

## Chapter 15

# ***Distopie all'italiana: Dystopian Depiction of the Souths of Italy through the Screens (Anna by N. Ammaniti and Mondocane by A. Celli, 2021)***

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### **Abstract**

This chapter looks at how contemporary Italian audiovisual productions, such as Niccolò Ammaniti's mini-series *Anna* and Alessandro Celli's film *Mondocane*, reinvent a dystopia "all'italiana", based on different models and current concerns. These works depict bleak futures through post-apocalyptic tales set in southern Italy: *Anna* takes place in Sicily, where a deadly virus has wiped out the adults, leaving the children to survive on their own; *Mondocane* is set in Taranto, a polluted and abandoned city where orphaned children struggle to survive. Both works use the dystopian setting to criticize the excesses of modernity and draw attention to pressing environmental and societal issues, while establishing a link between reality and fiction. Ultimately, these dystopian tales serve as mirrors for society's current crises and highlight the need for change, aimed at different communities of audiences.

### **Keywords**

dystopia; tv series; Italian cinema; post-apocalyptic representation; crises.

## Introduction

“Framing Souths” through contemporary artistic, literary, and audiovisual expression may seem an arduous task, considering how much the imaginary world associated with these territories has been nurtured by the many models that have inhabited creation and educated minds, sometimes sustaining the idea of a common, diffuse folklore where, in fact, the diversity of cultures, identities, and landscapes should be a source of richness. However, a number of recent works featuring a South — or Souths — seem to be moving away from stereotypes, taking their inspiration from unexpected models and/or projections linked to the present day and its societal issues. To illustrate this trend, I have chosen to explore the concept of dystopia through two recent productions from the contemporary Italian audiovisual panorama. Or, better still, a dystopia “*all’italiana*”, characterizing a genre — in this case serial and cinematic — by associating it with a territory, an era, and specific characteristics, as was the case, more famously, for the “*commedia all’italiana*” (or Italian-style comedy) of the 1960s and 1970s in Italy, a comic-satirical genre with a bittersweet note that took the genre beyond Italy’s borders and remains a solid reference point for foreign audiences to this day. The term is used here without any ironic connotations: by applying to dystopian stories produced in Italy and representing the south of the country, it characterizes a movement (it is still early to talk about a trend) or even a model for future productions. This may sound ambitious, but we cannot ignore the fact that, in the space of a few years, Italy, through different authors and with different types of production (literary, televisual, cinematographic), has given birth to a number of dystopian narratives that echo pressing societal and current concerns.

## A Question of Definitions

Before discussing these works, we need to consider the very definition of dystopia, which seems (already!) to be problematic. Indeed, while common dictionaries, such as that of the encyclopedia Treccani, offer a perfectly acceptable definition<sup>1</sup>, it should be noted that the French reference site CNRTL makes no mention of the term «dystopia» and suggests «reality» as the antonym of utopia (commonly cited as the antithesis of the original term)<sup>2</sup>. This raises the question of the difficulty of defining the concept. Cécile Leconte and Cédric Passard

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1 «Prediction, description or representation of a future state of affairs, with which, contrary to utopia and mostly in open polemic with trends perceived in the present, highly negative situations, developments, political-social and technological arrangements are foreshadowed (thus equivalent to *negative utopia*)» (Treccani 2022, s.v. “distopia”). All the translations of Italian and French texts are my own.

2 CNRTL (National Textual and Lexical Resources Centre; 2012, s.v. “utopie”).

refer to «the current trend for dystopias, whose very word, long considered an Anglicism, has become commonplace in the French language», because it is «in fact an omnipresent cultural form in literature (particularly, but not only, science fiction), cinema, television, videogames, manga and comic strips, and even music» (2020-2021: 9). Seen as a copy, in other languages, of the English word dystopia, etymology tells us that it is a combination of the Greek words *dys* (negation, malformation) and *topos* (place). Dystopia would therefore indicate a *harmful place*, a *bad place*. Above all, it is a vision of the world, in a more or less near future, produced by an author, through an imaginary or anticipatory narrative. The issues raised by Leconte and Passard are probably a bit strong:

Is dystopia simply the expression of a “disenchantment with the world”, a loss of faith in old ideals and growing anxiety in the face of rising risks and uncertainties, particularly those linked to the collapse of societies and the very self-destruction of the human species? (*ibidem*)

This is a way of linking the narrative (the imaginary) with considerations relating to the society that produced these same narratives. Dystopia is a term that has become very popular on a global scale. It should be seen here as a trend, more than a genre — because drama, fantasy, and other genres can be vehicles for this desire to describe a dystopian future. At the level of non-Italian productions, examples abound: in literature, one cannot fail to cite *1984* (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*) by George Orwell (1949) or even *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932); at the cinema, science fiction films (often adaptations of novels and/or literary sagas) such as *Dune*<sup>3</sup>, *Mad Max*<sup>4</sup>, *The Hunger Games*<sup>5</sup>, as well as their recent remakes and/or spin-offs, are just a few examples, together with other cult films such as *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang (1927), *Escape from New York* by John Carpenter (1981), or even *Terminator* by James Cameron (1984), at various times. Their common denominator is science fiction as a means of anticipating a difficult future, proposing in words, images, and sounds an alternative world inspired by our present that goes beyond the notion of simple

3 The literary saga *Dune*, written by Frank Herbert and first published in 1965, with several volumes until 1986, was first adapted in 1984 by David Lynch, and will be followed by a multi-part adaptation directed by Denis Villeneuve in 2021.

4 The film by Australian director George Miller dates back to 1979, giving birth to a franchise consisting of several films: *Mad Max 2 - The Road Warrior* (Miller, 1981), *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (Miller and Ogilvie, 1985), until recent episodes *Mad Max - Fury Road* (2015) and *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* (2024), again directed by Miller.

5 It is based on Suzanne Collins' multi-volume book, which includes *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), *Mockingjay* (2010), and the prequel *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2020). Five films make up the saga *Hunger Games* at the cinema: *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012), *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (Lawrence, 2013), *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1* (Lawrence, 2014), *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2* (Lawrence, 2015), *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (Lawrence, 2023).

entertainment. As we have seen, other media expressions are part of this trend, but it is the small screen that recently seems to be offering a privileged space for the dissemination of dystopian stories through television series, thanks to the transnational roll-out of SVOD<sup>6</sup> platforms providing access, to ambitious (especially financially) audiovisual (and sometimes transmedia) productions that are already cult hits, such as the series and mini-series *Black Mirror*<sup>7</sup>, *The Handmaid's Tale*<sup>8</sup>, *The Last of Us*<sup>9</sup>, etc. These few examples have met (and are still meeting) a great international success. It is easy to think that the spectators are convinced, in a certain way, by the link with reality, with a topicality which they experience, or at least know, more or less closely. This link with an alleged “true history” or, at least, a history that may come true, is the initial premise, the wager to hook a large part of the public that can read in these stories (literary, serial, cinematographic) what they want to find in them: a way to frighten themselves in the face of an uncertain and necessarily dramatic future, or a way to make a reading of a History (with a capital H) in progress and/or yet to come — like almost a document or documentary, despite the qualification of fiction. The hybrid nature of the dystopian story allows for this confusion of genres. Indeed, according to Jean-Pierre Esquenazi,

fiction is the result of a combination of two representational operations: the first consists in inventing characters and events in which these characters are the heroes; the second endeavors to situate the narrative within a real universe or one inspired by a real universe, which serves as the setting for this narrative. (2009: 87)

Thus, the very definition of the word “fiction” refers to the idea of a fantasy creation that transforms reality. And this is undoubtedly even truer for alternative narratives such as dystopias and euchronias, which constitute a kind of revisiting of History based on a founding event<sup>10</sup>. Viewers cannot avoid reading back and forth between the history they have experienced, or are likely to experience from their own point of view, and the fictional narrative presented to them by an author or a group of authors. In this projection into the future, the question is whether a better world or a nightmare awaits *us*. In dystopia, the pessimistic counterpart of utopia, the aim is to evoke a distorted reflection of reality and warn of potential abuses, from a critical and political perspective (Clary 2020). The success of this trend is due both to the fact that it is rooted in the real, the known and the probable — especially in these uncertain

6 Subscription Video On Demand.

7 It is a British series whose latest seasons were produced and broadcast by Netflix.

8 Based on Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel, it has been a hit series for 5 seasons (2017-).

9 It is TV series produced by HBO (2023-) and based on the action-adventure videogame developed by Naughty Dog in 2013.

10 See the definitions and examples given by Eric B. Henriot in his book *L'Histoire revisitée, Panorama de l'euchronie sous toutes ses formes* (2005).

post-pandemic times marked by international geopolitical tensions — and in the imaginary, the unknown and the unattainable. It is this ambiguity that gives the dystopia its special character, also seen as a kind of anti-utopia; in other words, history turned upside down, in a negative sense. In any case, this is the line taken by the authors of two contemporary Italian audiovisual productions: one serial, *Anna* (Ammaniti, 2021) and one cinematic, *Mondocane* (Celli, 2021).

## **Italian Dystopian Fiction on the Screens: *Anna* and *Mondocane***

The two examples chosen for this study are representative of the audiovisual panorama in Italy today from the point of view of the transnational circulation of works between television serialization and cinema (feature-length fiction films). Indeed, the affirmation of audiovisual consumption through SVOD platforms is now a reality, boosting the visibility of films and, above all, series worldwide. The TV series are now an extension of the cinematographic experience which, until now, has characterized Italian audiovisual production seen in its movement from local to global (and vice versa, for the return image we can see there), in the context of a transnational circulation of audiovisual production and thus of the availability of products created both for an Italian and a foreign viewer, also seen in the light of the *European television fiction renaissance*, according to the definition given by scholars Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni (2020). In this global market, Italy is no exception, since its series, more than the cinema by now, manage to meet a very large mass of the public, thanks to the development of new but now established distribution channels, which literally exploded during the pandemic and the lockdown but which already existed before and are already modifying themselves to adapt to the continuous evolution of consuming these products. Today, TV series — but also, sometimes, the most successful films — manage to export themselves, thanks to video-on-demand, paid platforms and/or free channels, but also to commercial distribution. At the cinema, it is much more complicated now but film festivals continue to give visibility to recent films, both blockbuster and niche.

For this study, the choice has been made to focus on two recent audiovisual productions: a TV series<sup>11</sup> and cinematographic fiction which, naturally, present both commonalities and differences. From a scientific point of view, bringing together two works that differ in format, length, target audience, mode of expression, aesthetic choices, etc. might seem strange, almost forced. However, it must be admitted that, despite the different categorization, the two intentions

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11 For reasons of methodology and relevance, I will not consider the analysis of Niccolò Ammaniti's book *Anna* (2015), at the origin of the series, which takes up the title, the story, and the characters.

can be brought together in a movement, albeit brief, dealing with the present and the future through the anticipation (imagined or prefigured) of a dark future (near or far), of an imaginary (to the point) situation of the society, which uses comparable elements to portray (including the use of children and forms of violence), and which are set in southern Italy, whose regions and *film commissions* (Sicily, Apulia) offered their contribution to the production.

Thus, the 6-episode miniseries *Anna* by Niccolò Ammaniti (i.e., the adaptation for the small screen of the author's novel of the same name) and the science-fiction film *Mondocane* by Alessandro Celli, both premiering in 2021, have several elements in common: the evocation of a post-apocalyptic society, a world populated by little girls, little boys, and teenagers; the loss of reference points and the construction of a new hierarchical organization; the deliberate setting in territories in Southern Italy, namely Sicily for *Anna* and the city of Taranto for *Mondocane*, thought of precisely as two islands, geographical and/or symbolic as the case may be; social issues, with a virus capable of decimating the adult population in the first case, and pollution that has generated a form of hell on Earth in the other; etc. While the dystopia is environmental in *Mondocane*, with the evocation of a place ruined by an ecological disaster, it tightens around the human in *Anna* and a return to the natural state, whether in the hierarchy of human relationships or in the invasion of a formerly urbanized territory where, inexorably, Nature reclaims its rights. Between ecotopia and prophetic narrative, symbols are everywhere (art, religion, economy, law), to raise awareness of the excesses of modernity, like a distorting mirror capable of magnifying the images of the present, in a discourse no doubt intended to be prophetic.

The airing on television and the almost concomitant, albeit coincidental, cinema release of these two audiovisual productions leads one to believe that contemporary Italian cinematography and seriality, understood as a means of expression and militant testimony with a didactic vocation, capable of reaching different target communities, in Italy as elsewhere, appear as a “necessity”, that is, to grasp topics of burning topical interest in order to denounce, warn, evoke the drifts of the present in order to better prepare the future as well as the relationship that human beings have, today and tomorrow, with their environment. In both cases, the presence of a South is certainly not without significance. This is one aspect, among others, that my study intends to address, through the analysis of the contents and aesthetics of the works in the corpus: perhaps this will allow us to better understand the meaning and functions of dystopia as a choice to narrate Italy, the South, mankind (?), at the beginning of the 2020s, in a period — as we all know — that is particularly uncertain for contemporary societies.

## **Anna, A Prophetic Tale?**

Niccolò Ammaniti's *Anna* is a drama mini-series inspired by (and faithful to) the novel of the same name published in 2015 by the author, here showrunner of his second series after *Il miracolo* (2018). It is an Italian-French-American co-production, aired in Italy by Sky on April 23, 2021. It consists of 6 episodes, each lasting around 50 minutes: *Il bosco ci protegge* (The forest protects us), *Tu devi fare il gelato* (You must make ice cream), *Ridono le iene* (The hyenas laugh), *Il cinghiale invisibile* (The invisible boar), *I gatti sono superiori* (Cats are superior), and *Cose da fare quando la mamma muore* (Things to do when mum dies). The plot is as follows:

Sicily, 2020. A lethal virus has wiped out the entire adult population of the island, including children who have already reached puberty. Maria Grazia, an independent and courageous woman, before dying, left her children Anna and Astor, aged 9 and 2 at the time, a notebook full of instructions on how to survive without her, advising Anna to teach Astor to read and to always protect him. Anna, now 14, has taken her mother's instructions to the letter, lives camped out with her little brother in the house that has become a messy den, and only comes out to procure what is necessary for survival. Her goal is to find a cure before Astor grows up, and she will face an innumerable series of trials. (Mymovies 2021)

It is a journey through a post-apocalyptic Sicily, undertaken by Anna, a teenager searching for her little brother Astor, who disappeared while Anna was away. Only teenagers live in this world because all the adults have been infected by a lethal virus, *la Rossa* (the red one, which gets its name from the red spots on the skin), that kills humans after puberty. One fact that may seem anecdotal but we cannot keep silent is the irony of fate: although it is a fairy tale, the fact is that filming of the series began six months before the outbreak of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, at the beginning of each episode two sentences appear, written in white capital letters on a black background: «The series Anna is based on the novel of the same name published in 2015. The outbreak from Covid 19 broke out six months after filming began». It is therefore difficult not to hear the echo of this science fiction tale with what the audience, the spectator, has faced in so-called “real life”. The cruel tale thus becomes a prophetic tale, or almost, accentuating the effect of dystopian tragedy through this troubling reference to contemporary reality.

The series contains various elements that lead to the idea of a South afflicted by a drastic change of state, in both its human and natural aspects. What the viewer sees is an abandoned Sicily: places like Palermo, the region's capital, are generally deprived of life (as in all perfect dystopias, in keeping with the canons

of the genre<sup>12</sup>), between city center reclaimed by nature and animals (birds, in particular) and abandoned suburbs (collapsed bridges, wrecked cars on the roads).

Around the cities — and this is the pendant to these urban places — there are the natural, unspoiled spaces: forests populated by animals, fairytale landscapes that bring a very present touch of oneiricism, of mysticism, of constant poetry throughout the episodes (and the bewitching soundtrack accompanies this constant poetry) that contrasts with the chaos of the “human” spaces with the many waste and consumer objects scattered everywhere.

The curated direction enhances the landscapes thanks to long shots; for example, in the fifth episode, the Mount Etna suggests the idea of a non-terrestrial landscape: it looks like the moon, or another planet, mineral, devoid of human beings, like on a post-apocalyptic Earth.

The sea, finally, is barely visible. It is the protagonist at the end of the last episode, when it is a matter of Anna and Astor leaving the island, of crossing a threshold, a border, to go to Italy, to the continent, where the hope of another life is perhaps possible. In the end, however, there is the hope of a promised land, a land of possibilities. It is about escaping from the south, escaping from the island, from a closed space. And, after all, what if *la Rossa* had only touched the island?

The symbolic return to nature also concerns human beings, who seem to return to their wild essence, as a symbolic condemnation that is not necessarily positive. For example, Astor (like other characters) is often mistaken for an animal through disguise and zoomorphic masks. As in the animal kingdom, there is no law but that of the strongest within the herd. And in every herd there is a leader: here it is Angelica, a cruel and emotionless leader, whose face is blurred with white and whose hair is covered by a long-skinned peruke, who kills and mutilates according to her desires or needs. She is a guru, a prophet, a guide for a mass of children without reference points.

Like in other dystopias, Anna, the protagonist, makes a journey of initiation (along with a physical, geographical travel through Sicily). There is a symbolic journey that strips her of her innocence and quickly leads her to adulthood, even before her mother dies. This idea of self-seeking involves trials, stages to be overcome, which are marked by the cruelty of interpersonal relationships, such as humiliation, dehumanization, verbal, moral, and physical violence. For example, in episode 3, children are caught like rats, caught with glue, then locked up in a cage (by another child), before forced labor, chained, while being fed with animal kibble.

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12 Just think of the latest hit distributed on Amazon Prime Video, *The Last of Us* (2023-), the TV adaptation of the video game of the same name.



On this journey of death and nightmare, Anna encounters a gallery of characters that belong to a “Tim Burton-esque” universe, like a macabre and cruel version of *Alice in Wonderland*, a fantastic tale but with a concrete possibility of realization, between blood and poetry.

Among the many characters encountered by both Anna and the spectator (the evil twin, the guardian of Etna, etc.), there is Katia, *la Picciridduna*<sup>13</sup>, interpreted by the Italian actress Roberta Mattei. Katia, the only adult being to have survived *la Rossa*, is “anomalous”, in the etymological sense of the term: “irregular”, because s/he is hermaphrodite, man and woman in the same body. Katia is a theatrical character, a mythological “monster”, who underlines the symbolic aspect of Anna’s odyssey.

## ***Mondocane*, between Ecological Drama and Science Fiction**

The feature-length film of dramatic and fantastical genre *Mondocane* was released in September 2021, after its presentation at the Venice Film Festival’s Critics’ Week. Produced by Matteo Rovere and directed by Alessandro Celli, the film takes a bold approach to the aesthetics and content of contemporary Italian cinema. The plot is as follows:

In a not too distant future, Taranto is a ghost town surrounded by barbed wire where no one, not even the police, dares to enter. The poorest are left struggling for survival, while a criminal gang, the Formiche (the ants), led by the charismatic Testacalda (Alessandro Borghi), vies for territory with another gang. Two 13-year-old orphans, who grew up together, dream of joining that gang. Pietro, known as Mondocane for having passed the acceptance test in the gang, imposes Christian on the group, which mocks him by calling him Pisciasotto. But something cracks in their equilibrium, putting everything they believe in at risk. (SIC 2024)

The film did not meet with great box-office success<sup>14</sup>, despite its originality, the presence in the cast (and promotion of the film) of actor Alessandro Borghi, a true phenomenon of Italian acting as well as an essential and chameleonic figure of contemporary male stardom, and its distribution abroad. The film has been sold in a large number of foreign countries, either under its original title or in an English translation (*Dogworld*), more for the “action movie” aspect, almost a new *Mad Max*: an interpretation of the film that does not really reflect the true content and moral of the story nor the director’s intentions. The film opens with a caption in yellow letters on a black background, which sets the scene using strong language to evoke the idea of an area that has been

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13 In Sicilian dialect, the term means “the big girl”.

14 The film’s box office gross was 118,000 Euros (Mymovies 2021).

degraded and abandoned by the State, by the Law and by Mankind: «In the favela born in the shadow of the steelworks, the children of neglect survive without law. Forgotten, in the symbolic city of a country marked by environmental degradation».

In both form and content, we find the same central ideas of the series *Anna*: abandonment, the absence of laws and rules, being forgotten. However, in *Mondocane* the territory is “a city” and the virus is nothing but “environmental degradation”. It is a denunciation film, a cry of alarm very much linked to current events and the present because it is a symbolic representation of the contaminated area (here, a no-go zone) of the ex-Ilva steelworks in the Apulian city of Taranto. Many press articles, from specialist and activist journals to Italy’s major national dailies, have reported on the scandal of land contamination by industrial waste, which has led to an increase in illness among the population. This ecological disaster has left its mark on people’s minds.

In the film (also), the steel mills have poisoned the inhabitants of the area, causing many deaths. The many orphans are “imprisoned” in institutions, or live in the favela, together with the adult survivors who exploit them, in a cartoonish atmosphere of yellowish, orange, brownish tones, in a world contaminated by pollution. The many large chimneys continue to belch their smoke over the beach, coloring the sky and spreading their poison as far as the sea.

The protagonists are Pietro and Christian, two young boys who were first friends and then separated by the betrayal of one of them. Like the other children, they are left to their own devices, brought up with violence, weapons and theft: learning and initiation take place through weapons and fighting, and elimination is natural; again like for animals, only the strongest and bravest survive.

Like in *Anna*, they too are victims of the absence of reference points in an abandoned world, without rules (or one has to transgress them to survive), without a father and without God: the cross, a religious symbol, is nothing more than a piece of trash like any other found at the bottom of the sea. Thus, the father figure, the guide is embodied by Testacalda, the charismatic and violent leader of the gang. He gives meaning to the lives of these children when the environment does not allow it. The children, called “the ants”, are Testacalda’s soldiers. However, the most interesting aspect remains the message of denunciation, the stern look that condemns what is happening in Taranto, as a city polluted by the former Ilva. In an interview, actor Alessandro Borghi also refers to the event:

this story concerns us closely and concerns a city that has had a serious problem for many years, even though some people pretend it does not exist [...]. In the film, Taranto has become a favela where anarchy reigns: maybe this will make some people think... (Aricò 2022)

The fact is staged, in words, images, and sounds: it is a well-known fact that is also treated abroad as the symbol of a health disaster in Italy, a scandal that is represented and re-presented here through dystopian storytelling.

## **(Partial) Conclusions**

Despite the different character of the two filmic works, the analysis of *Anna* and *Mondocane* reveals a number of similarities that make it possible to classify these audiovisual products as two examples of the *distopie all'italiana*. Indeed, what do they tell us about the present and the future? They are, we have seen, the mirror of a present reality, where the South (Sicily and Taranto) acts as a laboratory, as an instrument to present things to the spectator and perhaps better involve him. Through the dystopian tale, it is a matter of evoking this South (and its evils) in a different way: the fairy tale, science fiction, the fable allow us to draw other forms, to interpret, to blur a reality that is difficult, perhaps, to film if not through the documentary. It is above all a question of putting one's finger where it hurts: a place, a society, the human who causes his own downfall. One has to make a journey to get out of it, to find a way out. In terms of the author-work-recipient relationship: if a message is conveyed, the film or series serves as a vector of ideas evoking the possibility and above all the need for change (of habits, consciences, values, points of reference). Understood as a mirror of a society's current crises, dystopia is not so far away. This would be the message.

Therefore, this Italian-style dystopia serves to underline the very strong theme of the fragile environment to be protected, in one way or another: human's damage to nature and, consequently, to himself. The Souths, which lose their folkloric and de facto marginal aspect, are a laboratory where expression becomes universal. The awareness does not take place (for once?) in large urban centers. The dramas are also those of the peripheral territories, these lands of the forgotten that must be reconsidered, protected, in the face of the great challenges of contemporary societies and the dramas generated by global dehumanization. The place, which is admittedly circumscribed, recognizable for some, anonymous for others, allows the universality of the subject matter, since the themes tackled, the prophetic nature of the stories, and their facilitated international dissemination. The question is perhaps a little ambitious: is the Italian (or even Mediterranean) dystopia a new form of mythical and allegorical storytelling that can help structure collective imagination in a time of great change? Is this a far cry from the idyllic vision of the Mediterranean, presented as a lost paradise, or one to be reclaimed? The Mediterranean is said to be a victim of modernization and is facing the dangers caused by the Anthropocene: the over-exploitation of natural resources, the threat of atmospheric pollution, the destruction of ecosystems, the concreting of the coastline, etc. (Jourdain-Annequin and Claval 2022: 297-309). The return to nature is sometimes idyllic

(*Anna*), sometimes hellish (*Mondocane*). But it is the human race that must change, and that constitutes both the greatest danger and the greatest hope: the face is double, the balance is complicated and reconciliation difficult. It is a complex history in the making.

The dystopian fiction allows us to think about the future in order to influence the present, as a cry of alarm, therefore, through artistic works with a didactic vocation, addressed to the masses and to communities of spectators, through cinema and/or television. These are works with a message: and that is perhaps the role of dystopia, understood as a contemporary example of the traditional *impegno* (commitment) in Italian audiovisual creation.

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