

From the Volcano to the Sea: Part II – The Feminist Group Le Nemesiache in 1970s and 1980s Naples

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'Sea, because sea, beyond any dream or creation, if you weren't we'd create you ourselves, in the moments of our anger, in the screams of our revolutions in the rages of our revenge.' With these evocative verses, reproduced on the ramp of Chelsea Space, visitors are taken into the world of Le Nemesiache: a group founded by Italian artist and philosopher Lina Mangiacapre (1946–2002) in 1970 in Naples. The group involved over 60 women in the creation of experimental films, site-specific performances, poetry events, music, photographs, collages, books and artistic and political pamphlets. Through an intimate and evocative display focused on the decade between 1970 and 1980, writer and dramaturge Giulia Damiani has selected original artefacts and ephemera from the Mangiacapra Archive that narrate key moments and activities of the group. This exhibition, which resulted from Damiani's fellowship in Amsterdam, is the second part of a show conceived for the performance research project 'If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution'.

At the end of the ramp the verses point to a photo depicting a group of women wearing white gowns while playing flutes and reading poetry as they descend towards the sea. The caption reads 'poetry-action at Gaiola, 1978'. In the main space there is a poster of the theatre production *Cinderella. A feminist Psycho-fable* (Amalfi, 1973) and a black-and-white photo of the show in which two women are wearing macabre masks with the names of Aristotle and Plato. What is the relationship between Greek philosophy, Cinderella and Le Nemesiache?

As followers of Nemesis, the Greek goddess of revenge against arrogance, the group Le Nemesiache explored Archaic Greece, in particular the Cumaen civilisation with 'the intention of bringing myth into life again and re-appropriating those forgotten roots and territory'. Far from being an archaeological practice, their work is, as Mangiacapre stated, a 'process of excavation and in one's self and in the stones'. Places such as Mount Vesuvius and The Temple of Mercury (documented in a video by Damiani and included here) became the natural and historical sites of their interventions. In these suggestive yet fragile places, Le Nemesiache evoke the mythical female figures of the Mediterranean Sea, with its sibyls and sirens, in an attempt to counteract the violence perpetrated by patriarchy, affirm a new form of female subjectivity and establish a new relationship with the environment.

As Damiani writes in the small publication that accompanies the exhibition, Le Nemesiache developed the psycho-fable as an 'embodied consciousness-raising method which they practised in order to achieve a transformation of their place'. This ritualistic practice involves body-to-body transmissions enacted through speech, dance and orgiastic music. Close to what could be seen as a form of anthropological street theatre, these rituals were never considered by Le Nemesiache as a cultural representation of reality or as body art, but as a vivid moment of collective life and political action. As they boldly declared in their manifestos from 1975 and 1977 respectively, 'we are feminists not actors'



The Sibyls, dir Lina Mangiacapre, 1977, produced by Le Tre Ghinee Cooperative and Le Nemesiache

and 'creativity is political, it is life, routine, erotics, in harmony with nature and the cosmos'.

The development of creativity as a political weapon in conjunction with the exploration of cinema constitutes the centre of this exhibition. In a vitrine, specially designed in the shape of a sea wave and located at the centre of the space, are displayed articles written by Mangiacapre, political pamphlets signed by the collective but also documents from the Feminist Film Festival organised by Le Nemesiache in Sorrento (1976–95). This includes a group portrait of Mangiacapre with director Sally Potter and actor Tilda Swinton.

Under the direction of Mangiacapre, Le Nemesiache also created Super 8 films including *The Sibyls*, 1977, *The Sea Called Upon Us*, 1978, and *Cinderella*, 1977, which were followed by a feature film *Dido is not Dead*, 1987. All of them are shown here on monitors along with stage costumes and props. As for the theatre productions, the films are considered enactments of psycho-fables, moments of collective emancipation. Music has been a very important conduit in enabling these gatherings and performances to happen, yet it is in the process of post-production that all the elements – the performative, the political and the visionary – come together in the incantatory, psychedelic and abrasive dimension of experimental cinema.

In a video interview of 1998, Mangiacapre stated that the real struggle of 1968 was to take philosophy outside academia, interacting with the fishermen of Margellina in the suburbia of Naples. In a context in which 'everything was politics', she said, 'we thought that everything needed to be art, including the politics ... this is why I became interested in cinema'.

In times when performance and moving image have become popular tools for environmental activism, such as in the protests of Extinction Rebellion, Le Nemesiache's work can be seen as an inspiring model for future actions of ecofeminism that can still take place out there in the Phlegrean Fields through moments of eruptive intimacy and dance, from the volcano to the sea.

Le Nemesiache's films will be screened on 26 November at www.chelseaspace.org

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