemporary art[6].

But its production remains linked to the street art. He chose to intervene in the most popular poor areas and on degraded buildings. Subject of his works is the man, famous and not Jorit opts for the genre portrait, historically considered a typically high genre tied to bourgeois and aristocratic patrons. The artist reinterprets it adapting it to its needs and realizes it with the technique dear to him, the graffiti. A popular technique from the world of the street meets with the more traditional genres of paintings, creating visual high-impact results. For his portraits, Jorit chooses a complex hyper-realism, convinced that art should serve to inquire, therefore, to know the reality through the small details. At the same time the artist makes us understand that beyond the details that differ, all men are equal, all belonging to a single human tribe: hence the constant presence of red stripes on the cheek of the portrayed faces (recall to the African culture by him known and loved).

Careful study of the characters reminds us of the Caravaggio's naturalism, from which the artist himself often draws inspiration. The net cuts of light comes from him and also the idea of using real models for religious figures: thus the Saint Gennaro was born in Forcella, a poor and disreputable neighborhood in the centre of Naples. For his graffiti almost fifteen meters high, covering the wall of a tenement in poor conditions, Jorit is inspired by the Fig. of a close worker friend

of thirteen-five. Other times the artist uses imaginary patterns: as with the girl depicted in Ponticelli, a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Naples. Here the graffiti also take on social meaning because he was born not far from a Roman camp destroyed by fire. The work created within project that brings together local and national organizations, aims to emphasize the equality and equal opportunity to all children.

Other times Jorit portrays extremely familiar faces dear to the Neapolitans: just think of the portrait of Diego Armando Maradona in San Giovanni a Teduccio and of actor Massimo Troisi in San Giorgio a Cremano.

The subjects change but not the style, nor the areas where Jorit thinks of acting. They are the most degraded places in the city, the poorest, mostly the suburbs. It's the background that he has known since he was a child, being himself born and grown up in a peripheral municipality. As a suburban boy, Jorit knows very well that the zones distant from the centre of Naples are abandoned to their fate by an administration that can't afford new architectural and urbanist interventions. Thus was born the idea of putting his art at the service of the community. The art requalified the urban decay and at the same time creates artificial new induced activities, persuading tourists to reach areas that normally are cut off from the cultural circuits. The model that inspired once more is American, using the Brooklyn district example. Historically considered a place to be avoided, it has become, in the recent years, very trendy; the works of street artists has transformed it into an open air museum, visited daily by huge touristic flows. An ambitious project to Jorit which, however, could bring results. To do well and hope is the interest shown not only by citizens but especially the institutions that have made possible the realization of the graffiti in Forcella and in San Giovanni a Teduccio. We can't rule out that a new institutional client plans and puts into action systematic urban redevelopment through this art form.



Fig. 1: Forcella, Naples (before Agoch's work), Italy



Fig. 2: Jorit Agoch, *San Gennaro*, Forcella, Naples, Italy



Fig. 3: Jorit Agoch, *Ael*, Ponticelli, Naples, Italy



Fig. 4: Jorit Agoch, *Diego Armando Maradona*, San Giovanni a Teduccio, Naples, Italy



Fig. 5: Jorit Agoch, *Massimo Troisi*, San Giorgio a Cremano, Naples, Italy

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