

# DISPLACEMENT

WHEN A CITY LOSES ITS PUBLIC SPACE

by Giovanni Cocco and Caterina Serra

*What is the city but the people.  
True. The people are the city.  
Coriolanus, W. Shakespeare*

## CONCEPT

**DISPLACEMENT** is a journey, a visual and a textual narrative, into the cataclysmic transformation of Europe's historical cities. With speculative investment and economic forces driving away the community of residents, workers and citizens from historical city centers we observe the novel paradigms that emerge in their lieu: the Souvenir City, the Amusement Park City, the Museum City, the Mall City, the Grand Hotel City.

Unfettered mass tourism and the transformation of homes, schools, movie theatres and theatres into hotels, shops, and supermarkets alter the private and public spaces of urban cores, the *genius loci* of individual and collective presences.

**DISPLACEMENT** tells the story of this change, of how novel urbanistic and architectonic patterns impose a serialized model common to every city that has only tourism left to survive. What will be the social and cultural soul of such places?

## THE WORK

We started our journey from **L'Aquila** and from **Venice** – cities that are symbols and precursors of this loss.

**L'AQUILA** is a provincial town hollowed out by the earthquake of Apr 2009 and by the carelessness and greed of local and national politics, that have reduced it to a town of boutique hotels, resurrected from the debris, of empty streets dotted with new houses for sale, while its own population lives scattered in the surrounding New Towns. The centres of these dormitory suburbs are reduced to be the roundabouts of shopping malls.

**VENICE** doesn't require an introduction, surfing history unchanged, with its gondolas resisting gaudy redecorations, its palaces avoiding ruinous falls as if they were in the hands of eternal jugglers, and a sense of magic that makes one forget the real lives behind. Still. Venice could become an anonymous site of enjoyment, a funfair, a carnival of voices and feet void of meaning because it is deprived of its citizens. [What] If the question, more cultural than geographical, of those who pass by or those who live there, loving this city, becomes the same: Where am I?

## AN EXHIBITION AND A BOOK

We have been in these cities, we have lived there, and have immersed ourselves into this displacement with our bodies, our eyes, and our ears. Now we aim to translate this work into an exhibition and a book – a visual and textual narrative – to tell the transformation of the sense of a city.

**The narrative.** It's a dialogue between the city and the observer. It's a confession, a testament, an elegy. The displacement that the city is suffering is shared by those who see it happening. The text is poetic, intimate but universal, fragments of a broken voice that tells for the first time, and the last one, its story. The city is a creature, animal/human/plant, exposing herself, indulging our gaze, our presence, to find herself and her soul.

**The photography.** A pictorial still life that explores the city, backdrop to a reality that morphs into theatrical representation. All shot on film, medium format. Since the consumption of a city takes also place today through the predatory capture of digital images, shooting on film reestablishes a mental and physical attitude of slowness, a reflective and instinctual vision, embracing the time, research and effort needed to immerse oneself into this displacement.

# threnody to a displacement

They stare at me, abominable,  
frightful.

Innocent

tainted body.

Having lost all desire,

listless

against the unyielding

grace of my breathing.

Handled

as if oblivious

of impression.

I stand breathless

at your sight.

Roaming through day

and night without respite.

I stare at the hollow dwellings,

exhaling darkness.

Icy, fearsome at my touch.

A door opened wide, yesternight,

a man alive amongst his remains.

Handwritten letters, a soiled mattress lying.

I envisioned a borrowed space

for someone to drift

sheltering desire.

I am cold. It seeps from those voids.

I long for someone that will

warm me.

The anguish

fractures me.

I'm disfigured, exhausted. Of cats and dogs.

Plentiful.

They corner me,

haggard, mangy,

swarded



with the everpresent chaff  
wind gusts stir up some blossoms,  
and roses, and roses.  
A whiff of elderflowers.  
And ripened figs awaiting in vain.

Reflecting on a shop window,  
well mannered, well-off,  
fuck-off smalltown.  
A crowd flowed,  
satisfied,  
your beauty smeared  
on their faces.

I don't want any more mirrors  
for my lovers.  
If I've shuttered all doors,  
it's not for fear  
of opening up.  
Who decided to leave  
present times outside?  
And to make a graveyard  
of the past.  
And to have nothing left  
to desire?  
No more rats to torment me  
at night, you noted?  
They abandoned me  
ever since  
all memories  
creased.

They built new houses  
to curtail space.  
Not time.  
With no roots,  
life is survival  
of tables with no memories,  
of hands and voices  
that hate each other

and want each other  
anonymously.  
Thank gracefully!  
They said,  
a house is just a house.  
The power of simplicity.  
And that's why they are all  
grateful for a gift  
that is extortion.

Men at work,  
laid bare.  
I regurgitate these ashen troops every single day,  
from my underbelly,  
crucified.  
Hammering away  
till the remains of the day,  
wailing hooters.  
They hold their hands, exhausted.

They spruce you up  
for the passage of the wealthy,  
heavy set in their movement,  
but fast to reset  
the world.  
In offices and hotels,  
banks and lounges,  
amidst mercenaries and whores.  
Thank gracefully.  
No houses  
where to rest in peace.

Hands behind their backs. Their souls are lying low.  
Struggling, no longer sure on where they are.  
Names are long forgotten,  
and there is not a place  
to sit, and wait for someone.

Walled up  
by broken stones,

unturned.

Is it my fault,  
or is that everyone nowadays is better off  
in the world.

Like those birds, in a cage,  
that still sing,  
and you can't figure out why.  
Have you heard me sing?

I feel at peace when I am with you.  
As if in laughter.  
At night, too,  
in the darkness, in your darkness,  
when I can better see the sky.  
And you don't scare me.  
Even in your song  
quasi a scream  
lamenting the end or the beginning  
in expiration and  
inspiration.

Enough of this  
silence.  
That brings death.  
Our own body  
is all what we have.

Sometimes it's just legs,  
all over the street.  
Oblivious of the space.  
A whiff of alcohol from a boy that wouldn't know how to kiss.  
Life without having tasted it.  
It doesn't always go down well.  
But this is what it is. And it is what you'll remember.

I beg you, find them out.  
I beseech you, where have they gone?

They hover around, and are pushed back.  
Foreign to their new homes,  
frontier cabins.



I stare at them, inmates in their yard time.

Where has desire gone?

They drag their feet  
and their stares  
across aisles of rags.  
Eating themselves out  
in those establishments  
that trade your free  
time.  
Desire  
on sale  
last days.

Can you smell the almond trees?

I do,  
seeping through your crevices,  
the glass shards,  
the decaying lumbers,  
death by water,  
overwintering.  
Summer  
turns you  
into a disheveled, fertile,  
ravenous land,  
filling every orifice.  
That ridge you call memory  
is for the living,  
those who know how  
to be alive without forestalling death.

I stare at them, day by day,  
their elbows stretching  
the counter,  
shored up trench.  
I drink with them.  
Drinking and breathing,  
it's all spirit.

I can't read their thoughts  
but I know this path  
to survival.  
The wine  
drenching the pavements  
in drool.  
Sacrificial wine for the dead to communicate with the living.

I recognize them all,  
reunited in their loss.  
And the truth comes  
through,  
nails and needles, salvation  
hanging in there  
by a thread, at the cross.

What a loss, not enough desire  
for what one doesn't want  
to lose.

I will lay barren in fragments  
without a heritage.  
Shuttled in merry-go-rounds  
drowned in their festive lights.  
Distraction  
not a turn in the road  
as if focus  
were less fun  
than fuck.

Could you get that?  
It is the veins and the streets  
that guide us.  
Our body is all  
that we own.

So tell me where it is,  
where is my body?  
Where have I ended in?  
If my head has lost awareness.  
If I am cold,

and there is noone that digs me,  
and wakes up with me, and embraces  
the night, the streets  
on beds-rafts that cross  
the darkness,  
the public space  
of our remembrance.

Those prints display an old square.  
A fairground  
encircling the last  
of our many fire-eaters.  
There is  
a small wood now  
longing for the sky, Babel reborn.  
Many tongues  
twisted in plain thoughts.  
As if the beginning of everything  
were some rudimentary love.

A beggar  
with a charm  
at the neck  
capturing all the enormity  
of this void.

It will be troops  
in blinkers  
between ear and hand.  
They will circle you,  
ring-a-round the rosies,  
empty of sympathies.  
A sense of wellbeing  
is the happiness  
they seek.  
Coming and going  
taking without giving  
fearful of odours that mark  
the boundary, and mark a difference.  
Better keep the same old.

It does not surprise.  
And there is no rising  
and there is no fall.

Today I saw swallows racing.  
And I thought of those children  
who misspeak the same language  
and fly in vain around the New Towns.  
Undisturbed sky.  
As you foretold.

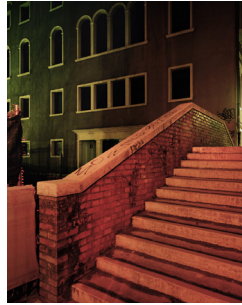
I saw them dancing  
in a pliant fight  
suspended, unaware.  
Perhaps they will take roots  
oblivious,  
with eyes forward  
because backward ceases to matter.  
Having cleared that edge  
they will know what to do  
no knowledge no more.

DISPLACEMENT - NEW TOWN NO TOWN





## DISPLACEMENT - A CHE ORA CHIUDE VENEZIA



## EXHIBITIONS



MACRO, International Photography Festival in Rome



## PUBLICATIONS



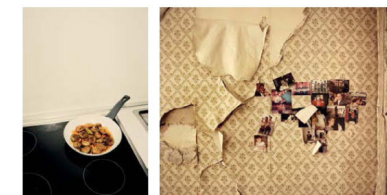
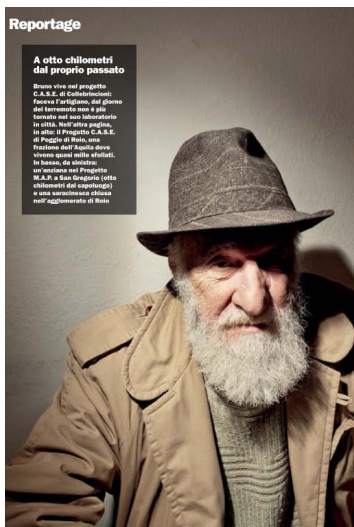
Sopra: l'interno di una casa dell'Aquila, rimasta com'era la notte del 6 aprile 2009. Nell'altra pagina: un'anziana aquilana, Anna, che oggi vive in un progetto M.A.P.

## L'Aquila oggi, anima dispersa

*Una città che non è più una città. E una comunità che non è più una comunità, polverizzata tra le "new town". Una scrittrice tra i luoghi del terremoto, sei anni dopo*

di **Caterina Serra** foto di **Giovanni Cocco**

Ergonomics, 2 April 2012



Mario, ciclista dilettante, esce dalla sua abitazione nel Progetto M.A.P. di Bazzano, a est del capoluogo. Nell'altra pagina: in alto, il villaggio "Fiuli Venezia Giulia", che fu inaugurato da Berlusconi nel dicembre 2009 a 12 chilometri di distanza dall'Aquila; in basso, la "new town" di Roio Poggio

giorno. Lavora, mangia e se ne va.  
Pan e oio, e il vino dell'Abbruzzo. Un  
ma vecchia di cinquecento anni. Ci a  
muri di assi di legno di un cantiere. I  
il primo locale storico ad avere r  
proprietario e i suoi figli stappano u  
mila dopo l'altra con un cavatappi a  
mura che è come una leva che ciascu  
modo suo, come se aprissero una  
abbassassero un ponte levatoio. I  
giovane, di vecchi, di caschi gialli di  
pausa. Un posto pieno di storie, u  
della memoria e nuovi inizi. Come u  
Capisco che L'Aquila è vuota di ab

[illegible]

Come si fa a sentirsi cittadini in una tenda a pagamento?

**Keywords:** child sexual abuse; disclosure; social support





IL LANCIO

## L'altra Venezia la città souvenir persa nel vuoto

CATERINA BERRA  
FOTOGRAFIE DI GIOVANNI COCCO

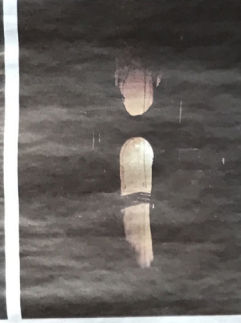
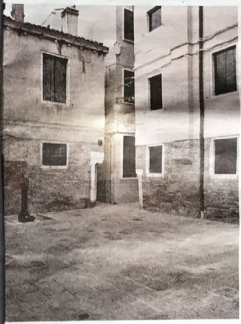
**Q**UANDA, l'isola di mare è tornata in laguna. Insieme al portuale reale, l'albergo, l'oca lombardella, il ginecristo e la casa della Silezia, la gente si è accorta che anche Venezia non ha il fuoco nero come le stampe che frusciano gialle. Vengono tutti a vivere a Venezia. In filoni migratori: gentile, un popolo aereo, che viene e va senza pretese di occupazione né temporanea né permanente. La città solo si tuffa al cielo, con l'aria un po' stanica, sfiorita dal milione di volti che la assalgono, afflitta dal corteo dei poveri di gente che ogni giorno già in fondo, si ferma, riparte, si perde. Dove sono? Chiede qualcuno con la cartina della città in mano. Ogni tanto è golfo, si ferisce, si confonde, si spezzeggia davanti agli occhi la strada, improvvisando un canale che interrompe il cammino. Ogni tanto invece offre ponti all'altro fianco, quello che ha attraversato il mare, e allunga un cappello a ridosso dei muri. Ogni tanto i due fianchi si incontrano in una confusione. Lo sanno tutti. Venezia richiude elasticità, stitichezza di movimenti, e tutti tutti improvvisi, come a sparire. E questa è confusione, l'impossibilità di un procedere lineare, omogeneo.

L'incertezza di un pensiero che non ammette contraddizioni. Sembra ferma, la città più intatta della storia, con le sue gondole che ancora nessuno ha dipinto di rosa, col suo canale di palazzi sospesi come piatti sulle testate di un giocattolo, e la stessa aria magica di un castello incantato. Eppure. Come un parco a tema da visita domenicale. Venezia apre ogni giorno come una Disneyland da visitare. Qualcuno dice che sta morendo, qualcun altro annuncia la gran voce che la città più bella del mondo è in vendita, che se la godono come un luna park, se la portano via come un bel souvenir, di pensiero, qualche giorno per farla poi inchiodare a ponti che servono da belvedere. Dicono che stia cambiando, che stia svuotando di chi c'era nato e vissuto, che si stia facendo in assembrare di negletti tutti uguali, a omologarla di copie il se stesso, sotto l'etere un po' felici di mascherare di un lutto carnevale, dentro stanze di ori e stucchi come dark room, un bacio della storia in cui infilarsi accetti dall'idea stessa di non sapere più dove si è. Dove siamo finiti? Se la comprano i più ricchi della terra e se la affittano, non è che ci vengono a stare, le case costano sempre di più allora si lascia l'acqua inerte per la terraferma. Ogni tanto qualcuno sbilla che sono anche i venditori che se la vendono a loro ammalati città, affittano e rivendono di case come le vendono l'anima, che agli stolti non attaccano tutti.

Ma dove sono?, nel senso di dove mi trovo, se lo chiede il turista spesso, e il veneziano spesso anche lui. Il turista che non solo si perde tra calli che gli sembrano uguali, ma che si ritrova in una città che non sa neanche se è quella vera, per dire stitica, quell'isola al mondo fatta così, o come invece una delle sue tante riproduzioni. A fine giornata nella città-souvenir, c'è sempre qualcuno che si domanda: «Cherchez Venezia?», con la paura di restare dietro mentre si spengono le luci, la gente si ferma, il divertimento è finito.

Come accade a una città svuotata dei suoi abitanti e popolata di turisti? Come si è dello spazio pubblico? E cosa succede a quello privato se l'uso di una cosa non è più abitativo? Come lo spazio pubblico potrebbe essere rinchiuso dietro i cancelli di una signorilità, come se invece non fosse abitata, «per cura di ogni bene comune, alimentare lo spirito della città con ciò che fa parte della sua storia, della sua identità. O come se lo spazio privato fosse il pretesto ad aprirsi al miglior offerente, e le cose non facessero parte di noi, non ricordassero niente a nessuno. Anche le case ogni tanto si chiudono, dove siamo? Se la città diventa un pittoresco spasso paese dei balocchi, quel paese di voci e pianti che la afflitta tutto un vuoto di senso, di cittadina, di vita reale, di vita vera, verrebbe da dire, in cui la domanda più istintiva che geografica, di chi la pensa c'è, viene a volte ancora con amore per la città, sarà la stessa dove sono?

L'autrice è scrittrice e sceneggiatrice



## L'AUTORE DELLE IMMAGINI

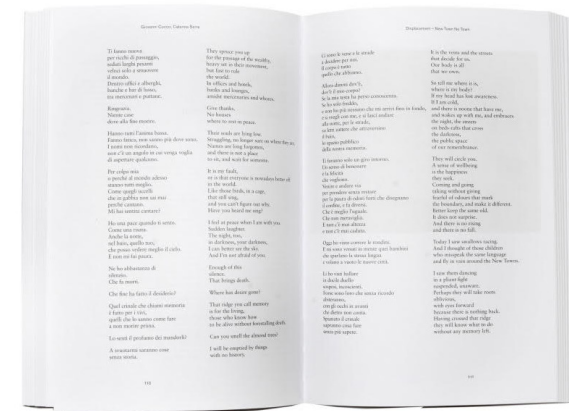
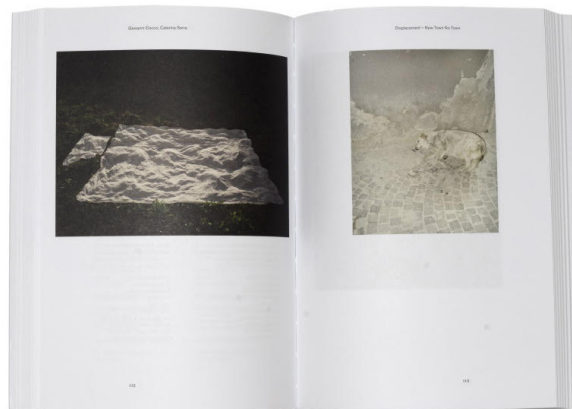
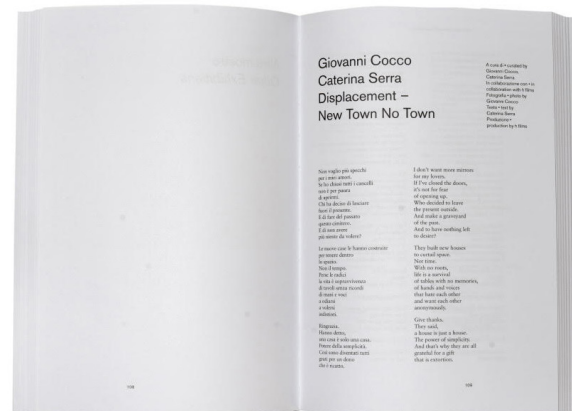
Giovanni Cocco (Palermo, 1977) traetta Roma e Berlino. Si occupa di fotografia di reportage con una chiara antropologica e sociale. Collabora con varie testate italiane e internazionali.

## CALL CAMPBELL: GARDEN

Le foto di Giovanni Cocco sembrano angoli di una Venezia quasi immangiabile dalla gran parte dei turisti: silenziosa, privata, sempre più vuota di abitanti e meravigliosamente autentica.

## IL DEDALO DELLA MEMORIA

I canali che ripuliscono e spazzano il giorno e la notte del ciottolo, gli accenti più segreti e aperti lasciando in traccia le mappe, il vuoto pieno di senso di una città che lascia sempre spazi.



Publication of the International Photography Festival's Catalog at MACRO, Rome



## THE AUTHORS

### Caterina Serra

Caterina Serra, writer and screenwriter, was awarded the Paola Biocca literary prize in 2006 with the short story *Chiusa in una stanza sempre aperta*. This was followed by the novel-reportage *Tilt*, published by Einaudi in March 2008, and by a second book, *Padreterno*, in April 2015, also by Einaudi. Among her short stories, *Fuori e dentro*, included in the 48th issue of *Nuovi Argomenti* (Mondadori 2008), *Segue alle pagine 2 e 3*, in *10 in paura* (Epoché, 2010), *The heel of a loaf*, in *Riga 32 - John Berger* (Marcos y Marcos, 2012). She is the co-author of the screenplay for *Napoli Piazza Municipio* (Bruno Oliviero, winner of the best documentary prize at the 2008 Torino Film Festival), the author for *Parla con Lui* (directed by Elisabetta Francia, 2010), and the screenwriter and author for *Piccola Patria* (directed by Alessandro Rossetto, Orizzonti section of the 2013 Venice Film Festival). She is the author of *Displacement*, a common project with the photographer Giovanni Cocco, that has been exposed at The International Festival of Photography at Macro, Rome 2015, and will exhibit at the Centre de la Photographie de Genève in 2019. She is a regular collaborator of the weekly magazine L'Espresso, and works also with the newspaper La Repubblica, and the online magazine Minima&Moralia.

### Giovanni Cocco

Giovanni Cocco was born in Sulmona in 1973. He graduated as a Electrical Engineer Technician, in 1991. In 1998 he started an ongoing project "Monia", an intimate portrait about his sister's life who was disabled since birth. The work has become a book in 2016. With "Burladies", 2007 – 2010, a series of portraits on Burlesque women's, he was selected for the "Mentor program" by the International Agency "VII", where he has been for two years, 2010 – 2012. At the same time he has worked "on assignment" for L'Espresso Magazine at the "Moving Walls" project, a research about the condition of migrants in the Europe borders, with the Italian journalist Fabrizio Gatti. From 2013 he is working with the Italian writer Caterina Serra on the projects "Displacement – new town no town" and "A che ora chiude Venezia", analysis and investigation between photography and writing about the transformation and homologation of historic Italian cities. Currently he is an independent photographer based between Berlin and Rome.

Has been realized with:

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DERMAMENTE