
Ponticelli. The unexpected

Giovanna Marrazzo, *University of Siena*

ABSTRACT

Waiting for the train at a small station of the circumvesuviana train line in the outskirts of a city, waiting in a courtyard transformed by time in new urban architectures, waiting in the large buildings of the council housing, waiting at the railway station in the city center. Places that cross the metropolitan spaces, characterizing them with their forms and hosting lives in transit which adapt themselves to the places where they lived. Ponticelli, the eastern outskirts of Naples, is a difficult neighborhood because of the stagnant economy, rich in history and traditions is tight between the status of outskirts and a strong will to emerge. *In-attese* is a photographic work carried out in parallel with an ethnographic study for about eighteen months. The photographs here presented show symptomatic places of the urban and social transformations that have taken place from the post-war period to the present day and portray forms of cultural persistence that create social cohesion in an existential coexistence that characterizes the face of the neighborhood.

KEYWORDS

Ponticelli, Naples, circumvesuviana, courtyards, waiting time, expectation, outskirts.

BIO

Giovanna Marrazzo earned a bachelor's degree in Art History at the University of Naples and a master's degree in Anthropology and Visual Languages at the University of Siena. She has always cultivated a great passion in visual languages, which she was also able to expand after studying in Paris. She approached photography in 2017; and during her ethnographic studies, carried out in Ponticelli, she applied photographic language as a documentation tool, experimenting with its aesthetic and emotional potential. She exhibited in the collective Ponticelli X at the Cloister of Santa Maria La Nova in Naples in May 2018, at the Casa del Popolo in Ponticelli in September of the same year and at the PAN in Naples in March-April 2019.

gio.marrazz@gmail.com

In-attese

In-attese was born from a visual documentation project¹ of the suburbs of Naples carried out between October 2017 and March 2019. The ethnographic research conducted in the Ponticelli area allowed me to enter into a relationship with the social fabric of the neighborhood and to begin to explore photographically the territory.

During the eighteen-month realization, three photographic exhibitions were set up, during which I subjected visitors to semi-structured anonymous interviews to investigate the perception that the inhabitants of Ponticelli (and those who were not) had about the neighborhood through the images included in the exhibition. The purpose was to collect information about the feelings on the identity of the inhabitants of Ponticelli and their relationship with the environment, starting from an image. The relationship established between the photographic image and the spectators allowed them to talk about their experiential and emotional impressions. Whether, on the one hand, the images represented the reality of the neighborhood, on the other they allowed the inhabitants to endow them with their symbolic value regardless the real data.

For the realization of the interviews and the analysis of the images I referred to a semiotic perspective that was accompanied by the phenomenological one linked to the specific context, which allowed me to produce an interesting collection of information on the experiences and perception of identity of the inhabitants of Ponticelli. The ethnographic study has highlighted a complex relationship of the inhabitants with their environment, characterized by a strong desire of affirmation of existence and resistance against a feeling of absorption of their lives by the city of Naples. These feelings are expressed in a long expectation for movement and evolution.

The stylistic choice of using color and the almost total absence of human figures in the photographs was dictated by the will to represent a living and changing environment as Ponticelli. The inhabitants although feeling an institutional void and an existential solitude towards the future, they struggle every day against a feeling of uncertainty and for the affirmation of their desire for life.

The urban context: the courtyards and Santa Maria della Neve

A courtyard in the historic center of the neighborhood, which once represented a social space for the families who lived there, it has now given way to new architectures, more modern and functional to housing problems. This transformation reduces relational and collaborative forms to a minimum. Persistence of the past and of an agricultural economy, these courtyards still retain traces of their identity and adapt themselves to new forms of living.

Santa Maria della Neve

Patron saint of Ponticelli. Dressed up in a white robe embroidered in gold and with the Child in her arms, she is carried in procession every year on August 5th on a high wooden cart through the streets of the neighborhood. During the celebration, the inhabitants of Ponticelli recognize themselves as members of a community with a feeling of devotion and belonging to this symbol of religious and territorial identity.

The original effigy of the Madonna is preserved in the church in the center of the neighborhood, but her image is found everywhere, in the streets as in the courtyards in a direct and familiar relationship with the inhabitants that does not end during the celebrations, but lives day after day.

¹ The project is based on a idea of Luca Sorbo, formerly professor of History and Technical Photography at the Academy of Arts in Naples.



PHOTO 1: Enlargement of a courtyard of Ponticelli's historical center, March 2018



PHOTO 2: View of a courtyard of what once was a garden used as a vegetable garden, March 2018



PHOTO 3: Devotional image of Santa Maria della Neve at a courtyard in Ponticelli, December 2017



PHOTO 4: Devotional image of the Virgin with Child decorated for Christmas celebrations, December 2017

The circumvesuviana

A small entrance very close to the historic center of the neighborhood, an overpass that connects the station tracks that lead trains to and from Naples, the ticket office always closed and some weatherworn iron benches for the travelers to wait. The Circumvesuviana station at Ponticelli is the chosen place to enter and exit the neighborhood, a metaphor of movement from the space of everyday life.



PHOTO 5: Entrance to the circumvesuviana station at Ponticelli, March 2018

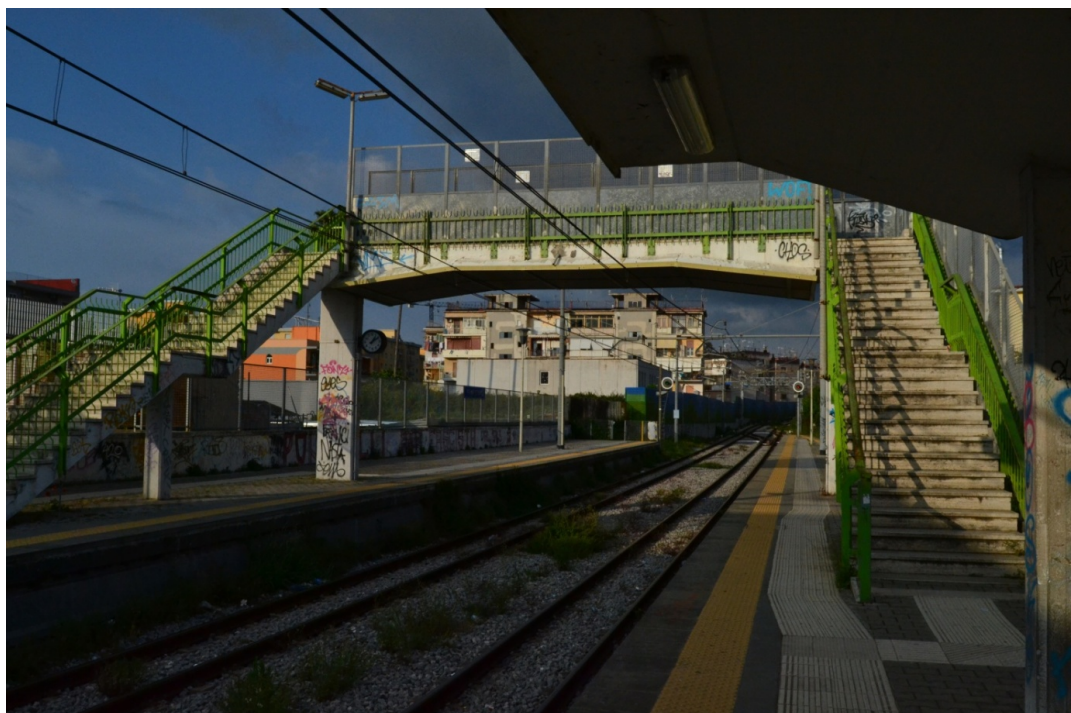


PHOTO 6: Circumvesuviana overpass at Ponticelli, May 2018



PHOTO 7: View of the Circumvesuviana station at Ponticelli from the overpass, May 2018



PHOTO 8: The Circumvesuviana station at Ponticelli, stairway to the overpass, February 2019



PHOTO 9: The Circumvesuviana station at Ponticelli, train from Naples, February 2019

Travelling

The short journey to and from Naples, a metaphor of escape and return for the inhabitants of the Ponticelli. A complex identity relationship of the neighborhood towards the city of Naples, of recognition and denial, of hope and damnation, possibility of escape and improvement of their living conditions.



PHOTO 10: A traveller on a circumvesuviana coach to Ponticelli, November 2017



PHOTO 11: Inside a circumvesuviana coach to Ponticelli, November 2018



PHOTO 12: Inside a circumvesuviana coach to Ponticelli, February 2019



PHOTO 13: Inside a circumvesuviana coach to Ponticelli, January 2019

The Piazza Garibaldi's circumvesuviana station in Naples

White lights illuminate an otherwise completely dark space, neon signs indicate the departure or arrival of trains, four tracks that connect the entire Vesuvian territory, including Ponticelli. The Piazza Garibaldi's circumvesuviana station in Naples is the point of arrival or departure for travelers moving from neighboring districts, it is a crossroads of lives that touch each other, often without meeting.

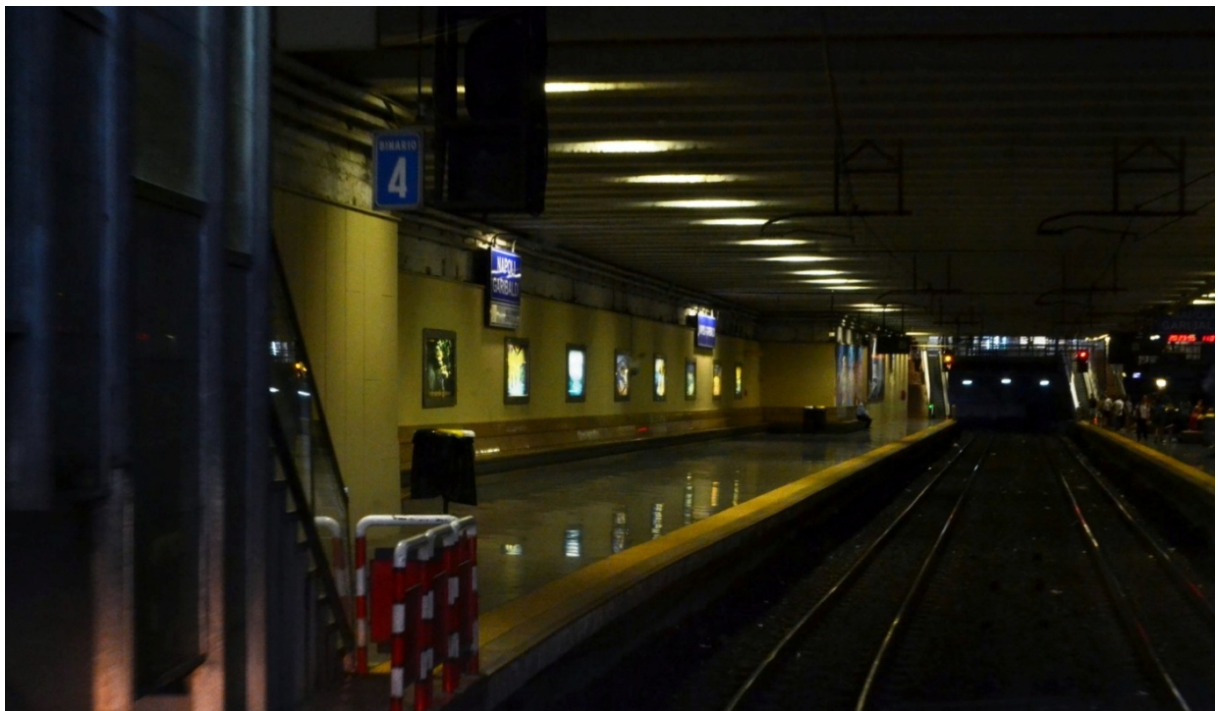


PHOTO 14: Piazza Garibaldi circumvesuviana station in Naples, train arrival, July 2018



PHOTO 15: Piazza Garibaldi circumvesuviana station in Naples, November 2017

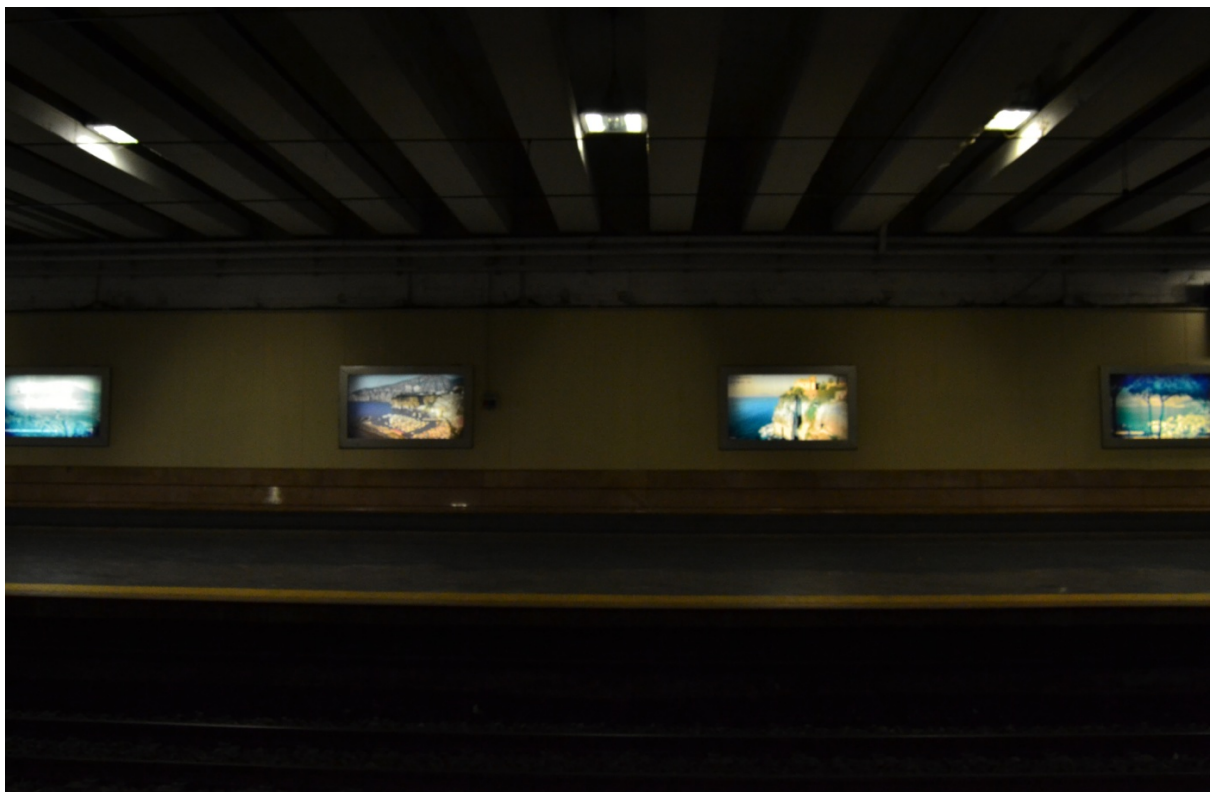


PHOTO 16: Piazza Garibaldi circumvesuviana station in Naples, May 2018

Waiting for

Waiting time and the unexpected. The journey to an unknown and known destination, the escape and return, waiting time and movement, stillness and urgency. Fantasy of leaving and returning, of abandonment and recovery, of departures and stationing. Waiting for expected or the unexpected.



PHOTO 17: Piazza Garibaldi circumvesuviana station in Naples, passengers waiting, September 2018



PHOTO 18: Piazza Garibaldi circumvesuviana station in Naples, passengers waiting, September 2018



PHOTO 19: The circumvesuviana station at Ponticelli, passengers waiting, October 2017



PHOTO 20: The Circumvesuviana station at Ponticelli, passengers waiting, February 2019



PHOTO 21: The Circumvesuviana station at Ponticelli, platform, February 2019