

# Where the Monsters Graze is the Province

## Fantastic Practices of Dis-Institution

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The contribution aims to explore the theme of disgust within the rejected substrate of the monstrous. While there is a fascination with what we perceive as deformed – be it body, matter, or space – this fascination often struggles to mature into an approach that embraces the monstrous as a design strategy. This research seeks to frame the disruptive potentials of the monstrous as generative for the broader culture of design, reintroducing value to concepts and practices of dislocation. Starting from an interpretation of the primary monstrous, the mother (Braidotti, 1994), the study intends to offer an overview that spans visual arts and performative theories, relating this density to its spatial application potentials. Through the relationship between perception and imagination, the paper proposes openings towards the wild (Metta, 2021), suggesting spatialized methodologies of the monstrous as privileged practices of action in marginal urban contexts, such as the province. By examining cases that address the legitimacy of bodies and their transition, and forms of investigation linking the liminality of territory with that of the individual (Miguel Vila, *Fiordilatte*, 2021, *Padovaland*, 2020, *Comfrotless* 2023; HPO, *Provinciale*, 2023; basso profilo, *CAMPOTTO: accordi di comunità verso un nuovo piano di stazione*, 2023 ), the paper investigates the oscillation between rejection and imagination, theorizing monstrous practices as fantastic opportunities to transcend the established spatial conditions. The selected works offer a means to consider the transformation of rejected human and territorial bodies into non-institutionalized potential for regeneration. The article works on the ambivalence between the warning of the uncanny and the vision of the transformed contexts, the conception of a space of dissent and grafts. Such viscosities, despite their complexity, retain a potentially generative disorder, not to be suppressed but to be engaged in a discursively implicated practice with the unexpected, bringing humanity closer to a concept of wild, ever-changing transformation.

Keywords: Monstrous, Disgust, Design Culture, Spatial Application, Wildness

# Where Monsters Graze or the Province

## Fantastic Practices of Dis-Institution

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*So, we refuse to cultivate utopias, impossible flowers without perfume, fragile and delicate to be kept under glass bells. We prefer instead to be shepherds of monsters; conjuring them up from within our magic circle, we nurture and nourish them so that they grow big and romp around. For we know that our terrible monsters are merely made of smoke, while the fragile red flower that utopians cultivate is like a poppy that hides in its corolla the white latex of sleep; and this truly frightens us.<sup>1</sup>*

Monstrous, body and space are intertwined in a relationship of mutual definition. Clarifying their boundaries and relations implies the possibility of understanding them as attributes of one another, thus establishing their treatment within the relevant disciplines. This contribution builds on the predicative influences at play within this triangle to frame the disruptive potential of a monstrous-corporeal-situated practice as generative for the culture of design in a broad sense, restoring value to thoughts and practices of dislocation.

In the first section, the contribution delves into the literature on the monstrous to provide a foundation for considerations related to the monstrous body. In the second section, it aims to explore the monstrous in spatial terms, proposing its placement within the province, a distinctly Italian context of territorial distribution. Through three case studies – the trilogy by comic artist Miguel Vila, the *Provinciale* cycle by the Ferrara-based studio HPO, and the participative project for Campotto by basso profilo in Argenta – the goal is to outline the dimension of a territorial monstrous that is as viscous as it is vital. Finally, considerations are presented regarding the understanding of the approaches highlighted as opportunities for the deinstitutionalization and reappropriation of spaces, bodies, and monsters.

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<sup>1</sup> Superstudio, *Utopia, Antiutopia, Topia*, in G. Mastrigli (a cura di), *Superstudio. Opere 1966-1978*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2016, p. 362 (my translation).

## 1. Transformative potentials within the monstrous. Gazes and bodies

The theme of the monstrous has enjoyed significant development and analysis in different disciplines such as literature, philosophy, and art. The overview presented here aims to contextualize the interpretation of the monstrous as a generative spatial category.

When approaching the monstrous, it is inevitable to reference Rosi Braidotti's *Madri, mostri e macchine*. When spaces are subjected to constraints that overlap with those of the bodies, we should attempt to treat these spaces as bodies themselves – deformed bodies – considering them as «displacement devices»<sup>2</sup> and reclaiming the monstrosity derived from doubt and the non-unitary nomadic nature of the body. The monstrous is also linked to the notion of the mutating body, which the critic Francesca Alfano Miglietti (FAM) defines as an anarchic form that opposes evolutionary linearity as an identity choice. The body is read as a territory of reaffirmation that is, by nature, nomadic and in a state of transfer. This state of transfer prevents the constraint of the mind and allows it to be in constant transformation<sup>3</sup>.

An increasing number of disciplines are adopting an ontologically multiple approach to the practices of crossing the world. Consider, for example, the medical field and the necessity of viewing the body not as a uniform and monolithic entity, but rather as a plural and variable concept that is constructed and understood differently depending on the medical context. Medical practices, technologies, and cultural narratives all contribute to the construction of various versions of the body<sup>4</sup>. The ideas presented by Francesca Alfano Miglietti (FAM) resonate with the concepts introduced by Legacy Russell in her glitch theory. Russell revisits the notion of the «anti-body» introduced by Lynn Hershman Leeson in the essay *Romancing the Anti-body: Lust and Longing in (Cyber)space* (1994). Anti-bodies can act like computer viruses, continuously evolving and thus evading extinction across different times, memories, and parallel dimensions. The glitch, building on this foundation, takes an additional step forward<sup>5</sup>. Russell argues that «the glitch» (a malfunction or error in digital systems) can be used as a form of resistance and subversion

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<sup>2</sup> R. Braidotti, *Madri mostri e macchine*, Manifestolibri, Roma 2005, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> FAM, *Identità Mutanti. Dalla piega alla piaga: esseri delle contaminazioni contemporanee*, Costa & Nolan, Genova 1997, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> A. Mol, *The Body Multiple*, Duke University Press, Durham-London 2002, p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> L. Russell, *Glitch Feminism. A Manifesto*, Verso, London 2020, p. 8.

against traditional social, cultural, and gender norms. The concept of the glitch becomes an opportunity to challenge and destabilize fixed categories such as gender, race, and sexuality. Russell views the glitch not as an error to be corrected but as an opening for new possibilities of expression and identity. She explores how non-conforming and queer identities can use the glitch to navigate oppressive structures, transforming what is considered a mistake into a powerful tool for autonomy and self-definition. Moreover, the glitch is also seen as a way to reconfigure the body and identity in an increasingly digitalized world, where the distinction between the physical and virtual body is becoming blurred. Citing the case of Lil Miquela, Russell provocatively asks: what is the purpose of a body without a body? In the face of an increasingly privatized world, can a corporate avatar – in essence, a privatized, symbolic body – be an authentic advocate, a catalyst for social change? Indeed, Lil Miquela, also known as Miquela Sousa, is a virtual figure created in 2016 by a company called *Brud*, a Los Angeles-based tech startup [Fig.1].



[Fig. 1] Lil Miquela. Source: <https://press.connan.io/2021/04/30/lil-miquela-and-the-digital-realm/>.

Lil Miquela is a digital influencer and a computer-generated (CGI) character who has gained fame on social media platforms. Lil Miquela presents herself as a young Brazilian American woman, often engaging in topics related to fashion, music, and social issues. Lil Miquela's Instagram profile epitomizes the archetype of the influencer, leveraging increased visibility to promote important political causes. This case offers the opportunity to think about how we can make the invisible visible, engage new audiences

in intriguing ways, push the boundaries of corporeal materiality, and rethink how we might (re)define the body as we have always known it. These features make Lil Miquela fit into the treatment of a non-body that belongs to the category of what is monstrous as non-conforming. At the same time, the familiarity we have with such body types and their representation has, on the one hand, accustomed us to such options for new identities, and on the other hand, gives rise to a sense of mistrust regarding these declinations.

In the discourse on the monstrous body, also comes into play the approach related to the fearful fascination elicited by the monstrous itself. In *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*, Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park specifically address the concept of the monstrous, linking it closely to the idea of wonder and the ways in which nature was perceived and understood from the Middle Ages to the early modern period. In the trajectory they identify, wonders often included creatures or phenomena considered monstrous-beings that deviated from the norms of nature as known at the time. These monsters, which could be animals with anomalous forms or humans born with deformities, were viewed as divine signs or warnings, evoking both awe and terror<sup>6</sup>. Attention to the presence of monstrous creatures increased significantly with the advent of print technology, revealing a growing interest in the topic, particularly in Italy and Germany. In a medieval and Renaissance context, where the belief was that nature had an intrinsic order, monsters represented a disruption of this order. However, over time, modern science sought to explain these anomalies in rational terms, reducing the monstrous to a natural phenomenon that could be studied and understood rather than feared. Monsters were progressively seen not as supernatural prodigies or divine warnings, but as natural variations that could be explained through biology and anatomy. Monsters, once viewed as threats or signs of *otherness*, were gradually absorbed into the natural order, contributing to the development of a scientific worldview where the marvelous and the monstrous were no longer outside nature but part of it.

Although now incorporated into a potentially natural order, the oscillation between fascination and aberration will not be completely resolved. In fact, we must consider that the strong sensationalization (and sexualization) of bodies in iconographic form, narrative, and later in exhibition continued <sup>7</sup> – for example in the freak shows. This aspect

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<sup>6</sup> L. Daston, K. Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150-1750*, Zone Books, New York 1998, p. 177.

<sup>7</sup> M. H. Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1993, p. 57.

is also linked to the concept of deception, as the monster is something or someone that falsely resembles the familiar and thus deceives. According to human perception, the monster suggests an insincere kinship, not easy to derive. Human beings are inclined to tame, filter, normalize, and catalog the unknown to bring it closer to the familiar. In contrast, there is a provocative approach to design that aims to recognize traces of the wild, assist them in freeing themselves, and support their growth. This generates an ongoing and unpredictable act of re-making – a practice of knowledge that transcends functional divisions and embodies doubt: a transformative motion.

In this sense, a performative conception of design is advocated, characterized by action-driven processes that are deliberately unproductive and wild. Additionally, the Italian architect Annalisa Metta explores the potential for reconsidering the monstrous and the wild in landscape architecture with a sensitivity that aligns closely with the perspective proposed here, including within the domestic sphere. The concept of taming in relation to the openness to monstrous transformation is indeed a central theme in Metta's book, *Il paesaggio è un mostro. Città selvatiche e nature ibride*. From the early pages, the text reveals the tension between humanity's attempt to dominate nature and the effort to conceal its interventions – a sort of conscious desecration that navigates between improvised ruins and integration into the commodified non-human. Metta delves into the concept of the monstrous by recalling its dual etymology: *monere* (to warn) and *monstrare* (to show, to declare). It is the ambivalence between the warning of the uncanny and the vision of the familiar transformed, a conception of space as grafted, operated on, decapitated, repositioned, skinned, and reincarnated. In moments of crisis, it is revealed that fascination with the wild, viewed through the lens of rehabilitating nature in the city, translates into a predicative project in action. This desire for the future can become a vehicle for the extraordinary, prompting a transformative attitude and embodying the performativity of *marronnage*.

*Marronnage* is to escape, to enter an unknown realm<sup>8</sup>. A crucial point of the concept is that *marronnage* is not understood as a reuniting with one's natural state or a return to an original stage; rather, it is a practice of overturning the idea of perfection, control, and enclosure. It is an action of «conscious disorientation» that extends into the future as performative, operative, and generative. In this sense, Metta lays the groundwork for a

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<sup>8</sup> A. Metta, *Il paesaggio è un mostro. Città selvatiche e nature ibride*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2022, p. 144.

design practice that diverges from the construction of the exact, turning instead towards a deliberately potentially monstrous *mélange*. Metta's work, in juxtaposing landscape and the monstrous, brings us back to an everyday co-presence to be explored both in life and design practices. Italian epistemologist and art critic Eleonora Fiorani has explored the balance between the wild and the domestic, examining the anthropological, cultural, and historical roots of such classifications. It is noteworthy how Fiorani immediately identifies the boundary between these two terms as extremely fluid, tied to a divisive, institutionalizing imagination that is socially useful but artificial. From the earliest territorial delimitations by humans, such as animal enclosures, gardens, or agricultural cultivation, domestication has always involved intellectual ownership and the safeguarding of human-defined boundaries of the object. Instead, the primary focus of inquiry should be on the human being itself in its ethical relationship with nature, especially in the critical transition between appropriation and production<sup>9</sup>. Alongside the desire for possession, reduction, and control, there exists a fascination with the wild and the monstrous as supernatural and divine. Since antiquity, monsters have been dreamed of and depicted as wild because they are distant, yet at the same time necessary for a society to feel justified in defining itself as civilized. Just as the wild is defined by civilization as the "other", a certain degree of wildness must necessarily continue to reside within the human, the territory, and the object of domestication. If this were not the case, it would result in the annihilation of the domesticated<sup>10</sup>.

Indeed, resistance against oppressive norms can occur through the acceptance and celebration of non-conforming identities, using the digital realm as a space for emancipation and transformation. Imagination and institution may appear to be in conflict. However, the shifting of one in favor of the other can offer the possibility of disentangling one from suspicion and embedding it, and to move the other from the rigidity of imposition. The fundamental goal is to gradually erode the power with these narratives and replace it with an alternative interpretation of the world, not only in thought but also in action. This aspect is vividly illustrated in a paper by the Italian researcher Francesca Natale, who, in her exploration of spectatorship within public spaces, presents a perspective that considers the hypothesis of sabotage as a strategy for revolutionizing

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<sup>9</sup> E. Fiorani., *Selvaggio e domestico*, Franco Muzzio, Padova 1993, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> *Ivi*, p. 84.

attention<sup>11</sup>. Introducing the theme of visibility in relation to urban infrastructures and their role concerning the viewer's attention, she reflects on the necessity of reclaiming perspectives of gaze and attention, not to order them but, conversely, to multiply them. Natale does not propose the goal of seeking an objective focus but rather envisions these trajectories as participatory. In this sense, a collective discourse on the constant and embodied integration of marginal profiles becomes central, starting with the very first place we inhabit: our own bodies.

## **2. The province as a spatialization of the monstrous beyond the institution**

The analysis of the origins and variations of the monstrous entails a transcending of established boundaries. Transcending the established norms represents a form of renegotiation of one's action boundaries and a confirmation of one's status of existence. A significant example of work on institutions, which later evolved particularly in the field of ethnography, is provided by sociologist Dorothy Smith. Smith's research began with the need to develop a sociology that not only understood but also started from the perspective of women. Her approach, in fact, arises from a critique of traditional sociological methods, which Smith identifies as operating within a framework of dominant institutions. Instead, Smith proposes to start from the situated experiences of women in their daily lives<sup>12</sup>. This stance aims to develop an approach that allows for the exploration of a complex set of interactions between individuals, institutions, and society, with the goal of mapping social relationships that generate the «relations of ruling» which organize, regulate, and control life of – in this case – women, extending well beyond the single daily context<sup>13</sup>. Smith repositions a segment of the population as existing bodies, individuals, and citizens based on the specificity of their daily conditions. The same approach is applicable to other categories of marginality, whether spatial or physical, individual or group-based, with the aim of realigning institutional forms with strategies that are both representative and generative of reality. It is important to note that, according

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<sup>11</sup> F. Natale, *Aprire la scatola nera. Spettatorialità e dispositivi attenzionali partecipativi nell'utilizzo degli spazi pubblici*, in A. D'Ammando, T. Morawski, S. Velotti, *Urban Forms of Life. Per una critica delle forme di vita urbane*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2023, pp. 139-158.

<sup>12</sup> D. E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, Northeastern University Press, Boston 1987.

<sup>13</sup> E. Billo, A. Mountz, *For Institutional Ethnography: Geographical Approaches to Institutions and the Everyday*, in "Progress in Human Geography", 40/2, 2016, pp. 199-220.



to Italian sociologist Ota de Leonardis, institutions and their study are strongly connected to the social dimension as human aggregates of collective existence<sup>14</sup>.

The term *institution* lends itself to application in both public and private spheres if it retains the properties of collective existence, temporal continuity, internal structuring, and normative constraints that allow for the exercise of power. Power is examined from various perspectives, as both an exercise in promotion and a structure of denial, within contexts where institutionalization stifles potential growth. Belgian artist Sarah Vanhee, in an article for *Kunstenpunt*, reflects on the increasing tendency of artistic institutions to encircle artistic innovations, contrasting the analysis of actual institutions with a contemplation of the phantasmagoric, the feminization of institutions, and the hypothesis of fantastic institutions that break away from the dominant masculine power – not in terms of gender, but of attitude. The focus is on the obstacles to institutional change, primarily from an architectural perspective, as it pertains to values: constructed space can be designed to become a void that swallows and burns away novelty<sup>15</sup>. In this regard, the aim of this contribution is to offer reinterpretations of a spatial *substratum* outside of urban planning classifications, which is typically Italian: that of the province. The theme of the monstrous becomes significant in relation to the territory and landscape, particularly concerning the spread of urban centers and the fringes of their peripheral zones. If the monstrous represents the rejected mixture that we seemingly do not see, could this perhaps signal a revolution in institutional terms? Could this be the triumph of a satellite *substratum* of spaces, places, people, and intermediate communities? Rather than evaluating the quality of life or administrative divisions, this contribution questions the difficulty of defining the province in a way that captures its infinite complexity and uniqueness. In the current context, two cases are of particular interest to this analysis: the first is the metropolitan area of *PaTreVe*, encompassing the urban areas of Padua, Treviso, and Venice; the second pertains to the Ferrara region. The perspective applied to these areas is that of a comic project, a cultural event, and a participatory engagement with the territory. These are examples of a conscious valorization of a substratum beyond tourist spectacularization, where the *natural elsewhere* critically engages with the urban

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<sup>14</sup> O. de Leonardis, *Le istituzioni. Come e perché parlarne*, Carocci, Roma 2001.

<sup>15</sup> S. Vanhee, *The Fantastic Institutions*, in “Nu in de Kunsten”, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, online: <https://www.kunsten.be/nu-in-de-kunsten/the-fantastic-institutions/>.

environment, not as a tourist exploitation oasis but as a space for participatory reflection in the narrative and use of citizenship spaces<sup>16</sup>.

### **3. Miguel Vila: la trilogia del PaTreVe**

Vila's work offers us the opportunity to insist on the parallel between landscape and the monstrous established by authors such as Metta and Fiorani. Indeed, in Vila's work, the landscape not only represents a central theme in the comic but also functions as the narrative core around which the stories are structured. In this context, it is essential to address a significant issue: the urban language of the peripheries. The narrative setting does not merely frame the story but effectively becomes a part of it, establishing a continuous interplay between the locale and the emotional and relational experiences of its inhabitants. Consequently, creating a map of a territory transforms into a representation of the cognitive map of the community that inhabits and interacts with that space<sup>17</sup>.

Hence, those familiar with Veneto-related comic production may recall the work of Eliana Albertini, and especially her volume entitled *Malibù*. While Albertini focuses on the abandoned and non-urbanized province of Veneto, Miguel Vila explores the province of urbanization and fragmentation, where the countryside is forced into confrontation with the architecture of the new. Vila aims to place the reader in an uncomfortable position, compelling them to confront the raw and thus unexpected representation of the Veneto territory and the corporeal aspect of humanity [Fig. 2].

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<sup>16</sup> M. Aime, D. Papotti, *L'altro e l'altrove. Antropologia, geografia e turismo*, Einaudi, Torino 2012, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> E. D'Amico, *Padovaland, linguaggio e paesaggio*, in "Doppiozero", 2 gennaio 2021.



[Fig. 2] Covers of the volumes by Miguel Vila: *Padovaland* (2020), *Fiordilatte* (2021), *Comfortless* (2023). Source: <https://www.canicola.net/2020/09/26/miguel-vila/>.

The first two volumes, *Padovaland* and *Fiordilatte*, access the monstrous as the grotesque of the human, as the imperfect, erotic, disemboweled, shameful, repugnant body. Vila moves on a double track: on the one hand, he reconstructs the desolation of a connoted and existing public context, its changes and the reactions triggered by them in the citizens; on the other hand, he renders a picture of human nature at the extreme of its vulnerability, in the disgusting and unacceptable private aspects that although each human being knows, he does not reveal to other people.

Recognisable in Vila's language are the influences of Chris Ware and Nick Drnaso in their treatment of contexts of the human figure. On the other hand, the last chapter of the trilogy, *Comfortless*, shifts the focus from the characters to the pandemic context, gathering in a lucidly paced timeline the phobias and projections of a humanity moving catastrophically towards its end. The silent pages offer an autonomy to the figuration that breaks away from the historically Italian hyper dialogical narrative tradition to let the bodies speak as if they were paintings crowded with details, of a silent disorder. The autonomy reserved by Vila for the context shows itself as a fertile and unashamed perspective to the monstrous everyday, a finally tangible proximity to which the author reminds us that we are exposed and participate.



[Figg. 3, 4] Excerpts from *Padovaland*, p. 18, and *Fiordilatte*, p. 35. Source: <https://www.canicola.net/2020/09/26/miguel-vila/>.

#### 4. Provinciale (HPO) and basso profilo per CAMPOTTO

We have drawn some traces of the monstrous in the contemporary through its virtual representations and narratives on paper. There is also a substratum of activation of places and spaces that stems from the recognition of the generativity of their own internal conflicts, of their own somehow monstrous density. As Elke Van Campenhout points out in *Curating as an environmental mindset [La curatela come mentalità ambientale]*<sup>18</sup>, the potential for interchangeability between artist, curator and audience lies in the interstitial oscillations present in space. The dynamics generated here - echoing Dorothy Smith's research<sup>19</sup> - open up a rethinking of curatorial practice as capable of conveying information through the situated subject. In this sense, two experiences on the territory of the province of Ferrara move: *GiovanInfe* by HPO and *CAMPOTTO: community agreements towards a new station plan [CAMPOTTO: accordi di comunità verso un nuovo piano di stazione]* by APS basso profilo.

*HPO Architetti Ferrara* is an architecture studio that combines the valorisation of historical heritage with design innovation<sup>20</sup>. *GiovanInfe* is a participatory project, launched in 2022, with the aim of making Ferrara youth-friendly. Financed by the Municipality of Ferrara, the 2023 edition is curated by the HPO association, a collective of eleven

<sup>18</sup> E. Van Campenhout, *La curatela come mentalità ambientale*, in P. Di Matteo (a cura di), *Performance + curatela*, Luca Sossella editore, Roma 2021, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> D. E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, Northeastern University press, Boston 1987, p. 154.

<sup>20</sup> HPO, *Provinciale*, online: <https://h-p-o.eu/provinciale>.

architects under 30. The project aims to involve young people in the 18-30 age bracket, collect their thoughts and develop concrete ideas and proposals to build the future city in which to live. The *GiovaInfe* 2023 series of meetings, entitled *Provinciale* [Figg. 5, 6], is an invitation to collect a series of internal points of view on the issues of provincialism and non-metropolitan life. The project reflects on the concept of “provincial”, a term commonly used with an often derogatory value, and invites us in an ironic and creative way to reconsider the terms in which marginality and provincialism can, on the contrary, be resources for what we could call “a visionary limitation”: to give value to the province by raising awareness among its young people and stimulating a new self-determination, finding alternative resources and opportunities to the contemporary urbanization of large population centers.



[Figg. 5, 6] *Provinciale*, Ferrara. Source: <https://h-p-o.eu/provinciale>.

Various issues and ideas are framed and disseminated in the context of the Ferrara community through a cycle of three meetings. The review is developed on two levels: a local one and a national one. The latter is activated through an open call involving youth realities active in marginal territories. The project lays the foundations for a publication summarizing the experience, with which it will subsequently be possible to trace successful paths experimented elsewhere to be replicated in Ferrara itself.

Also in the Ferrara area is the APS *basso profilo*<sup>21</sup> which, among its many activities, is carrying out the Campotto project: community agreements towards a new station plan. Campotto, located in the Po Delta Park, represents an exemplary environmental redevelopment intervention, aimed at preserving and enhancing one of Italy's most delicate ecosystems. This intervention is characterized by its sustainable and non-invasive approach, aimed at minimizing the impact on the natural environment and improving the accessibility and usability of the area without altering its ecological integrity. The project involved the construction of lightweight structures integrated into the landscape, such as elevated wooden walkways, fauna observation points and educational trails, which allow visitors to explore the area in an environmentally friendly manner. The use of natural materials and traditional building techniques helped to reduce the project's ecological footprint. Discussions were also held on the involvement of local communities in the planning process and the sustainable management strategies adopted to ensure the long-term preservation of the Po Delta Park ecosystem. The artist Adelita Husni-Bey was invited to rewrite the management plan of the Campotto Station, a part of the park on the edge of the city of Argenta. The artist chooses to intervene with the practice of Legislative Theatre, developed by Augusto Boal when he was, for a brief period, municipal councilor of São Paulo from 1993 to 1997. Starting from problems and contrasts experienced by the population in relation to the local administration, and in this case with a focus on the rules of access and conservation of the park, the aim of Legislative Theatre is to write actual draft laws collectively, through theatrical performance [Fig. 7].

In the first phase, with a group of actresses, actors and stakeholders, the artist proposed an analysis and debate on the most pressing issues, then staged through four key

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<sup>21</sup> Basso profilo, *CAMPOTTO: accordi di comunità verso un nuovo piano di stazione*, July 23, 2023, online: <https://bassoprofilo.org/2023/07/27/campotto-accordi-di-comunita-verso-un-nuovo-piano-di-stazione/>.

situations, each representing a real conflict. The first issue concerned the control of certain animal species, whose population had grown exponentially thanks to conservation efforts, but caused problems for local farmers. The second issue dealt with the sanctions imposed by the various bodies in charge of managing the different areas of the park, particularly in the border areas, where overlapping competencies were causing confusion and inconvenience. A third issue was related to the difficulties faced by managers of small hostels in proposing events within the park, hampered by rigid and complex regulations. Finally, the last point concerned the preventive flooding of some inhabited areas during the May flooding, a drastic measure that had caused quite a bit of controversy among residents. The inhabitants of Argenta, who were involved in this performance practice, willingly accepted to share the stage with the group of actors, bringing their personal experiences and creating a lively and participatory dialogue.

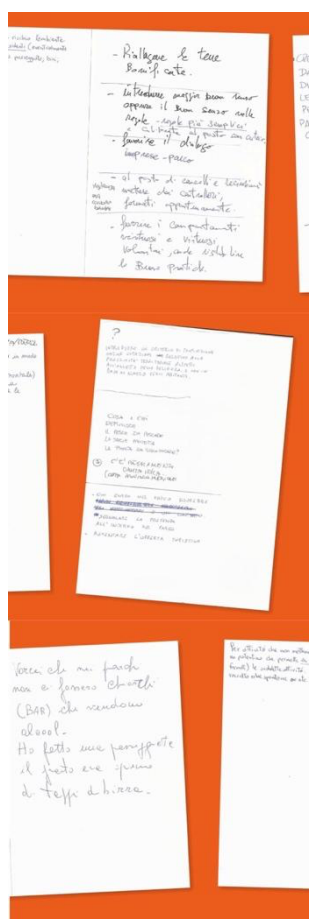


[Fig. 7] Teatro Legislativo, Argenta. Source: <https://bassoprofilo.org/2023/07/27/campotto-accordi-di-comunita-verso-un-nuovo-piano-di-stazione/>.

These moments of shared experiences prepared the ground for the next phase of the path, which was dedicated to the elaboration of proposals for change for the park's management plan. Divided into small groups, the participants worked together to formulate concrete ideas in response to the problems that emerged [Fig. 8]. Two technicians, with solid professional experience in the field of land management, took part in this phase. As Husni-Bey recalls, according to the principles of Boal's method, they



formed the so-called «metabolic cell»<sup>22</sup>, in charge of screening the proposals that emerged, dividing them into those already included in the management plan, those that went beyond it and those that could be integrated to improve the future management of the park. The focus was not only on the feasibility of the proposals, but also on the perception of the citizens, who, as in the *Provinciale* experience, were incorporated into a para-institutional process for the community.



[Fig. 8] Participants' Notes on Action Strategies for Campotto. Source: [https://www.instagram.com/p/C0OhfvXtOQT/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/C0OhfvXtOQT/?img_index=1).

In these cases, albeit with different objectives and methodologies, emerges a desire to affect the provincial territory as a fertile space for the sharing of regenerative processes from below, guided by professionals who, from the variety of different disciplines in the field, are concerned with opening avenues of generativity.

<sup>22</sup> Arnesano, G., *Attivismo per salvaguardare il Delta del Po. Intervista all'artista Adelita Husni-Bey*, in "www.tribune.com", 21 novembre 2023.



## **5. Conclusions**

As illustrated by the cases discussed, the pathways through the monstrous are various. At the same time, there is a strong contemporary need to confront the more uncomfortable and less institutional aspects of our lives and practices. The discourse around the monstrous has solid roots in literature and the arts; however, it is still not widely regarded as a generative practice. Instead, the qualities of the unexpected accompany us daily; they are the “must” through which we walk. The disruption of institutionalized forms of thought encompasses the possibilities for a collective and participatory construction, a communal engagement with what, although largely rejected, constitutes us as human beings in our deepest nature. Design practices, adopting a transformative stance, can concurrently embrace diverse applications of disciplines and modes of navigating urban spaces. The province is one of the preferred terrains for this exploration. It is mixed, infinitely granular, yet it is a substrate that must be described in the most raw and sincere manner. Engaging with the province is a choice, and so is engaging with the monstrous. The necessity of working in a situated manner, giving space to these narratives, and choosing to operate from this perspective is a way to remain within a system beyond its norms. It is a perspective that needs to be continuously stimulated to develop embodied and situated cultural methodologies, where conflict matures as a fertile counterbalance to the sleep of the poppies.