

CHAPTER 12

JOYOUS POST-POLITICS

Street Art and the Pursuit of Consensus after the Morandi Bridge Collapse

Emanuela Guano



INTRODUCTION

On 14 August 2018, a section of the Morandi highway bridge crumbled, killing forty-three people and causing six hundred residents to lose their homes in one of Genoa's postindustrial outskirts. Almost entirely isolated by the collapse, Certosa bore much of the brunt.¹ Initially, Certosini grieved the loss of lives and property; soon enough, however, they also found themselves struggling with other challenges: the noise and the pollution caused by the demolition, the neighbourhood's inaccessibility and its rapid decline.² On the municipality's website, recently elected Marco Bucci – the first conservative mayor since 1975 – seized the opportunity to lash out at previous left-of-centre administrations and their alliance with Genoa's industrialists: 'The tragedy of the Morandi [bridge] has highlighted the precariousness of life in the . . . Valpolcevera, which in the past [was] affected by a senseless industrialization only to be abandoned by those very same industries that had colonized its territory, distorting its urbanistic layout' (Comune di Genova n.d.). Widely advertising each of his initiatives, he secured reimbursements for those residents who had been expropriated from their homes and promised to rebuild the bridge at record speed.³ Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, during the summer of 2019 Bucci's team also inaugurated the 'On the Wall' project, which led to the creation of murals on Certosa's walls by artists of national and international renown. The theme of the project was 'Joy'.



Figure 12.1. Certosa's Cupid and Psyche. © Emanuela Guano.

Whether they display the ornate accoutrements of power or the humbler graffiti that challenge it, the walls of Italian cities have long been a public sphere in their own right. Yet at times the images populating Italy's urban public realm may subvert implicit norms. Magnus Course (this volume) shows how some of the Catholic saints painted on Naples's façades eschew religious concerns to advocate for the oppressed; along these lines, I suggest that the traditionally resistive genre of murals can become a tool in the attempt to feign revitalization and anesthetize political consciousness. Certosa's street art, I argue, is a case in point.

Interpreted with considerable license, the 'joy' painted on Certosa's walls has the semblance of a large reproduction of Antonio Canova's statue of Cupid and Psyche. 'This is SITE SPECIFIC', screams the lettering.



Figure 12.2. Free to get lost. © Emanuela Guano.

The murals' joy also looks like an oversize couple eloping in a tiny convertible, featuring the caption 'FREE TO GET LOST', a large vertical tag; and a realistic portrait of film character Fantozzi, played by Genoese actor Paolo Villaggio. Painted on opposite buildings, two gigantic children communicate through tin cans connected by power cables; stylized statues,

rosettes and large windows in red and blue provide a flat geometrical version of a Renaissance façade. In December 2019, I took a sightseeing trip to the Certosa murals under the guidance of Anna Rita, a former resident. Like many other Certosini, Anna Rita too had her home expropriated after the disaster. Braving the cold wind and the rain, Anna Rita and I proceeded from mural to mural till we reached the end of a narrow side street; there, framed by two rows of painted walls, the terrace at the end of the cul-de-sac opened like theatre stalls onto the view of the new bridge under construction. If the cul-de-sac provided the ideal location from which to observe Mayor Bucci's flagship project, the murals on either side of the street framed the viewer's gaze, forcing it to rest on the bridge's construction site. I gasped in surprise: 'This is a gigantic commercial for Mayor Bucci!', I blurted out. Anna Rita nodded and burst into laughter; 'yes, it is', she replied.

Drawing on ethnographic research conducted between 2019 and 2022,⁴ this chapter explores the post-political underpinnings of Certosa's street art. These murals, I suggest, are an attempt to enact a type of aesthetic governance (Grama 2019; Slaby and Bens 2019) that seeks to foreclose political antagonism; it does so, I surmise, through a distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2010: 24–25), striving to shape the residents' sensuous, affective and cognitive experience of their neighbourhood. Certosa's murals are but a sham covering a neglect that continues unabated; as such, they fail to sway an aesthetic community organized around the sensuous and affective perception of its own disenfranchisement. Rather than promoting an allegiance between Genoa's conservative administration and Certosini, the attempt to use street art to negate Certosa's predicament and placate its residents' anger fails to disavow their memory of the disaster and its roots in long-standing class inequalities. As murals sponsored by the municipality continue to celebrate a tone-deaf 'joy', residents are increasingly questioning the effectiveness of Certosa's post-political street art in ameliorating a ruined neighbourhood.

URBAN SPECTACLE AND THE PURSUIT OF CONSENSUS

Post-politics is characterized by a managerial approach to government that, tailored to market requirements, is devoid of a proper (i.e. antagonistic) political dimension (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014; Mouffe 2005; Swyngedouw 2018; Žižek 2002). Yet proper politics, in Genoa, has lost much of its appeal. Since 1975, Genoese voters have consistently elected mayors from the centre-left of Italy's political spectrum; however, the city's low-income peripheries have rarely benefitted from an increasingly neoliberalized left that has cozied up to developers and corporate capital (Guano



Figure 12.3. Joy. © Emanuela Guano.

2020). The disappointment was such that, in 2017, voters from several of Genoa's postindustrial peripheries (though not Certosa) aligned with the city's conservative bourgeoisie in electing right-wing mayoral candidate Marco Bucci. Bucci is a member of Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, and his administrative style echoed Berlusconi's habit of turning politics into 'glossy

and sound-bitable nuggets' (Molé Liston 2020: 144); his use of disasters to showcase his own effectiveness (Bock 2022: 44); and his technocratic appreciation for experts (Mudde 2004).

It is by relying on the kind of technocratic expertise that claims to be above politics that Bucci vowed to have the Morandi bridge rebuilt in two years – and so he did, inaugurating the new San Giorgio bridge on 3 August 2020. The rapidity with which the crumbling bridge was demolished and the new one was erected earned Bucci's managerial style the sobriquet of *modello Genova*, the Genoa model. Casting him as an exception in a country where bureaucracies are known to stifle even the most essential projects, the local media drew on Bucci's professional experience in the US to dub him *sindaco americano*: a mayor whose 'Americanness' denoted corporate efficiency and a disregard for Italy's administrative tardiness. Yet Bucci was not just adept at implementing a technocratic style; following Berlusconi's example, he also excelled at modulating political affect through spectacle and theatrics (Ginsborg 2004; Piccardo 2020). Consistent with populism and its appeal to gut feelings (Mudde 2004; Heywood, Liston, Cammelli, this volume), his goal was to establish an affective allegiance between Genoa's administration and the residents of the city's low-income neighbourhoods. The space of the city provided him with an ideal stage for this strategy.

Space, as Lefebvre (1991: 32) suggested, is 'a locus, a medium, and a tool' for the generation of consensus; the power to shape a cityscape can establish 'certain relationships between people in particular places' (ibid.: 56). More specifically, spatial arrangements of urban materialities reappropriate the sensible by assigning what is to be sensed to where it is to be sensed (Rancière 2010: 24–25). Hence, the type of aesthetic experience that this chapter tackles is not – or not just – an abstract contemplation of beauty and art, but rather a process of organizing and perceiving reality that engages the physical senses to mobilize both affective and cognitive processes (Larkin 2013; Stoller 1976; Welsch 1998). If sensing is equivalent to making sense (Howes 2015), exercising control over what is 'available to the senses when making judgements' (Dikeç 2015: 30) means being able to intervene on somebody's perception and conceptualization of the world, as well as of their place in it (Slaby and Von Scheve 2019: 349). The goal of this potentially stultifying process may be the establishment of a passive spectatorship keen to accept whatever is impressed upon its senses (Rancière 2009: 12; see also Debord 1994). Along these lines, in what follows I argue that, for Mayor Bucci, the collapse of the Morandi bridge and its reconstruction presented the opportunity for an aestheticization of the built environment meant to foster consensus.

Disaster sites often become stages for a political theatricality that, in turn, is a tool for the modulation of affect (Dickie and Foot 2002: 12; Massumi

2002: 226); the grand inaugurations of infrastructures, too, are frequently shrouded in propaganda (Coleman 2014; Larkin 2013). The demolition of the Morandi bridge remnants provided a preliminary glimpse into not just the local, but also the national administration's taste for spectacle. Following an intense media campaign, on 28 June 2019 the remainder of the Morandi bridge was exploded in front of television and online audiences. Attended by local and national party and government representatives, the spectacular event was labelled a *demolizione controllata*: a controlled demolition through which politicians and technocrats would stage their attempt to regain control over a situation that had compromised their credibility.⁵ The subsequent inauguration of the new San Giorgio bridge in 2020 was initially expected to be a glitzy event replete with celebrities and fanfare. Yet the promise of pomp failed to impress neighbourhood residents, and it also offended the families of the victims; eventually, the Italian government agreed to tone down the celebrations. The plans for the event were scaled down; however, the new bridge would still be lit with the Italian flag as politicians crossed it to the tune of a symphony. In the meantime, the *frecce tricolori* air force jets would draw the Italian flag in the sky. By parading patriotism, the event sought to offer redemption to the very same political class that, colluding with the Autostrade per l'Italia corporation managing Italy's highways, had allowed the Morandi bridge to deteriorate and collapse in the first place.

Amid the strife over the inauguration, Bucci's focus remained firmly on his constituency: the Genoese who had elected him, and those who had not but whom he may eventually win over. His goal was also to promote the *modello Genova* both locally and internationally. In his own words, '[the building of the new bridge] has been an opportunity to end up on the international radar screen that we need to utilize, because it gives the city visibility' (in Barbieri 2019: 118). In line with his attempt to appeal to local and global publics, Bucci awarded the commission for the design of the new bridge to Renzo Piano, a Genoese architect of international renown whose oratory skills tug at the hearts of his audiences (Guano 2019).⁶ At the time of writing in 2022, Bucci's plans for the area of the disaster also entail the creation of a memorial park (Parco del Polcevera) that, located in the area of the collapse, will commemorate the victims even as it revitalizes this postindustrial area.⁷ As the municipality's website claims, 'it is mandatory to pay new attention to the valley; beauty and art are a compensation that is symbolic aside from urbanistic' (Comune di Genova n.d.). This notion is likely to resonate with Genoese publics, in that it is through 'beauty and art' that, at the end of the twentieth century, rapidly declining postindustrial Genoa was transformed into a destination of cultural tourism (Guano 2017). Yet only this city's bourgeois downtown benefitted from this process; precious

little change took place in its low-income peripheries. The ‘beauty and art’ that Genoa’s municipality is now promising as the tool of Certosa’s revitalization entail the creation of murals on the walls of several of its apartment complexes. Until the collapse, however, beauty and art had hardly been a consideration in how Genoese administrations managed this area.

CERTOSA’S RUINATION

Stemming from an imperial ‘refusal to take notice’ (Stoler 2009: 256), ruination is a ‘corrosive process’ that originates in the predatory practices of capitalism (Stoler 2008: 194). Capitalism reduces workers’ needs ‘to the paltriest minimum necessary to maintain [their] physical existence’ (Marx 1975: 360 in Eagleton 1990: 200); it does so, I suggest, by establishing a ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière 2010: 24–25) whereby what is to be sensed in workers’ neighbourhoods is exclusively industrial utilitarianism. Workers, in this perceptual economy, are only entitled to a “bare life” of servility’ (Holston 2009: 246) whereby their needs for safety and essential services are subordinated to the requirements of capital accumulation. During the industrial era, working-class outskirts in much of Europe had to accommodate cheap housing, support the productive process and enable the mobilization of goods even as they hosted cumbersome infrastructures. This distribution of the sensible assigned sensuous pleasures to wealthy neighbourhoods while dispensing utilitarian rationality – and little comfort – to working-class areas (Lefebvre and Enders 1978). By the end of the twentieth century, even the mild improvements in the living conditions of Western working classes began to be eroded by a deindustrialization and a deregulation that, once again, favoured the wealthy over the poor (Harvey 2007); these processes exacerbated urban inequalities, fostering a simmering resentment that occasionally erupts into anger (Holston 2009; Dikeç 2017).

This worsening of living conditions has been Certosa’s fate, too. In the twentieth century, while Genoa’s bourgeois downtown and its genteel eastern seaside neighbourhoods enjoyed an abundance of amenities as well as the beauty of carefully staged built and natural environments, its peripheries to the north and the west of the city were subjected to the utilitarian urbanism of industrialization – one that juxtaposed a proliferation of factories, infrastructures and low-income housing with a dearth of services such as schools and clinics. As an ancient village that had developed around a Carthusian monastery, in 1926 Certosa was incorporated into Genoa’s industrial outskirts. For much of the industrial era, Certosa and the surrounding Valpolcevera valley hosted factories and workers’ homes. Polluted, congested and devoid of basic services, Certosa was reduced to a state of infrastructural

servitude vis-à-vis the city as it was forced to host, among other things, two toxic waste dumps, a busy railway junction and a waste recycling facility. In the 1960s, the construction of the Morandi highway bridge right at the border between Certosa and Sampierdarena added an additional strain. The bridge was a cumbersome presence hovering above – and in some cases leaning upon – Via Porro's low-income housing; it brought noise and pollution directly into people's homes, occasionally releasing vehicular debris on the streets beneath it. When Italy's highway system was privatized in 1999, the maintenance work on the bridge was drastically reduced. By the early 2000s, this infrastructure began showing a deterioration caused by the increased transit and the action of the elements. The intimacy that residents had developed with the bridge ended abruptly when, on the morning of 14 August 2018, a segment of the Morandi bridge collapsed, killing forty-three motorists and causing six hundred residents to lose their homes. Even though none of the victims were from Certosa, residents grieved at the sight of the bodies being retrieved from the rubble. Shock waves rattled the city and the country, but it was in Certosa that the magnitude of the disaster was to be felt for some time to come.

For days, those who had lost their homes to the wobbly remnant of the bridge waited in the street for a brief chance to go back to their apartments and collect a few essential things. Eventually, some of them received housing from the municipality; others, instead, obtained a lump sum and bought new homes. Several apartment complexes were demolished; as they vanished, they took with them the belongings and the memories of those who had lived there. A few of the evacuees were allowed to return to their apartments; however, soon enough they came to regret what they had regarded as their good fortune. For the following two years, these residents had to put up with the fine dust and the asbestos released by the demolition of the Morandi bridge, as well as the traffic and the noise caused by the new construction site. Shortly after the inauguration, a spray-painted white sheet appeared in the middle of the neighbourhood. Hanging from a local overpass, it screamed 'MA QUALE MODELLO GENOVA? LA STRAGE È DI STATO' – 'Forget about the Genoa model. This is a state massacre.' This resentment had been long brewing. As many of my informants kept reminding me, it was under the state's watch that the Autostrade corporation had been skimping on the bridge's maintenance, thus causing the collapse. Knowing that, upon resigning, the Autostrade CEO had received a golden parachute exacerbated the collective upset. 'Three days after the disaster I was still waiting in the street for a chance to get back into my home and a black car came by. It was the Autostrade CEO! People had died and we had lost our homes, but there he was, sitting in his nice car. I recognized him and started yelling "MURDERER!"' These were the words of a 60-year-old

educator, a mild-mannered woman whose surprisingly explosive anger epitomized a common sentiment in Certosa and beyond.

FROM POLITICS TO ANAESTHETICS

In the twentieth century, murals often channelled grievances about social inequities; gracing mostly the walls of low-income neighbourhoods, they generally expressed the dissent of the subaltern (Ortiz-Loyola and Díaz-Garayúa 2019; Sieber, Cordeiro and Ferro 2012). However, in the twenty-first century the emergence of a global visitability economy (Dicks 2004) brought about a profound transformation in the role of murals. As a cheap strategy meant to inscribe an enjoyable 'streetness' into low-income and often blighted neighbourhoods (Andron 2018; see also Evans 2016), street art has become yet another way of shaping urban ambiances meant to attract young, creative and above all moneyed publics (Campos and Barbio 2021; Guinard and Margier 2017; Pavoni 2019; Salomone 2018; Schacter 2014). This kind of street art is frequently characterized by its failure to assimilate with its contexts (Pavoni 2019: 72). The disconnect is evident in Certosa, too: instead of being volunteered by local artists who know the neighbourhood, its murals came into being through a collaboration between Genoa's administration and an NGO that was overseeing the beautification of the highway pillars in the city's revitalized waterfront.⁸ Mayor Bucci's Cultural Manager, a film-maker by trade, invited this NGO to expand its street art project to Certosa.

In line with neoliberal tenets on government spending, the project was to be sponsored by local businesses and, whenever possible, supported by volunteer work: 'the murals did not cost us a penny', the Cultural Manager proudly informed me during our interview. He then added that, in deciding that the theme of the murals was to be 'Joy', his intention was to avoid any political entanglement. 'Even though this *is* a political operation, I didn't want any political provocation. Usually murals are critical, at times even violent, and they always have a social message; nobody ever thinks of working with positive elements', he told me. Hinting at the kind of aesthetic control over urban space that is seemingly required in the interest of social order (Molnár 2017: 386), he also added that his intention was 'to impart a positive impetus to the neighbourhood'. Yet the Cultural Manager worried about the residents' possible reactions to an intervention in what he defined as a 'blighted and highly sensitive area'. After all, he informed me, in neighbouring Sampierdarena 'a television crew and a group of politicians were recently pelted with stones'. This concern steered the administration towards a top-down use of street art as a traditionally resistive artistic genre. Once stripped

of its resistive potential, the ‘On the Wall’ mural project would use ‘Joy’ to harness local affective energies and soothe the community’s anger. First the Cultural Manager enacted what he defined as a ‘capillary intervention’ meant to inform the citizenry. This entailed putting flyers in residents’ mailboxes and approaching local priests, administrators and small business owners’ associations; the NGO also posted announcements on Facebook to discuss the project in its semi-public forums. The next step was to obtain approval from the residents of the buildings they were targeting. Having achieved these goals, the project was labelled as *partecipato*, that is, inclusive of residents’ participation. None of the latter, however, had a say in what was going to be painted on their walls.

Writing about the shopping malls, the theme parks and the ‘tourist bubbles’ that characterize modern and contemporary cities, Susan Buck Morss (1992: 22) argued that the goal of these visual displays is, in fact, the ‘manipulation of the [onlookers’] synaesthetic system by controlling environmental stimuli’. As phantasmagorias whose role is to bombard the eyes ‘with fragmentary impressions’, so that they may ‘see too much – and register nothing’ (ibid.: 19), these displays strive to provide that ‘simultaneity of overstimulation and numbness’ that, for Buck Morss, is ‘characteristic of the new synaesthetic organization as *anaesthetics*’ (ibid.). Along these lines, I suggest that, in attempting to blunt affective reactions through their ‘compensatory reality’ (ibid.), Certosa’s murals act as a top-down prescription against an anger that, in its quest for culprits, may awaken political antagonism. In so doing, Certosa’s murals seek to enact a ‘stultifying logic’ (Ranci re 2009: 49) meant to seduce their spectators into trading in their upset for a joy that glosses over inequities.

OF WHEAT BUNDLES AND HUMMINGBIRDS

In the fall of 2020, a new mural was planned for the fa ade facing a neighbourhood association. Upon finding out that the mural was supposed to feature a blonde girl holding a wheat bundle, activist Enrico became enraged: ‘the city councillor seems to have forgotten that blonde girls holding bundles were a popular theme in Fascist propaganda; they have the gall to do this in Certosa, a neighbourhood where every single street is named after a partisan! My father, too, was a partisan, and this mural offended me deeply.’ After a battle with the administration, Enrico eventually managed to have the blonde girl turned into an old farmer; the wheat bundle stayed, though.

This compromise was a meagre consolation. Enrico’s association had requested that at least one of the new murals acknowledge the working-class



Figure 12.4. Farmer with wheat bundle. © Emanuela Guano.

history of the neighbourhood; ‘you are a sad bunch’, a conservative city administrator replied, turning a deaf ear on this petition. Weeks later, a famous muralist from Brazil decorated a Certosa façade with two giant hummingbirds, the likes of which have never been seen in Italy.

As it undergoes a process of ‘commodification, co-optation, artification, and institutionalization’ (Campos and Barbio 2021: 121) that is meant to serve merely economic purposes, neoliberal street art often remains ‘perfectly numb to the social realities of its setting, treating public space like a blank canvas, rather than a site already loaded with cultural, historical and personal significance’ (Schacter 2015). Following this global template, Certosa’s street art is driven not by the relevance of its themes to Certosa’s residents but rather by the reputation of individual artists; it thus pursues an aura that, as Walter Benjamin (1969: 5) suggested, is a function of the distance from its context. The NGO chose Certosa’s muralists on the basis of their notoriety, picking them from among artists of national and international renown; in so doing, it also excluded local artists from the project. Along with the abstraction of the proposed theme (‘Joy’) and the administration’s



Figure 12.5. Bang's mural against the backdrop of the new bridge.
© Emanuela Guano.

explicitly post-political intent, these selection criteria contributed to the disconnect between the muralists' work and the neighbourhood.

While visually striking, many of the gigantic tags, the geometrical figures and the naturalistic images that are painted on Certosa's façades may as well be anywhere else in the world. Indeed, some of the artists tried to reduce this distance. If, for example, Bang portrayed a few of the residents he had met during his stay, others painted images that, in their eyes, represented Genoese-ness at large. Rost and Loste, for instance, produced a gigantic portrait of Fantozzi, the popular film character played by Genoese actor Paolo Villaggio; the inspiration for Cactus's and Maria's mural, instead, came from a song by Genoa's famous singer and songwriter Fabrizio De André.

Neither Villaggio nor De André ever lived in Certosa, though. Hence, even as they nod to 'Genoese culture', these murals are also the product of a gaze from outside – one that does not focus on Certosa per se but rather on Genoa as a city whose inequalities and divisions become invisible from afar.⁹

Soon after the 2019 street art festival, the murals' disconnect from residents' lives caused several of my informants to lose interest. Not only were they indifferent to the themes of the murals, but their long-standing disposition towards the sensuous, affective and cognitive perception of local



Figure 12.6. Mural inspired by a Fabrizio De André song. © Emanuela Guano.

inequalities generally overwhelmed the impressions generated by the street art. Indeed, some of the residents expressed appreciation. ‘It’s nice to have some colour!’ a middle-aged woman told me. Several, however, qualified their approval by pointing to what they regard as Certosa’s more pressing needs: in the words of a resident in her sixties, the murals are ‘*belli* [nice]’,

though ‘it would have been better if [the administration] had spent that money on restoring the façades instead’. A local migrant activist – a girl in her twenties – echoed, ‘I like the murals, but it would have been better if they had cleaned up the small park and had painted the neighbourhood’s façades, which are still falling apart.’ She then went on to tell me, ‘if you are young, you might like street art, but people like my mom, who is 50, have no use for it. And there are lots of elderly people in this neighbourhood.’ If, in these residents’ views, the murals failed to remedy the neighbourhood’s blight, for others they even exacerbated Certosa’s marginality vis-à-vis the rest of the city: ‘Genoa has an ancient tradition of [realistic] trompe l’oeil façades, why didn’t they do that instead?’ another woman in her sixties contributed. Since the class politics of muralism were not lost on her, she also objected to street art as ‘the kind of stuff you only find in poor neighbourhoods. They would have never put murals in [Genoa’s most upscale neighbourhood]. Now Certosa feels even more blighted’, she concluded. ‘They are horrible’, a man in his fifties volunteered. ‘Some of the façades [in Certosa] are crumbling, why didn’t they fix those instead?’ Like others, the man also expressed concerns about the murals’ lack of connection with Certosa and its residents: ‘Perhaps I am not quite the street art connoisseur, but what does Fantozzi have to do with the neighbourhood? Since [in Italian cinema] Fantozzi represents the quintessential *sfigato* [loser], this mural must symbolize Certosa’s *sfiga* [bad luck].’ Commenting on the mural featuring the old farmer, Anna Rita observed: ‘It’s nice, but what does the countryside have to do with Certosa’s industrial history? Putting splashes of colour on the walls comes across as an attempt to ignore the struggles of Certosa’s workers. There are plenty of topics that are potentially relevant [to Certosa], but the murals do not touch upon any of them.’ Graffiti writer Alessandro, in particular, was critical of the disjunction between the murals and Certosa: ‘[The NGO] should have brought in artists who know how to relate with the territory and its residents . . . Just having them paint their murals and then leave makes little sense.’ What this writer would have preferred for the neighbourhood was a ‘sustained engagement with residents’ to be brought about through the creation of a ‘street art school for younger generations’. However, as local crews were excluded from the project, none of this happened.

A NEIGHBOURHOOD COMING BACK TO LIFE?

At the time of writing in 2022, Certosa’s Memorial Park is still a long way from completion. However, in 2020 the Genoese administration established a plaza known as the *Radura della memoria* (Memorial Clearing).

Built right over the Via Porro’s apartment complexes that had been



Figure 12.7. Radura della Memoria. © Emanuela Guano.

demolished after the disaster, the plaza hosts a circle of forty-three trees in memory of the victims and a playground. The new bridge stretches over it, and a retaining wall surrounds the clearing on one side. On this wall, the association of Via Porro refugees sponsored a mural featuring a quotation by writer Ferzan Ozpetek: ‘Do we ever leave our childhood homes? / Never! For they always remain inside us / Even when they no longer exist.’

Cast against a background comprised of forty-three different colours – one for each of the victims – a nearby mural features two young women gazing in the direction of the collapse. This image, too, was commissioned by an association of evicted residents.

‘[These women] represent the shock at what happened’, Via Porro refugee Mimma told me, expressing regret at the city administration’s failure to memorialize the displacement of six hundred Certosini. In the face of this omission, the refugees’ murals seek to reclaim the area where entire apartment complexes were razed to the ground; however, even this modest memorialization attempt is negated by a children’s park that the city administration installed at the centre of the plaza. The playground’s position is such that the two painted women give the impression of staring at it. Children and their parents do not seem to worry; however, some of the older residents expressed dissatisfaction: as a man in his sixties put it, ‘never before



Figure 12.8. Eyes on the disaster. © Emanuela Guano.



Figure 12.9. Do we ever leave our childhood homes? © Emanuela Guano.

have I seen a playground built on the spot where a tragedy has happened.’ He also pointed out that the playground is exposed to the pollution and the traffic debris falling from the new bridge: ‘how safe is that, really?’ Yet the city administration does not share these concerns: in the words of a councillor, the children playing under the new bridge convey ‘the idea of a neighbourhood coming back to life’ (*‘Inaugurato il nuovo parco giochi’* 2021).

Whether Certosa is coming back to life remains to be seen. At the time of writing in 2022, several new projects are brewing in – though not necessarily for – Certosa: among them is a new railway track destined for freight trains, 10 percent of which will carry hazardous materials: ‘we’ll have forty-two freight trains a day running at a distance of barely 20 feet from people’s windows, and at least four of these trains will carry God knows what’, Enrico told me. A new highway crossing Certosa is also in the works: this construction will last ten years and will require boring through a mountain that contains asbestos. Predicting more dust and construction sites for years to come, Enrico told me, ‘What quality of life can we residents expect? Many of us aren’t even young, is this how we want to live the years that we have left?’ As the Certosini’s anger continues to simmer, ‘For Sale’ signs are becoming a ubiquitous sight in this neighbourhood. In the face of the challenges caused by a century of exploitation and neglect, many are giving up on their hope for a better quality of life. ‘It takes more than murals to fix this. A couple of drawings on the walls won’t change anything’, Enrico concluded.

Even as Certosa’s infrastructural ruination continues unabated, the Memorial Clearing keeps hosting concerts and theatrical events; in the words of Genoa’s administrators, these are all ‘characterized by a . . . dignified profile and by the respect that is due to the place and the victims of the collapse’ (*‘Inaugurato il nuovo parco giochi’* 2021). In the meantime, subsequent waves of joyously irrelevant street art keep erupting on the neighbourhood’s walls. However, in June 2021 a Certosina friend sent me an excited WhatsApp message: a new mural had been inaugurated whose inspiration was, in her words, ‘bottom-up, unlike Certosa’s other “joyous” murals’. By representing firefighters at work on the bridge, this mural was not only pertinent to the neighbourhood, but it had also been volunteered by muralists Drina A12 and Giulilogol: a couple who live just a few miles away from Certosa. The mural, Drina told me, stemmed from their close ties to the territory; their choice to immortalize the firefighters originated from their appreciation for this group’s selfless service. ‘It is the firefighters who risked their lives to pick up the dead bodies from the [bridge’s] rubble’, Drina pointed out. Indeed, many a Certosa resident feels a debt of gratitude to firefighters; this is why the 2021 inauguration turned out to be an emotional event where, in Drina’s words, ‘everybody cried, except for the politicians – but we wouldn’t expect those to shed a tear anyway.’

CONCLUSION: THE FAILURE OF POST-POLITICS

Like Drina, many Certosini are sceptical of politicians; in recent years, this distrust has been exacerbated by the awareness that, despite the promises, their neighbourhood's ruination continues unabated. As residents' hopes for a better future are dashed by plans for a new highway and a freight railway jammed between Certosa's homes, their already tepid appreciation for the joyous street art is growing thinner. 'Mayor: Thank you for the murals, but we don't need them. We need services' is a sign that, displayed during one of the street protests that are becoming increasingly common in Certosa, epitomizes a common sentiment. What Certosa needs, in the eyes of many, is an end to the process of ruination and the infrastructural servitude that has characterized it since the onset of industrialization.

According to the municipality website, the purpose of Certosa's street art is to 'upgrade the streets, the buildings and the municipal and private surfaces through the work of the most famous Italian and international writers', thus turning this area into 'an outdoor museum' (Comune di Genova n.d.). However, as of 2022 Certosa's revitalization remains a chimera. Furthermore, despite the emotional welcome extended by residents to Drina's and Giuligol's artwork, the city administration continues to have no plans for locally relevant street art. Yet the escapism characterizing most of Certosa's murals has failed to sway an aesthetic community (Rancière 2009: 57) that, emerging out of a nexus of affective energy and sensuous everyday experiences, has remained aware of its own disenfranchisement. The 'splashes of colour' painted on Certosa's walls may look 'nice', in the words of some; however, despite their attempt to promote consensus, the murals have failed to anaesthetize the awareness of a distribution of the sensible whereby Certosa continues to be reduced to the "bare life" of servility' (Holston 2009: 246) that is typical of many postindustrial peripheries. In the experience of Certosini, the collapse of the Morandi bridge; the construction sites that keep cropping up; the incessant encroachment of highways and railways; the ever-present threat of asbestos; the toxic waste buried under the streets; and the crumbling façades constantly reiterate the perception of an 'entrenched regime of citizenship' (ibid.: 249): one that manifests through a distribution of the sensible organized along class lines. What is being sensed and made sense of in post-collapse Certosa is neither the genteel ease of Genoa's bourgeois neighbourhoods nor the post-political 'joy' of hummingbirds and wheat bundles; instead, it is the jarring awareness of an inequality that keeps being reinscribed.

Emanuela Guano is inaugural C. Ackerman Professor of Anthropology at Georgia State University. Her current project entails an ethnographic

exploration of the role of aesthetics and infrastructural violence in Genoa's postindustrial peripheries. Dr Guano's previous work has been featured in journals like *Cultural Anthropology*; *City and Society*; *Gender, Place and Culture*; and *Ethnos*; she is also the author of *Creative Urbanity: An Italian Middle Class in the Shade of Revitalization* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017) and *Immaginando Buenos Aires: Ceti Medi e Modernità urbana* (FrancoAngeli, 2016).

NOTES

An early version of this chapter titled "Joy": Murals and the Failure of Post-Politics after the Morandi Bridge Collapse' appeared in *City & Society* 35(1) (2023): 38–61. This article is available at <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ciso.12442>.

1. The apartment complexes that had to be evacuated and demolished belonged to Sampierdarena; however, since for all practical purposes their residents regarded themselves as Certosini, this is how I refer to them in this chapter. Here I also follow residents' habit of calling Certosa a 'neighbourhood', even though it is really a unit of the Rivarolo neighbourhood.
2. None of the forty-three victims were from Certosa.
3. The new San Giorgio bridge was inaugurated in August 2020, only two years after the disaster.
4. This project is based on five months of pre-pandemic ethnographic fieldwork in Certosa and twenty-nine semi-structured, in-depth interviews with residents conducted in person and online between 2019 and 2021.
5. Certosa activists sought to oppose the use of explosives in the demolition because of the likely presence of asbestos in the bridge. To their dismay, only one of the pillars was spared.
6. During a 2018 press release, Renzo Piano announced that his new bridge would be 'simple and frugal, a truly Genoese bridge . . . a steel bridge – one that is as shiny and limpid as a boat, and endowed with a clear soul that will support the city in mourning this terrible loss.' These words gained great resonance with Genoese publics, who associate frugality, a rugged simplicity, and a familiarity with the sea that has been honed over the centuries as essential aspects of their city's imaginary and their own identity (Guano 2019: 254).
7. To date, limited funding has been allocated for the creation of the park.
8. Since the 2000s, neoliberal street art has been used in Genoa as a low-cost strategy to beautify areas damaged by neglect such as parts of its historic city centre and the revitalized waterfront.
9. The class-based divisions between Genoa's centre and its low-income peripheries were first observed by sociologist Luciano Cavalli in his 1965 *La città divisa*, where he argued that class inequalities (and political tensions) in industrial Genoa could be neatly mapped onto this city's geography.

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