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Hills, Helen [orcid.org/0000-0002-9024-189X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9024-189X) (2018) *Introduction:Directions to Baroque Naples*. *Open Arts Journal*.

<https://doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2018w00>

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# INTRODUCTION: DIRECTIONS TO BAROQUE NAPLES

Helen Hills

## Abstract

*How have place in Naples and the place of Naples been imagined, chartered, explored, and contested in baroque art, history and literature? This special issue revisits baroque Naples in light of its growing fashionability. After more or less ignoring Naples for decades, scholars are now turning from the well-trodden fields of northern and central Italy to the south. This is, therefore, an opportune moment to reconsider the paradigms according to which scholarship has – often uncritically – unrolled. How has scholarship kept Naples in its place? How might its place be rethought?*

**Keywords:** Naples, baroque, *meridionalismo*, viceregency, colonialism, Spanish empire, architecture, urbanism, excess, ornament, marble, Vesuvius, Neapolitan baroque art, city and body, Jusepe de Ribera, city views, still-life painting, saints and city, place, displacement

**Full text:** <http://openartsjournal.org/issue-6/article-0>

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2018w00>

## Biographical note

Helen Hills is Professor of History of Art at the University of York. She taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Manchester before being appointed Anniversary Reader at York. Her research focuses on Italian baroque art and architecture in relation to religion, gender, and social class, exploring how architecture and place are productive and discontinuous, even disjunctive. She has published widely on baroque theory, southern Italian baroque art and architecture; religious devotion and social divisions; miracles and materiality; and post-industrial architecture. Her books include: *The Matter of Miracles: Neapolitan Baroque Architecture & Sanctity* (Manchester University Press, 2016), which investigates the relationship between matter and miracle in baroque Naples; *Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents* (Oxford University Press, 2004), awarded the Best Book Prize by the Society of Early Modern Women; and *Marmi Mischì Siciliani: Invenzione e identità* (Società Messinese di Storia Patria, 1999). Edited books include *Rethinking the Baroque* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), an exploration of 'baroque' at the interstices of history, philosophy, and art. Recent publications include: 'Taking place: Architecture and holiness in seventeenth-century Italy', in A. Payne (ed), *Renaissance and Baroque Architecture. Companion to the History of Architecture*, vol. I, (London: Wiley, 2017).

# INTRODUCTION: DIRECTIONS TO BAROQUE NAPLES

Helen Hills, University of York

## Introduction

This special issue investigates artworks, literature, and histories of baroque Naples through a critical interrogation of their relationship to place. It aims to consider 'baroque Naples' as a critical question, not in terms of periodisation, stylistic moment, or place set in time, as if these things are already known and settled, but in terms of convulsion, shifts, differences, and disparities. What are the dislocating effects of baroque interventions? How have place in Naples and the place of Naples been imagined, invented, chartered, explored, and contested in baroque art, history, and literature? By what means – scholarly, cultural, social, political, and economic – has Naples been kept in its place and with what consequence for the interpretation of its culture? In what ways might 'Naples' be usefully thought, less in terms of reassertion of identity or of city as given and place in terms of continuity, than in relation to displacement, difference, and disjunction? What hitherto obscured aspects of Neapolitan baroque culture might thereby be allowed to emerge? The aim is not to interpret the particular in terms of the general, nor to essentialise either 'Naples' or 'baroque'. Instead, we wish to bring the terms 'baroque' and 'Naples' together percussively and generatively. The term 'baroque' is thus not posed as description, style, or period; nor does 'Naples' simply designate place as given. Indeed, one issue explored here is the extent to which 'baroque' and 'Naples' have been held apart or collapsed into each other without sufficient consideration of ellipses or friction between them. Baroque Naples and its forging, discursively, materially, technologically, and aesthetically are here examined in innovative essays by seven scholars. They investigate baroque Naples in relation to architecture, marble, painting, prints, written texts, maps, geology, power, and privilege in order to bring the relation between material transformation and place into focus.

An interrogation of the terms 'Naples' and 'baroque' necessarily foregrounds the problem of place. What possibilities for rethinking baroque Naples are opened, if one resists assumptions that 'the city' is a given, or that place secures continuity or is a passive container that accommodates interventions that take place *within* it while leaving the 'container' unchanged, apart from

mere expansion? It is important to acknowledge the inability of linear narrative either to accommodate effectively the spatiality of historical processes or to interrogate that spatiality. An assumption that place is *a priori* tends to occlude the politics of place. If place is not assumed to be fixed and stable, what part does it play? What happens when place is thought, not only in terms of extension, but in terms of contestation, discontinuity, and dislocation? What, then, emerges as at stake in the place and places of Naples?

Recent scholarship has provided innovative approaches to materiality and the processes of transformation in art and architecture (Lloyd Thomas, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Benjamin, 2011). On the whole, however, art-historical engagement with the material turn has been limited to objects, materials, and techniques (Anderson, Dunlop & Smith, 2015). The question of how materiality might relate specifically to *place* has fallen out of focus. Historical scholarship and art and architectural history tend to take the place of Naples for granted, treating it as passive backdrop to more spectacular or momentous events that are understood to unfold within it or even on it, such as the 'arrival' of Caravaggio which suffices to explain his 'influence'. Space and place are thus conceived in terms of measurable extent. Yet, such approaches have been challenged by scholarship in geography and philosophy (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; De Landa, 2002). Space, by these accounts, is intensive as well as extensive. While such scholarship focuses on film, maps, and contemporary issues, it has opened the question of how place might be thought in intensive terms historically in relation to art, architecture, and texts of all kinds. This collection aims to bring place, displacement, materiality, and transformation into relation. The city of Naples is approached here as provisional, in production, under pressure, contested, and riven with contradiction and conflict, rather than as a fixed, stable place or circumscribed location.

The questions raised above are explored in divergent ways in the essays presented here. Below, I introduce those essays, before moving to a wider discussion of the salient issues by which the field is riven: excess and ornament, the viceregency and colonialism, and *meridionalismo*.

## Individual Essays

In a brilliant essay Sergius Kodera explores Giovan Battista della Porta's performative natural philosophy in relation to the topography of Naples in which the fate of human beings is inscribed topographically, physiologically, and somatically. Della Porta's

*Chirophysiognomia* (1677), an extraordinary treatise on palmistry, probably written between 1599 and 1608, is interpreted via Naples' topographies and geographies. Body and place are seen to be co-implicated, not in terms of embodiment, but in terms of metonymy and the unravelling of fate. Della Porta's treatise purports to make sense of the palms of hands and soles of feet of criminals, a process of discerning the hidden laws of nature that Kodera relates to Naples' theatrical topography of criminal management, by tracing the ways in which bodies, texts, and places were produced relationally and topographically. He relates the upper-class discussions that took place in della Porta's palace to the stages and traces of criminalisation and cadaverisation of bodies across the city. Convicted criminals were paraded through the streets of Naples before their execution in Piazza Mercato; corpses were then transferred beyond the city limits to a gallows at Ponte della Maddalena, where they were left to rot. Distinct places were activated to punish criminal bodies and to reduce human beings to corpses and signs. Thus, the manipulation of appearances and audiences in the theatrical marvels that della Porta sported in his palace had an analogous counterpart in the streets and squares and 'limits' of Naples. The study of nature and the marvellous display of elite knowledge worked in a metonymic relation across bodies, texts, and places, which also operated synoptically. Along the way, what emerges forcefully are both the ostensible gulf and the intimate interweave between magus and multitude, nobles and criminals in baroque Naples. 'Naples' emerges from this essay as the horrible embroiling of the cultural formation of noble elites and processes of criminalisation.

Helen Hills' essay examines the depiction of the city of Naples and specific locations within it, in relation to the presence of the divine and protector saints, to investigate the ways in which the politics of colonialism enter in that relation. It suggests that the relationships between city and viceroy and city and protector saints were productive in metonymic and analogous relation to each other. Spanish colonial rule over Naples opens a doubling in terms of rulership in the figure of the viceroy, who represents the absent King, that is seen here as generatively analogous to the relationship between protector saint and heavenly court. The relationships amongst the divine court, the city of Naples, and protector saint, explored in paintings in seventeenth-century Naples, are interpreted as informed by analogous relationships amongst monarch, viceroy, and the city. Hills suggests that paintings by Micco Spadaro, Jusepe de Ribera, and others encompass the holy or saintly dimension of the politics of baroque

Naples. Rather than treating these artworks as if they represent a pre-existing political contract (viceregency), it is argued that they interrogate the legitimacy of what is held in place. Hence the fracturing and scattering of place is related in the essays by both Kodera and Hills to the fracturing of bodies and their regulation. Both Kodera and Hills are concerned with place in terms of metonym, edges, limits, and what is posited as beyond the edge of representability. It is the margins from which things are defined. Early modern maps of Naples do not show the gallows outside the city, observes Kodera. The place falls off maps. The Ponte della Maddalena represents the furthest limit of the city, but the stinking corpses at the gallows on its further side showcased a first and unforgettable view for *forestieri* on their way into Naples. The festering pit and gallows in Kodera's essay find a counterpart in the Largo Mercatello during the plague discussed by Hills.

Joris van Gastel considers marble inlay in light of a historiography that in various ways has seen it as troubling and has sought to marginalise it. His essay takes up Naples as a place of 'excess' as construed by art historians, alighting on Justi's 1922 characterisation of Neapolitan baroque ornament as 'overgrown' or 'added on'. By refocusing on Naples where ornament is emphatic, he suggests that it is possible to trace the potential of a material approach to materials. To that end, van Gastel turns to the fabulously coloured and sculptural inlaid marbles that adorn many chapels and churches in Naples, and which have long been regarded as one of Naples' most distinctive art forms. Their material richness and visual complexity have often been treated as overwhelming or vulgar, as obstacle to interpretation and 'excessive'. Van Gastel questions the schemata by which such inlaid marble adornment has been studied to suggest that it might more usefully be read in relation to radical material transformation, brought about by nature and artists, related intimately to place, locality, and resources, to the history of images, and to social and technical histories. Thus, marble inlay can be related to specific currents in Naples, geological, artistic, artisanal, and their inter-relationships. Materials and technique – including the mobilisation of groups of workers – are part of this. This essay thus joins a current in recent scholarship that investigates the inter-relationships amongst materiality, telluric philosophy, geology, and the socio-political history of Naples (Cocco, 2013, pp.453–475; Hills, 2016, pp.136–173), which is also pursued here by Alfonso Tortora and Sean Cocco.

While Vesuvius has habitually been conceived in terms of cosmopolitanism and the Grand Tour, viewing the volcano from Naples and northern Europe, as it

were, Tortora and Cocco investigate the *città vesuviana* ('Vesuvian city'), the Neapolitan hinterland encircling Vesuvius, in terms of inter-relationships between geological and historical transformations. Their essay attempts to track geological and socio-historical inter-relationships through the lens of the Somma-Vesuvius volcano and the settlements around it after 1631.

They seek to trace transformation in terms of the co-shaping of cultural formation and geof ormation, and of stochasticity, rather than linear configuration.

Art history has traditionally tended to dichotomise 'native traditions' and 'foreign currents' or 'taste' and adhered to the notion that cultural 'influence' between Spain and Italy was homogeneous and unidirectional, with Italian renaissance ideas spreading to the Iberian peninsula and native Italians resisting (or embracing) 'Spanish culture'. It is partly for these reasons that Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652), a Spaniard living in Naples, has assumed a pivotal role in Neapolitan art history. The 'Spanishness' or otherwise of his work is assumed to be key to its interpretation. This issue is interrogated here in radically divergent ways in the essays by Bogdan Cornea and Edward Payne. Payne treats Ribera as 'a hybrid figure' and 'a man between two countries'. He argues that the signature he sometimes used, *Jusepe de Ribera español*, inscribes Ribera textually, pictorially, and corporeally into the fabric of Naples. Ribera's repeated returns in painting and prints to certain themes, including St Jerome and Silenus, forms part of a characteristic working that repeats, reverses, turns, doubles and mirrors images. This habitual doubling might be seen as informed by the complex cultural politics of viceregal Naples and its relation to Madrid and the Spanish monarchy, itself a form of mirroring and doubling. Ribera's interest in the great translator Jerome may be seen in analogous terms.

Cornea turns to the question of violence in Ribera's work. Ribera's many depictions of the flaying of saint Bartholomew, like those of other forms of violence including hanging, have repeatedly been explained as a 'reflection' of Naples' supposedly particularly violent nature, which, in turn, is usually blamed on the blood-thirsty Spanish. Ribera's violent subject matter is thus seen as 'reflection' of the violence of Spanish Naples. Cornea rejects the claims that violence in Ribera's work is an index of physical violence in seventeenth-century Naples and that it is best interpreted in terms of representation of such putative realities. He argues instead that Ribera's violence runs deeper in his canvases. A refusal to square subject and technique allowed him to produce and explore forms of violence that are pictorial and material. Hence canvas, paint,

flesh, and skin worked, not in literal reference to a 'reality' outside the canvas, and not in alignment or identity with each other, but in violent relations of displacement in relation to figure and surface. Thus, Cornea seeks to locate violence in terms, not of pictorial materiality working in identity with subject, but as a dislocation between meaning produced by materials and the subject depicted.

Neapolitan still-life painting offers fascinating depictions of fish, flowers, silver vessels, and food. Christopher Marshall tracks a shift in the critical – and market – fortunes of still life from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. Domenico de' Dominici's *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti napoletani* (1742–5) accords particular interest to 'talented painters of flowers, fruit, fish, hunting scenes etc', which Marshall claims to be a first attempt at a 'schematic outline of a regional school of Italian still life painting'. Marshall's investigation of prices of paintings and payments to artists has unearthed useful information on patrons and collections, and evidence of increasing specialisation. Collaborative painting emerges as significant. It appears that the discrepancy in Naples between the value of still-lives and history painting was less marked than in Rome. Why this may have been so, the distinctive qualities of Neapolitan still-life, beyond price and size, and the ways in which, for instance, the Recco family workshop managed to maintain dominance from the 1650s on are usefully opened up for future research. How might paintings of fish be interpreted? Marshall observes that Luca Giordano and Giuseppe Recco's *Riches of the Sea with Neptune and Two Sea Nymphs*, c. 1683–84, which was probably sent to Madrid by Neapolitan Viceroy Marques del Carpio, effectively offers southern Italy up to the king as bounty. Might the marine world, including coral and fish, be opened up for interpretation in a manner analogous to that undertaken for geological resources and their capacities?

### Why baroque Naples?

Baroque Naples is the focus of this special issue for three principal reasons. First, Naples affords particular potential for rethinking both baroque and place. Viceregal Naples and the baroque were powerfully framed teleologically by nationalistic history, most notably in the work of Benedetto Croce, and in oppositional and hierarchical terms to what came after or what took place elsewhere. Thus a supposedly ignorant superstitious population, an aristocratic class obsessed by honour, a corrupt and all-pervasive Church, a viceregal government dependent on ignorance, division, and misery was replaced by a

rationalised and effective government under the Bourbons in the early Enlightenment; southern Italy was seen as inferior to northern Italy in economic terms; and Naples was regarded as inferior to Florence, Rome, and Venice in terms of the arts. The history of southern Italy as passive, backward, belated, and a series of 'failures' is a story told in relation to 'modernity', imagined as singular and identified with northern centres, that fails to allow for multiple pasts. This story has its counterpart in art history. Such entrenched perspectives require urgent reconsideration in relation to new specialist scholarship and in light of renewed critical interrogation of the legacies of colonialism and *meridionalismo*.

To counter negative stereotypes of baroque Naples, it is tempting to urge its celebration. But a celebration of Neapolitan art and architecture – a simple reassertion of its 'materiality', for instance, floating on the present current of the 'material turn' in the humanities and social sciences – fails to address the ways in which visual culture is implicated in systems of rule, regulation, domination, and exploitation, the ways in which hegemony depends on culture, and the ways in which teleological conceptions of art history continue to operate. Hence, the story of 'baroque Naples' must be told slant. The field is now ready for a more critical approach to baroque Naples that engages with the politics both of viceregal rule and of art history.

Second, as a colonised capital city, baroque Naples occupied a crucial cultural role, which has not yet been effectively examined. While European colonisation outside Europe has received intense scholarly attention, intra-European colonisation remains under-explored. To date, Spanish rule has been studied in predominantly political and economic terms. The complex and often subtle implication of the arts in the processes of Spanish colonialism requires urgent investigation. In spite of sophisticated art, literature, music, and architecture, which afford tremendous resource to scholars, and in spite of an energetic and developing scholarship on Naples, driven by the impressive efforts of local scholars in particular, the arts of Naples remain under-examined in this regard.

Third, baroque Naples is becoming a fashionable target for art historians, a turn of events that offers great potential, but also opens deceptively alluring traps. After more or less ignoring Naples for decades, scholars are now turning from the congested fields of northern and central Italy to the south. This is, therefore, an opportune moment to look back as well as forward in order to interrogate the paradigms according to which scholarship has – often uncritically – unrolled. Art history is implicated in the hegemonising

processes that stratify places and peoples to distribute them according to concepts of nation, class, skin colour, and locality. Cultural markers are rooted in art history. Thus it is not simply a matter of recuperating what has been ignored, as if the problem were one of mere oversight, but of revisiting more critically the terms on which attention was and is bestowed. Insights from subaltern studies, developed from a dissatisfaction with the existing historiography of South Asia in the early 1980s as an effort to rethink colonialism in India, are useful here.<sup>1</sup> The term 'subaltern' in this context derives from Antonio Gramsci, whose analysis of the failure of national consolidation in Italy served as a model for rethinking the nationalist legacies in India (Gramsci, 1973; Spivak, 1998). Subaltern studies shifted from an initial rejection of elite histories in search of the subaltern voice to locating fragments of subalternity within the folds of dominant discourse. The arts in viceregal Naples might usefully be explored in such terms.

The relative scarcity of scholarship on Naples, compared to Florence, Venice, and Rome, is not simply a 'lack'. It is also an opportunity. Naples need not, cannot, and, indeed, should not be addressed in analogous modes to the scholarship of those cities. There are far greater possibilities if it is approached differently and in terms of difference – and, crucially, not in terms of simple 'celebration' of the very terms of its denigration. It is vital to interrogate academic knowledge that justifies or sustains processes and discourses of subordination, such as those which continue to pervade European art history in general and Italian art history in particular. A point of view from Naples and the south is a better vantage point than that of 'the centre' for the tracing and addressing of disciplinary, conceptual and material privileges and prejudices. This is essential, if Neapolitan art is not to be reinscribed into stagnant taxonomies of originality, style, influence, and centres and peripheries, and in order to allow the potential of post-colonial and post-meridionalist approaches to be embraced.

If historians have recently engaged with Neapolitan history predominantly in terms of revisionism and periodisation (Imbruglia, 2000; Marino, 2011), art historians have tended to accept well-worn paradigms of style to investigate individual artists' oeuvres while keeping period and place firmly in place as 'context'.<sup>2</sup> Characteristics found in artworks produced in Naples are by this model deemed to be 'Neapolitan'. Against this backdrop, individual artists are seen (usually teleologically) as responding to the demands of patrons, influencing each other, working faithfully to their own 'style', while that style is seen as developing subject to

the 'influence' of others. These moves are questioned here. The aim is not to deliver categorical definitions or stable characterisations, to re-periodize, and even less to reconcile divergent interpretations and settle arguments. Rather, the aim is to allow each term – 'baroque' and 'Naples' – to destabilise the other. Naples is thus emphatically that which is *not* shared, but rather that which is contested and is discursively produced through those very contestations. Rather than treat baroque Naples as a descriptive apparatus that explains what it supposedly contains, the essays gathered here disrupt notions of containment and continuity in order to complexify assumed homogeneity, whether temporal, geographical, spatial, or within the oeuvre of a single artist. Naples is seen here, not as 'context' or as passive, if also changing, *background* against which cultural events took place, but as itself an event, at once fractured and multiple, subject of and subject to cultural interventions and transformations that were partial, contested, discontinuous, imperilled and unfinished. Thus, the aim is not to *unify* Neapolitan baroque, but to explore baroque Naples in relation to fragmentation, fracture, disjuncture, and dislocation. What does Neapolitan art history look like if it allows place to be discontinuous and open to the forces of contingency, chance, and contradiction, at least as much as to those of structure and purposeful design? Such an approach, more aporetic and elliptical, less triumphalist and celebratory, also permits art history's own continuing pernicious politics to be addressed.

While the focus on 'Naples' may seem to invite a consideration of its art and architecture in terms of 'representation' of a people or place that preceded it, it is precisely such an assumption that this issue interrogates. The production of an image is seen here as a process that is creative and alive, and that produces something that is also creative and alive. Architecture is not simply three-dimensional and static, nor is it reducible to a literal building. Architecture and art maintain the characteristics of a human activity, operate as such, and therefore may usefully be perceived as embodied forms (Bredenkamp, 2014, p.31). Texts, paintings, and architecture are not fixed, static objects, but bodily and intersubjective interpretative processes that are also materially implicated. Thus, place and displacement, subject and colonial subject, emerge as intimately connected in relation to materiality and material processes of transformationality.<sup>3</sup> The place of Naples, like the baroque, is anything but stable.

Naples is therefore not the container or explanation to which artworks may be referred. Always changeable and permeable, it must be examined *relationally*. Thus Ribera's violent figures cannot be interpreted as simply

'reflecting' 'violence in Naples', nor simply as reflections on violence informed by his experience of living and working in Naples. Thus 'Naples' (much less 'violent Naples') cannot be assumed (and thus overlooked), but precisely how 'Naples' is brought into play must be investigated.

### Art history and baroque Naples

Naples has languished outside the art historical golden triangle of Venice-Rome-Florence, receiving at times barely an obligatory nod of recognition.<sup>4</sup> This is not due to an absence of research on the arts in Naples, as if often claimed, but to two inter-related problems. First, the institutional conservatism of art history, which tends to consolidate the early formation of art history by Vasari, which elevated Florence to its centre, and depended on an interpretative narrative of periodization.<sup>5</sup> Second, insularity in some Neapolitan scholarship has tended to close the field to unorthodox approaches. Both problems are perpetuated, wittingly or not, by notions that the south is inferior culturally, economically, and socially to the north.<sup>6</sup>

Neapolitan scholars, from Gaetano Filangieri in the 1880s to N.F. Faraglia, Giuseppe Ceci, Raffaello Causa, Raffaele Mormone, Roberto Pane, Eduardo Nappi, Gaetana Cantone, Franco Strazzullo, Vincenzo Rizzo, Elio Catello, Teresa Colletta, Renato Ruotolo and many others, have undertaken heroic toil in challenging conditions in archives and libraries to publish documents relating to all aspects of Neapolitan early modern art. A host of recent publications explore Neapolitan urbanism, palace and church architecture, painting and sculpture. Recent initiatives aimed at drawing together disparate approaches and fields focused on 'Naples' (Warr & Elliott, 2010; Calaresu & Hills, 2013; Astarita, 2013) are signs of a developing wider interest. They also demonstrate the need for comparative studies and research that does not pull up the drawbridge at the edges of the city. Indeed, there is a good deal of such work undertaken and underway (d'Agostino, 2011; Guarino, 2010; Carrió-Invernizzi, 2007; San Juan, 2013; Dauverd, 2015, pp.55–80; Visone, 2016).

The splendid exhibition 'Civiltà del Seicento a Napoli', held in the Neapolitan museums of Capodimonte and Pignatelli in 1985 was significant in its ambitious range and impact. In addition to essays on predictable topics, such as collecting, painting, and architecture, the catalogue was enriched by studies of cartography (Alisio, 1984), magic and science (De Giovanni, 1984), music (Bossa, 1984, pp.17–26), silver (Catello, 1984), and textiles (Portoghesi, 1984). Bold

though this was, Neapolitan art history has tended to remain within the precepts and paradigms it sketched out. Much scholarship remains tightly focused on the literal object, restricted to a given medium or by specific material, while some materials, such as stucco, are unduly neglected. While there has been productive engagement with early modern science (Bertucci, 2013, pp. 149–75), art and architectural history remain, on the whole, cordoned off from potentially productive engagement with religious history, philosophy, and literary studies. Still-life painting is locked into paradigms familiar from early scholarship on Dutch flower painting, but shorn of the more critical and politicising readings that have enlivened that field in recent years, and that have challenged the assumption that still-lives are mere representations of ‘reality’ by considering them as artworks that challenge given realities and open up new possibilities.<sup>7</sup> Architecture and art are persistently treated as responding to, addressing, and even solving problems or exigencies encountered by patrons and artists. The generative capacity of art and architecture and the extent to which they reconfigure new worlds have barely been glimpsed.

Baroque Naples came to be characterised and interpreted retrospectively. The historiography of Naples has approached the city in terms of explanation for its ‘failure’ to develop in accord with particular conceptions of ‘modernity’ and with other places in Italy, with blame directed variously at Church, state, or the people (Rao, 2013, pp. 203–23; Marino, 2013, pp. 11–14). In turn, a defensive affirmation of the value of Neapolitan art and architecture has followed, without a critical examination of the terms on which it is made.

Art historical scholarship focused on Naples tends to remain somewhat insular, in terms of analysis, disconnected from ideas and approaches developed in other disciplines or in relation to other cities and countries. Despite its richness, local scholarship often takes for granted local points of reference, neglecting to make concessions to readers from elsewhere, while failing to interrogate its own assumptions. Well-worn geographical, chronological, epistemological, and conceptual boundaries are too readily rehearsed. But the problem is not principally home-made. Despite the tremendous wealth of scholarship on the arts in Naples, little of this work has permeated into wider studies of Italian art and architecture. Neapolitan art continues to be treated as exceptional, subaltern, or of merely local interest. While regionalism continues to divide scholarship on art and architecture throughout the Italian peninsula, Neapolitan art – and southern art in general – are persistently treated as less significant

than the art of Rome, Florence, Venice, and elsewhere, largely as a result of being viewed through the lens of renaissance Florence, baroque Rome, classicism, and even ‘modernity’. Wittingly or not, many art-historical approaches to Naples, albeit well-intentioned, inadvertently reproduce stereotypes of the south. Hence it is not enough to revisit ‘materiality’ in the south without a careful examination of how matter has been subordinated to ideas in art history and how that hierarchy maps on to hierarchical distinctions between ‘northern’ and ‘southern’ Italian art. The ‘South’, like the ‘Orient’, is a constituted entity, discursively produced in relation to ‘the centre’, ‘the North’, or ‘the West’. The crucial issue for a sophisticated art history of Naples is thus how the south and ‘Naples’ have been and are discursively produced, which necessarily entails engagement with *meridionalismo*.<sup>8</sup>

In the history of art, ‘style’, and the artist conceived as autonomous individual persist as predominant and unquestioned modes by which Neapolitan art is conceptualised, investigated, and discussed.<sup>9</sup> Anthony Blunt’s ground-breaking *Neapolitan Baroque and Rococo Architecture* periodised baroque as style in teleological terms (1975, p. 124). For Blunt ‘originality’ (1975, p. 67), ‘local traditions’, ‘foreign artists’, ‘taste’ (e.g. ‘French taste’) and ‘influence’ (p. 3) were engines for style change in Naples. Such paradigms survive intact.<sup>10</sup> Neapolitan art has too often been treated as homogeneous, with insufficient attention to conflict and contestation. Thus, what is retrospectively designated as ‘style’ is rarely prised open to expose what was at issue in a specific presentation of peculiar forms. A focus on individual artists does not serve well the great complexes, such as the Certosa, the Gesù, or the Palazzo Reale, in which many artists and workshops worked over extended periods of time. Nor does it help to understand relationships between individual building and wider social and urban issues. Indeed, it reproduces an art history that tends to be static and staccato.

Neapolitan baroque art demands investigation across media, field, and materials. That challenge has been taken up in recent years. While classic studies, such as Blunt’s, depended on a sharp distinction between ‘strictly architectural qualities’ and ‘decoration’ (1975, p. 67), architectural history no longer shrinks from interrogating the splendid marble altars or wall decorations of churches and chapels (De Cavi, 2009; d’Agostino, 2011; Napoli, 2015; De Divitiis, 2015; Hills, 2016). However, more genuinely interdisciplinary scholarship is now required. Important scholarship on palaces, on collecting, and museums might usefully now be related to dress, dance, music, the role of servants,



and religious practices, for instance. Recent research into Naples' remarkable banking systems should be related to cultural practices. Institutions apart from churches and palaces have received relatively little attention. Naples' remarkable hospitals and their complex economies require studies that extend far beyond technical issues of site, patronage, and authorship to embrace questions of gender, sexuality, governmentality, social organisation, political and emotional affect. A focus on nobles and elite court life has left exposed unexplored territory in relation to artisans and workshops. How was the material of silver, for example, imagined and understood? How was it imported into Naples and subsequently distributed? What were the processes of its working, the training of silversmiths, and the organisation of their workshops? While alchemy and freemasonry in Naples are frequently invoked as sweeping explanations for arcane art, they yet to receive critical investigation.

Naples is frequently characterised as a place of particular 'popular piety', 'superstition', or 'religiosity', indicating assumptions that Neapolitan religious practices lack sophistication and are unchanging. Such primitivising assumptions have hampered effective study of its art and architecture. Indeed, religious and intellectual ideas have too hastily been treated as distinct from art and architecture, though with some important exceptions (Lenzo, 2015). More critical examination of the so-called 'Counter Reformation', which is itself not an explanation but a label, is required. The super abundance of protector saints in Naples, for instance, may be better understood as inflected by Spanish rule, rather than mere consequence of a resurgent Catholic Church (Sallmann, 1994, pp.71–7; Hills, 2016, pp.215–69). Art and architecture are more than manifestations of the Council of Trent's decrees. How important was apophaticism to the arts in Naples? were there distinctive Carthusian 'spiritualities' and how were they implicated in the complexities of institutional politics at San Martino and beyond? The Theatines were particularly significant in Naples as confessors to grandees, especially to noble women, cloistered and lay. Why was this and what were its artistic, social, political, and institutional consequences?

The essays here explore ways in which art is both distinct from that which precedes it and how it is productive. Attention is paid to peculiarities of material form, rather than engaging in swift stylistic designations. Thus Bogdan Cornea's essay interprets Ribera's painting, not in terms of a supposedly all-encompassing religious movement, but in relation to surfaces, pigments, and theories of lifelikeness; Sergius Koderá's essay highlights analogies in the treatment

of the bodies of saints and those of criminals; Joris van Gastel interprets ecclesiastical adornment in relation to the geological; and my own essay interprets depictions of saints in Naples in terms of the politics of place. It is not so much that boundaries between secular and religious, interior and exterior are blurred in the baroque city, but that possibilities of place and the city itself are produced through their dynamic inter-relation (Hills, 2016, p.488).

### **Meridionalismo: Keeping Naples in place**

*The South is far more than a geographical entity, it is an imaginary and mystical one, associated with both hell and paradise.*

(Gribaudi, 1997, p.84)

Interpretations of Neapolitan culture intersect with the 'southern question', with debates about 'missed opportunities' and under-development in the south (Rao, 2013, pp.203–23). The southern question posed by a group of intellectuals to the ruling class of Italy in the decades after Unification was a national question concerned with nation building and Italy's new sense of identity (Dickie, 1997, pp.125, 127). As John Dickie has observed, Naples is the place in which 'the quintessentially patriotic act of knowing Italy' has been carried out (1997, p.128).

Renato Fucini's *Napoli a occhio nudo* (1878) presents a view of the miserable condition of Naples' plebeian class, a denunciation of the government and the rich nobles who had reduced the people to 'miserie scimmie a due mani' ('miserable monkeys with two hands'). Naples is the place of the bizarre, of incomprehensible contrasts, the place, in short, of the obscene of Italy. The terms in which nineteenth-century *meridionalisti* describe Naples resound in those of the discussions of the baroque, which, in turn, was the underside of the rational and the classical:

'A strange country this! What bizarre fusion of the very beautiful and the horrendous, of the excellent and the worst, of the pleasant and the nauseous!'

(Fucini, 1976, pp.6–7).<sup>11</sup>

Thus the discourse of 'the south' runs parallel to, intersects with, and is confused with 'the baroque' in particularly productive – and pernicious – ways:

No other city in the world I believe equals Naples in conserving such paltry and insignificant architectural remains from the successive dynasties that followed one another in ruling it [...] Of the Byzantines and Normans there is the occasional and shapeless relic. The Swabians and Angevins have left a few churches but their solid palaces resemble sturdy fortresses rather than princely residences. To the Spanish is owed an abundance

of awkward looking churches and the odd obscenely baroque obelisk.

(Fucini 1976, p.10)<sup>12</sup>

Naples is little more here than a wasteland strewn with vestiges of civilization brought from afar. Fucini's orientaling approach makes sense of Naples in terms of the 'Orient', Spain, and De Amicis' *Costantinopoli*, as somewhere that would strike an Italian as 'millions of kilometres from his homeland' (pp.5–6). Italians do not come from Naples.

Naples, according to these claims, is unfathomable, neglected by and unknown to its inhabitants. Not only did Naples lag historically behind the north, its inhabitants were evolutionally retarded. Alfredo Niceforo's 1898 *L'Italia barbara contemporanea* claimed that the southern mainland, Sicily, and Sardinia were stagnating at a level of social 'evolution' well behind that of northern and central provinces and explained this in terms of their inhabitants: 'The people of the south are still primitive, not completely evolved, less civilized and refined than the populations of the north and centre of Italy' (p.3). Statistics on crime, education, birth rate, mortality, suicide rate, and the economy, along with craniometric data justified this position. Niceforo and others saw their investigation of southern Italy as the victory of science over two opposing taboos: a short-sighted regional pride on the part of those who refused to consider the problems of other areas of the country and a cult of national unity, which sought dogmatically to fit all of Italy's diverse regions into one administrative model (Dickie, 1997, p.118).

*Meridionalismo* brought together disciplines including agronomy, economics, geography, and sociology to explain the peculiarities of the south in relation to the rest of the country (Gribaudo, 1997). The southern economy was explored in contrast to the north within a dualistic framework. A dichotomised image of the Mezzogiorno emerged. *Meridionalismo* exercised a strong grip on subsequent scholarship on the 'Southern problem' that identified lack of resources – from good soil and water to entrepreneurial skills and civic spirit – the problem of urban poverty, a peasantry bound to large estates and mafia violence. For Croce the 'Neapolitan nation' consisted of an intellectual elite, capable of playing a 'national' role in the Italian south, but which, even at its peak at the end of the seventeenth century and the age of Enlightenment, failed to build a nation (1925). *Meridionalismo* was generally conceived with regard to 'modernity' (Galasso, 2011, pp. 411–16; Musella, 2005). And 'modernity' was imagined in terms of the development of northern Italy. Temporality and geography were collapsed: the south was 'backward'.

Not only was the south backward, it was entrenched in mere matter, materials, and nature, as opposed to the culture and ideas of the progressive north. Pasquale Villari's *Di Chi è la colpa à sia la pace e la guerra* of 1866 is paradigmatic in treating Naples as both symptom and enigma. Naples was defined by contrasting the ugliness of its culture and bestiality of its people to the natural beauty of the city's setting. Benedetto Croce gave new legs to the sixteenth-century proverb that Naples was 'a paradise inhabited by devils' (1956, pp.5–10). Auguste François Creuzé de Lesser contrasted the magnificence of Naples' site and 'the very mediocre beauty of the city [...] This Naples, so vaunted, hardly possesses any beauty which is not [nature] [...]'. The architecture of her palaces and churches is generally in the worst style' (1806, pp.73–4).<sup>13</sup> While Naples had nature, it lacked culture.

The picturesque named, aestheticised, and exoticised the south's anomalous position between Italy and the Orient, between the world of civilised progress and the spheres of rusticity and barbarism, a world of supposedly free instinct and exaggerated sensuality. Art historian Carl Justi's characterisation of Neapolitan baroque as 'wanton' is part of this and does not simply belong to a supposedly distinct art historical discourse. Colonial and oriental images surface intermittently in Villari's attempts to define the south and its problems as a national concern to reveal the thinking of the south, and particularly the southern peasantry, as being beyond Italy. Italy's identity was to be constituted in terms that Villari identifies as simultaneously the south's Other and its most intimate self, 'its greatest moral danger and its ultimate salvation' (Dickie, 1997, p.128–9).

The assumption that southern society was incapable of self-rule and that endemic corruption could only be corrected through powerful initiative from central government was established by the tradition of nineteenth-century *meridionalismo* and survives to the present. Debate over the extent to which development in one region had been at the cost of the other dominated the historiography in the decades after the fall of fascism (Morris, 1997, p.3). In the 1980s, new scholarship challenged the premises of *meridionalismo* on the grounds that it risked distorting the realities of the Mezzogiorno by interpreting the south through explicit or implicit comparison with the north. The region's identity was based on measurement against cultural and economic models based on profoundly different societies, and thus on negation, on its lack of a bourgeoisie, individualism, or group solidarity (Gribaudo, 1997, p.85). Historical specificity slipped quickly into geographical and historical characterisation. Instead of

emphasising the variation across the south in its very different regions and diverse dynamics of historical change, *meridionalismo* highlighted a lack of dynamism compared to the north, producing an image of an unchanging backward world, such that the history of the south was the history of the southern problem, while Italian history was made elsewhere (Bevilacqua, 1993, p.vii). Instead revisionists sought to analyse the 'Mezzogiorno without *meridionalismo*' (Giarrizzo, 1992, pp.x–xx), not to deny the peculiarities of the mezzogiorno but with a greater alertness and readiness to consider them in terms other than that of a failed version of somewhere else.

Renato Fucini was not alone in indulging in a topographical determinism:

After the social reasons for such architectural poverty, another reason, more powerful and compelling, you will find walking on a calm day along the magical shores of the Gulf, when, with agitated soul, you will feel forced to exclaim: 'What point is there in struggling with our little mortal brains against the most beautiful work of nature?' Imagine to yourself Brunelleschi's cupola in the shadow of Vesuvius, and think about that.

([1878] 1976, p.11)<sup>14</sup>

The common element in such stereotypes was the construction of the south as an Other to Italy. The barbarous, the primitive, the natural, the violent, the irrational, the material, the feminine, the African were repeatedly located in the Mezzogiorno as foils to definitions of Italy. This 'Other' is not simply distinct from, but is an essential part of 'Italy'. And this 'Other' continues to inhabit art historical interpretations of Neapolitan art in its designation as 'violent', 'irrational', or 'material'.

### Baroque Naples, viceregency, and colonialism

In what ways were visual culture and the discourses of art and architecture implicated in Spanish colonial rule in Naples? While the cultural politics of Spanish colonialism have received great attention in Latin America, comparable analysis is lacking for Spanish rule in Naples, as it is for Spanish rule elsewhere in Europe. While Spanish rule outside Europe and the art of its Latin American domains are readily interpreted in terms of colonialism, there is resistance to considering Spanish rule within Europe and the art of its European domains in those terms. In so far as Neapolitan baroque art has been considered in relation to Spanish rule, this has been in either nationalist or in incidental terms. That is, in terms of 'barbaric Spaniards',

or art made for individual patrons who happened to be Spanish, or art, architecture and urbanism that shaped a city that happened to be governed by Spain. These models have occluded the cultural politics of sovereignty and the complex implication of the discourses of art and architecture in governmentality. A more critical examination of the cultural politics of Spanish rule will permit the operations of government in and through cultural formations and art to emerge. At issue is not 'Spain', but the cultural implications of Spanish dominion, the sophisticated ways in which art was implicated in government – beyond military fortification or 'propaganda'. Emphasis on Spanish rule here is important – not as background against which art must be seen, but instead, as a question that is crucial for baroque Naples. How does culture enter into, inform, structure, and enable Spanish colonisation and rule? In what ways do buildings and artworks generate, sustain, explore, and contest that rule?<sup>15</sup>

Following its recapture from the French by the royal house of Aragon in 1504, Naples was ruled in tandem with the kingdom of Aragon. The Aragonese kingdoms (including Sicily and Sardinia) shared their monarch with the kingdoms of Castile, Leon, Navarre, Granada, Valencia and the territories associated with them. From 1517 until 1700 the common ruler of these kingdoms was a Habsburg, who was often referred to as 'king of Spain', although the title had no formal status. Naples was ruled by the king of the Sicilies. The Castilian jurist Juan de Solórzano Pereira's *Politica Indiana* (1647) enunciated a principle that each kingdom was to be ruled *aeque principaliter*, 'as if the king who holds them all together were king only of each one of them' (Elliott, 1992, pp.52–3). By contrast, the kingdoms of Mexico and Peru were subordinate to and incorporated within the kingdom of Castile alone.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, formal independence was more complex in practice. Naples was a junior partner to the kingdom to which it belonged and at the heart of rule of Naples was the absence of a resident monarch and court, a significant absence in an intensely dynastic monarchical world.

The relation between Spanish rule and the arts in baroque Naples has been framed since the late nineteenth century in predominantly nationalistic terms. Sharp condemnation of supposedly essential 'Spanish' characteristics took precedence over a critical investigation of the dynamics of power and governmentality in a model of history that reduced the arts and culture to passive product or representation of national or moral qualities (Croce, 1925). Thus, in his 1854 study of the Carafa of Maddaloni, Alfred de Reumont described Caravaggio's work as 'more

dreadful than demonical, with that predilection for that which was horrible and bloody, which is chiefly to be ascribed to Spanish influence, in as much as it is more in accordance with the hard and melancholy nature of the Spaniard, and with his extravagant love of painful subjects' (p.14). Caravaggio, morally susceptible, succumbed to both low-class culture and to Iberian influence, both moral maladies. Art history has been slow to change course. Even today Naples is depicted as a sort of soft target for Caravaggism, a place where Caravaggio's 'influence' was taken up and absorbed into darkness.

Baroque Naples has been framed as the chaotic and superstitious period to which the Bourbon dynasty majestically put an end. The 'Enlightenment' thus casts a dark shadow across the preceding era from which it has retrospectively been distinguished.<sup>17</sup> Luigi Del Pozzo's 'Preface' to his *Cronaca civile e militare delle Due Sicilie sotto la dinastia Borbonica* ([1857] 2011) is paradigmatic in its justification of Bourbon rule by contrasting it to the 'humble and depressed condition' of the viceregency that it replaced (p.vi).<sup>18</sup> The Bourbons inherited a sterile and oppressed kingdom, in which vast *donativi* extracted by the viceroys were sent direct to Spain, the *gabelle* and other taxes hit the poor, while barons enjoyed all kinds of immunities and were not held to account, while the Consilio Collaterale struggled beneath an unwieldy accumulation of disparate Norman, Swabian, Angevin, and Aragonese law (Del Pozzo, 2011, pp.vii-x): 'It was as if the gold of Naples took the form of an everlasting and inexhaustible fountain, that poured itself out on the soil of Spain' (p.viii).

Recently, the peculiar implications of Naples' role as cadet branch to a worldwide imperial power has been identified by John Robertson as an important factor in the development of the Neapolitan Enlightenment. He argues that thinkers in eighteenth-century Naples and Scotland, prompted by the onset of political crisis, shared a particular commitment to understanding 'man's place in the world', understanding and advancing the causes and conditions of human betterment and the possibility, but not the inevitability, of progress in the present world (2003, p.78). He identifies 'the common factor' to be 'the kingdoms' status as junior partners in larger composite monarchies' (2003, p.148). While acknowledging that 'its adherents needed careers and recognition, along with outlets for their writings', Robertson insists that a 'cosmopolitan' Enlightenment with 'intellectual coherence' is not bounded by place ('ideas, books and men of letters were able to travel across Europe and not only to Paris') (2003, p.80). Asserting that 'ideas should not be

reduced to cultural discourses', he claims that 'their priorities remained intellectual, and they looked to public opinion to confirm their intellectual authority' and that 'the same Enlightenment existed in both Scotland and Naples' (2003, pp.80, 82, 86). What, then, is the meaning or legitimacy of the term 'Neapolitan' in 'Neapolitan Enlightenment'? Do Neapolitan ideas only really matter if they transcend the city and the south? Is the place where they lived merely a necessary but irrelevant backdrop to these men's ideas? How does such a conception of 'ideas', stripped of all cultural embeddedness, also impoverish the power of 'place'? Were the 'careers', 'recognition', and 'outlets' for their writing in Naples simply necessary but irrelevant, or did they sustain, inform, and challenge those ideas? After all, the 'intellectual' priorities on which these men focused were political economy, agrarian improvement, and an enquiry into the historical progress of society (Robertson, 2003, p.83). Such issues are necessarily implicated in the local conditions of farming, political rule, and the distribution of wealth and resources, in short, the socio-political and economic circumstances of eighteenth-century Naples in which these men lived and in relation to which their ideas developed. The specifics of the place and politics of Naples, from which Robertson seeks to distinguish ideas, have been treated as contaminatory in scholarship since Croce at least. Robertson's wish to distinguish between ideas and 'cultural discourse' finds an interesting analogous position in Croce's desire to locate true art apart from 'practical considerations', which lies at the heart of his discussion of Neapolitan baroque (1929, pp.25-9).

Croce's *Spagna nella vita italiana durante la Rinascenza* (1922) excoriates the 'barbaric Spanish invasion' of Italy, the inferiority of Spanish literature, Iberian love of honorific titles, pomp and duels, and concludes with a chapter on 'Hispano-Italian Decadence'.<sup>19</sup> Assuming that culture has its pivot in philosophy, Croce asserts that Spain contributed little or nothing to the progress of ideas, but exerted a reactionary influence constrained by Scholasticism and the 'Counter Reformation' (1922). Croce's *Storia dell'età barocca in Italia* (1929; 1944; 1953) interpreted the culture and costumes of baroque Italy as distorted by the values of absolute monarchy and Catholic Reform. His characterisation of Naples at the mercy of the Spanish Counter-Reformation, imbued in religiosity, suffused by bloody violence and baroque decadence, has cast a long shadow.<sup>20</sup>

Given this nationalistic tradition, it is perhaps not surprising that the suggestion that Spanish Naples might usefully be thought in terms of 'colonialism' has met with shrill resistance. While 'Spanish dominion', 'artistic influence', patronage, and the passage of art

objects from Naples to Madrid or vice versa are readily accepted, the terms 'colonial' or 'empire' are not (Pestilli Rowland & Schütze, 2008). The magnificent art and architecture produced under Spanish rule is even adduced as evidence of the beneficence of that rule (see Hernando Sánchez, 1994; Bosse & Stoll, 2001; Hernando Sánchez, 2004, pp.43–73; Colomer, 2009). It has even been claimed that intermarriage between Neapolitan and Spanish aristocrats demonstrates the inappropriateness of the term 'colonial' to describe Spanish rule. In point of fact, however, this merely naturalises the dynamics of monarchical and aristocratic dynastic power, and their implication in colonialism.

Thus Spanish rule has, on the whole, been treated primarily in terms of geographical extent and its art and architecture – unless explicitly concerned with Spanish government or military force – as innocent product whose relationship to empire is purely incidental. To rethink Spanish rule in Naples in terms of the *cultural politics* of empire, however, requires careful attention to the implication of the arts. Resistance to this springs in part from a desire for Naples to be recognised on a par with other more celebrated artistic centres. Hence the resistance to any approach that is seen as undermining a hard-won cultural legitimacy. Meanwhile, a fiercely hierarchical approach to the arts and an insistence that quality, style, 'taste', and individual artists' biographies and oeuvres are adequate paradigms for interpreting art continue to render opaque art's involvement in politics, power, and exploitation, except where this is literally explicit.

In the kingdom of Naples the viceroy, generally chosen from the ranks of the highest Castilian nobility, substituted for, replaced and represented the person of the king. Indeed, the viceroy was the simulacrum of royal status. Viceroys were moved at the first sign of significant local trouble to avoid criticisms reflecting on the king (Koenigsberger, 1951).<sup>21</sup> Two councils at the heart of the Spanish monarchy, the Council of State and the Council of Italy oversaw the viceroy. The first appointed viceroys determined policy and strategy for the monarchy as a whole; the second was concerned with the internal affairs of the states ruled by the Spanish Habsburgs in Italy and drew its members from those states. In Naples itself, the Consiglio Collaterale (Collateral Council), staffed by Spaniards and Neapolitans, was the highest governmental authority in the Kingdom; under it were the Sacro Regio Consiglio, the highest court, and the Camera della Sommaria, which controlled the kingdom's finances. Beneath them, a sprawl of councils constituted as tribunals proliferated this division of functions such

that jurisdictional conflicts were endemic (Villari, 1993, pp.10–18).

Spanish rule relied on and strengthened, instead of replacing, the power of indigenous elites. Inhabitants of Naples of all levels were not simply passive recipients of colonial schemes. On the whole, Spanish rule depended on local barons who, in return, secured confirmation and extension of their privileges, immunities, and powers. Consequently, the heaviest burdens, including taxation, fell disproportionately on the poor and those locked out of such deals. Taxes rose through the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth century, as war with France and Protestant powers sharply intensified the Spanish monarchy's fiscal demands. More money, recruits, and military supplies were extracted from Naples. By 1636 the public debt reached 40 million ducats and the interest alone exceeded ordinary income. The crown granted a virtual monopoly over the entire financial system to Bartolomeo d'Aquino, a financier, who, together with his associates, raised a further 36 million ducats between 1637 and 1644. By this time, Naples had become a sophisticated financial centre (Calabria, 1991). Since the financiers received generous commissions of 50% on the taxes they farmed, crown revenues fell in real terms. Consequently, yet more taxes were inflicted (Villari, 1993, pp.74–97). Eventually, in 1647–8 escalating pressures from the monarchy provoked open rebellion, drawing on anti-Spanish sentiment across Church, barons, and the poor (Musi, *La rivolta di Masaniello*). That combination of disparate interests was also responsible for undermining it and the rebellion was ruthlessly put down. The kingdom returned within the Spanish monarchy, but taxation never returned to the rates of the 1630s and early 1640s. Successive viceroys duly accepted the privileges of the noble and legal elites, and the feudal nobility and *togati* profited from their renewed acquiescence to Spanish rule.

That compromise between Spanish and Neapolitan elites effectively immobilised the kingdom politically for the remainder of Spanish Habsburg rule. Membership of one of the city's Seggi (to which 130 families belonged by 1700) provided vital access to urban power.<sup>22</sup> Membership of a noble Seggio combined with possession of a rural fief, with its extensive economic and social powers, marked out the real urban elite, at the top of which were the great noble clans of the Carafa, Caracciolo, Sanseverino, Avalos d'Aquino, Pignatelli and the Orsini (Astarita 1992, pp.37–40; Visceglia, 1993). Thus, the barons ruthlessly extended their power. This was the elite who built palaces with fine inner courtyards, fabulous portals and staircases,

interiors adorned with sumptuous furniture, hangings, and pictures, and who commissioned sculptors and painters to decorate their family chapels in churches (Labrot, 1977). That art work has not yet, on the whole, been adequately interrogated in relation to baronial manipulation of power or struggles over political domination due to Spanish colonialism and the complex roles of city, court, and visual and literary culture in relation to it.

Naples' vast population appears to place it in a league with Amsterdam or London, but unlike these cities it did not stimulate the economies around them and, unlike them, it was not at the head of a pyramid of cities.<sup>23</sup> It was alone in a kingdom in which no other city had more than 20,000 inhabitants. And its relationship to the Kingdom was parasitic, a place of consumption more than production or trade. It was not integrated into a commercialised economy, but was sustained by the transfer from Kingdom to capital of rents, payments, taxes, and legal fees. Thus, by 1690 there were about 800 tolls in the kingdom, mostly levied by the nobility (de Rosa, 1996). Naples' high population, the influx of nobles, and their building of palaces within easy reach of the viceregal court are facts that are frequently repeated, but rarely interrogated in relation to the politics of Spanish rule. In what ways did competition or alliances amongst aristocrats impact on the architecture and organisation of their palaces, their collections, their patronage of the arts and their involvement with religious institutions? In what ways were devotional practices inflected, not only across monastic orders and institutions, by gender and social rank, but by political affiliations, financial interests, and courtly rivalries?

Spanish viceregal patronage has generally been conceived narrowly, in terms of works directly commissioned by viceroys, hence fortifications, castles, palace building, new city walls and streets (Pane, 1984; De Cavi, 2009; Pessolano, 2015). Rule by this model depends on defence, fortification, and representation ('propaganda'). This overlooks the ways in which culture is interwoven with governmentality in more subtle and complex ways, the ways in which the arts produce, sustain, inform, and reform changing identities and social relations that are crucial, not secondary, to any dominion. It overlooks, too, the ways in which Spanish government skilfully deployed and exploited its court in Naples to advertise its power on a wider European stage. For Naples was not only location, but capital and instrument of royal power. Military forces and fortifications were self-evidently modes of rule; the ways in which tribunals, courts, churches, hospitals, and palaces formed part of the web of sovereignty and

governmentality requires more subtle elaboration (see Agamben, 2011; Rossi, 2015).

The Spanish monarchy secured privileges for the capital in order to consolidate its power over the Kingdom and beyond. These included exemption from state taxes and obligation to pay only city taxes, less expensive bread, a more reliable food supply during times of scarcity. The concentration of aristocrats in Naples, swarming round the royal palace, advertised loyalty to the king, while being on hand to take rewards. Wealth was concentrated here through royal grants and feudal revenues, the centre of business affairs, contracts, public works, private and public loans, and banks (in the early sixteenth century some provincial banks survived; by the end of the century they were all concentrated in the city). Feudal aristocrats, merchants and the professional classes chose to live in Naples. The manufactures of silk, gold, and silver received impetus. Silk and grain merchants and financiers emerged as powerful pressure groups. For the lower classes the city offered a chance to escape from excessive taxation, feudal demands and unreliable food supplies in the Kingdom.

In general the deals between barons and monarchy have been examined in narrowly economic and political terms. Yet baroque Naples was the centre not simply of a concentration of wealth, but of favour, access to patronage, and cultural distinction, around which developed a culture of abeyance, sycophancy, mimicry, and parody. The arts played a vital role in this and were informed by it, as Koderá's essay here demonstrates. The precise ways in which this took place in other artistic endeavours require further research.

To situate Neapolitan art in relation to Spanish colonial rule is to place it in an orbit radically different from those of style, individual artist careers, and of discourses of materiality imagined in relation to art historical discourses, 'southern identity', and Europe alone. It was a rule that encompassed both sides of the Atlantic. It is telling that subjected peoples in both the Viceroyalty of Peru and in the Kingdom of Naples were referred to as 'Indians' and their country as 'the Indies'. To see baroque Naples in terms of colonialism and colonality invites closer comparison with the Empire of the Indies and to its own Kingdom, the hinterland that has been treated as relatively inconsequential, lost in the shadows of the glittering capital city.

## Ornament and excess

While the southern question tends to be framed in terms of 'lack', cultural commentators have routinely approached the south in terms of ornament and excess. Both share a concern with 'licence' and 'matter', associated with the supposedly sensual south and with its rich, highly coloured ornament. Thus, Naples is figured at once as a place of 'lack' and of 'excess'. In his 1692 guide book to the beautiful, ancient and curious in the city of Naples, canon Carlo Celano described the silver of the aristocratic convent church of San Gregorio Armeno as 'excessive in quantity, weight, and working' (1970, pp.927–33).<sup>24</sup> He locates its excesses in terms not only of extent and number, but also of intensity of elaboration ('lavori'). To Justi everything in Naples from the last two hundred years 'is tasteless to the point of excess' (1922, p.79). For Pane Neapolitan baroque 'expressed itself' in 'the preciousness of the ornamental' (1984, p.18).

Ornament, long associated with *licentia*, is often portrayed as additional, inessential, excessive, or overblown, and it is associated with matter – in short, a material impediment to the Ideal. Baroque ornament is on these terms an extravagant interruption before the enlightenment and a return to the smooth waters of classicism. Rudolf Wittkower, Roberto Pane, Christof Thoenes, Anthony Blunt and Gaetana Cantone followed this broad paradigm. Since excess, vulgarity, and lack of restraint are qualities which art and culture usually suborn, harness, and overcome, Naples emerges as lacking real (Ideal) art, even while it is swamped in material excess. Hence, Naples is too intimately involved with materials, too much entranced by precious metals, too dependent on material colour in its use of marbles, too prone to indulge in ornament and licence, too wantonly *feminine*. Vulgar, sensual, unrestrained, even mercenary, Naples flouts boundaries of taste and respectability to wallow in material 'excess'. Neapolitan baroque has been seen as material encumbrance, a 'covering over' of something beneath it that is more essential, of greater merit, and hence as something added on, supplemental and inessential, even diversionary, bogged down in materials and matter. Recent interest in decoration and adornment within history of art (Necipoğlu & Payne, 2016) offer a renewed impetus to revisit these issues in light of renewed engagement with materiality. Materiality may be understood, in contradistinction to matter or materials, not as essence already given, but as qualities to be discovered excavated and invented, sites of potentiality and part of a process of exploration. Protean activities of stones and metals permitted artists to discern a life in materials, to collaborate with

it, productively engaging its potentiality (Smith, 1988, p.3; Hills, 2016, pp.123–73).

The habitual characterisation of Neapolitan art in terms of material excess should not, however, be misread as simply due to a supposed peculiarly intense or widespread use of rich and colourful materials in Naples. Croce's lament, issued in 1925, is telling: 'Beside the masterpieces of Tuscan, Lombard, and Venetian artists that were created or brought here by chance, [visitors] find, for the most part, secondary works, ostentatious rather than of intrinsic worth' (1925, p.335). It is not simply that Neapolitan art is showy. Ostentation substitutes for intrinsic worth. The failing is a moral one, an unrefined ensnarement with vulgar matter.

If Naples has been criticised for its 'excess' and the superabundance and superficiality of its decoration, its ostentatious and wasteful deployment of precious materials including silver, and a vulgar use of colour, what might be gained by focusing on precisely those aspects? Beyond simply gesturing to validate ornament, colour, and rich materials, what are the wider implications of this move? Unless this move is carefully framed, it risks simply reinscribing Neapolitan baroque with matter and materials, as if they were in some way proper to it. The notion that one can simply reverse the paradigm or reaffirm the subordinate term obscures the extent to which the designation of Naples in terms of 'excess', ornament, and materiality *already* depends on an *intersection* of discourses at the heart of both art and architectural theory and 'the south' – and the ways in which these discourses are intimately bound to power relations, including national politics, and the politics of gender and sexuality.

Ornament was a key concern to Renaissance art and architectural theorists and stood as a claim of artistic independence, a claim to *licentia* (Payne, 1999, 6). Ornament's subordination to structure in architectural discourse is long-standing and extends way beyond Naples. In 1992 Mark Wigley brilliantly argued that architectural theory since Leon Battista Alberti has subordinated adornment to structure, treated it as additional and as desirable within limits, but readily given to excess. The effect of architecture's following afterwards to house something that pre-existed it may be seen as one of its ideological effects (Wigley, 1992, pp.330–4). The painted white wall presents itself as a naked unadorned structural truth. Architectural discourse is, Wigley suggests, most ideological precisely when it appears to be most innocent. Gottfried Semper's insistence on textile hanging as first producing spatial divisions, was persistently misread, because it challenged fundamental ideological assumptions

embedded in architectural theory (Wigley, 1992, pp.380–9). Thus, gender and sexuality are staged in architectural discourse as if they precede it, but in fact are produced through it. Adornment is linked by Alberti through architecture with deception, seduction, women, and femininity. If indeed ornament is associated in particular with Naples, and seen as overwhelming, tasteless and overdone, then this needs to be critically explored and understood in relation to architectural discourse as much as to materials.

Thus analysis of Neapolitan baroque decoration cannot simply proceed in terms of ‘celebration’. It requires critical engagement with discourses of ornament and matter beyond Naples, with the construction of the south in terms of sensuality, vulgarity, and matter, and in relation to philosophical and historical scholarship on materiality. It is then necessary to go further to ask why the south is seen persistently in those terms: why has the *conjunction* of ‘decoration’ and ‘south’ produced a discourse of material abundance? In what particular ways does southern adornment exceed order or threaten subversion? Thus, Naples’ saturation in discourses of matter cannot be treated in terms of materials and art history alone, but must be situated in relation to a wider discursive subordination and denigration of southern Italy, across social, political, economic, and cultural fields, to colonial rule, the southern question, and *meridionalismo*.

Hence it is crucial not simply to over identify Naples with material ornament. Marble cladding, wall-to-wall frescoes, elaborate sculpture, inlaid marbles, highly decorated surfaces also abound in Florence, Venice, and Rome. Yet, such ornament in those cities has not persistently been characterised as ‘excessive’ or in terms of ‘materiality’ by art historians. To assume that Naples and the south are more materially engaged than the north or that an emphasis on matter is ‘southern’ is to overlook the politics of the specific conjunction of the terms ‘the south’, ‘ornament’, ‘material’, and ‘excess’, which is also related to art history’s implication in the denigration of the south.

It is a fundamental mistake to assume that there is simply *more* ornament in the south or that the productive use of materials is proper to the south. Instead, the critical question is why have art historians so readily accepted and amplified this characterisation of southern baroque? In what ways have ‘matter’, ‘ornament’, and ‘the south’ been discursively produced to feed such a perception and how has the discourse of ‘excess’ operated in relation to southern ornament (Hills, 2016)? What anxieties about which social groups lurk behind the designations ‘wanton’, ‘licence’, ‘excess’,

‘adornment’, ‘matter’, and ‘ostentation’? What is being held anxiously in place?

Thus what is seen as characteristic of the south is already ‘out of place’. Hence, it is insufficient simply to ‘celebrate’ the south’s ‘materiality’, as if it were proper to the south in general, or to ‘Neapolitan identity’ in particular. It is also necessary to explore what is meant by ‘identity’ in relation to ‘materiality’ in the complex situation of Spanish-occupied European territory, a move that in turn requires careful engagement in the politics of Spanish colonial rule. To assume that Naples is best interpreted in terms of tangible and passive matter is once again to produce ‘the south’ in antithetical and oppositional terms to the ‘north’ in ways that are discursively and historically overdetermined. It is to blithely overlook the fact that art in northern Italy is just as ‘material’ as that in the south and equally open to materialist interpretations, even if it has long been framed in Idealist terms. Such an approach naively overlooks art history’s own involvement in *meridionalismo* and colonialism. Thus, rather than to collapse again the south and matter, it is necessary to approach the conditioning processes of art historical discourse more critically to ask what is the matter with defining art of ‘the south’ in terms of tangible matter? Which discourses are co-implicated and to what effect in this potent conjunction?<sup>25</sup>

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Alice Sanger, managing editor, *Open Arts Journal*, for her expert guidance and patience; and also am pleased to acknowledge the support of Villa I Tatti, The Harvard Center for Renaissance Studies, and its Director, Alina Payne.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Subalternism is ‘the general attribute of subordination in south Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way’, (Gulha, 1988, p.35; see also Beverley, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Rarely do exhibitions examine architecture or urbanism. The vast majority of exhibitions and books dedicated to Neapolitan art focus on a single artist approached in terms of archival data, style, personality and influences. Useful though these can be, their perspective precludes exploration of many of the issues raised below.

<sup>3</sup> Materiality is not equivalent to either matter or to materials. The essays presented here draw on currents in new materialism to treat materiality not as mere brute matter, passively awaiting form, but in terms of potentiality and the work of the work of art. Thus ‘materiality’ is not simply the identification and enumeration of materials and techniques used.

<sup>4</sup> The situation is improving, but the tendency remains to discuss Naples in terms of one or two signal artworks, such



as Castel Nuovo, framed in terms of artists and artworks from northern Europe ('Artists on the Move'), even in the vast new surveys of Italian Renaissance art (Campbell & Cole, 2012, pp.264, 185; see also Cole, 2016). It fares better in Italian baroque surveys. (see Del Pesco, 1998, pp.223–48).

<sup>5</sup> Paula Findlen points out that Florence has functioned as a historical laboratory for early modern Italy as a whole, partly because of the ready accessibility and richness of Florentine archives, and partly because of the centrality of the 'Renaissance' in Anglo-American accounts of modernity (2003, pp.13–28). The establishment of national identity in nineteenth-century Italy was undertaken through a history of the medieval city states and the renaissance and Florence of the Medici was evoked as a powerful political ideal. Today the lavish institutional support for research in Florence, Rome and Venice – from national academies, including the American Academy in Rome, to Harvard's Center for Studies of the Italian Renaissance at Villa I Tatti in Florence to The Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice – has no counterpart in southern Italy.

<sup>6</sup> The social, political, cultural and economic marginalisation of Naples both informs and is reinforced by its treatment by historians and art historians. Art historians have been particularly slow to recognise their own prejudices in this regard.

<sup>7</sup> The literature is too vast to characterise here, but for the two extremes, see Veca (1981) and Silver (2006).

<sup>8</sup> The south became an object of special study soon after Giuseppe Garibaldi, having conquered the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, surrendered it to Victor Emmanuel II in 1860. Leading figures in the Liberal movement, who had guided the process of unification elsewhere in the peninsula, strove to understand the territories unexpectedly acquired by the new kingdom. This set the foundations for an intellectual tradition that became known as *meridionalismo* (Gramsci, 2007, pp.12–37; Morris, 1997, pp.1–2).

<sup>9</sup> Thus, in 2016 a rich and wonderful exhibition of Neapolitan baroque art held at the Art Gallery in Wiesbaden, Germany, was accompanied by a conference conceived exclusively in terms of individual artists and style: 'Naples as Laboratory – Stylistic Currents, Artistic Rivalry and Aesthetic Effect in Neapolitan Baroque Painting'.

<sup>10</sup> Baroque was seen as a 'taste' that follows after and replaces 'local tradition', at once transcendent and localised. Thus, Silvia Savarese describes Francesco Grimaldi as 'an artist who, while remaining tied to a traditional vocabulary, marked in Naples a change of taste as the hinge between local tradition and early baroque architecture' (1992, p.120). For Neapolitan art in terms of style, see Abbate (2002, pp.123–60).

<sup>11</sup> 'Strano paese è questo! Quale impasto bizzarro di bellissimo e di orrendo, di eccellente e di pessimo, di gradevole e di nauseante!' For such discussions of baroque, see Hills (2013).

<sup>12</sup> 'Nessun paese al mondo, io creo, conserva al pari di Napoli così scarsa e non pregevole quantità di tracce monumentali delle dinastie che vi si sono succedute nel dominio. [...] Dei Bisantini e dei Normanni qualche rara

ed informe traccia fuor che nei dintorni; degli Svevi e degli Angioini qualche chiesa e le loro solide regge, meglio paragonabili a robusti fertilizi che a principesche dimore; degli Spagnoli molte chiese goffissime e pochi obelischi oscenamente barocchi'. (White, 1877).

<sup>13</sup> 'La beauté tres médiocre de la ville [...] Cette Naples si vantée n'a guere de beau que ce qui n'est pas elle [...] l'architecture de ses palais et de ses églises est en général du plus mauvais style'.

<sup>14</sup> 'Dopo le ragioni sociali di tanta povertà architettonica, altra più potente ed efficace la troverai passeggiando in un giorno sereno lungo le magiche rive del Golfo, quando ti sentirai forzato ad esclamare con l'animo commosso: "E a che scopo lottare coi nostri piccoli cervelli mortali contro la più bella opera della natura?" Immaginati la cupola di Brunellesco all'ombra del Vesuvio, e pensa.'

<sup>15</sup> This is not to think in terms of 'propaganda', which relies on a representational model of art's relationship to power and identifies issues of power only in literal and direct representation of such issues (Hills, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> The papacy had a claim to homage from the king of Naples by virtue of the fact that the kingdom had been established in 1130 as a papal fief, but this did not challenge the king's title.

<sup>17</sup> In turn, interpretations of the 'Neapolitan Enlightenment' often depend on a framing viewed from the perspective of the 1799 revolution and its failure. This interpretation, spearheaded by the Italian historian Franco Venturi (1962) established a persistent historiographical paradigm.

<sup>18</sup> My thanks to Fabrizio Ballabio for this reference.

<sup>19</sup> Risorgimento leaders looked to the Roman Republic and the renaissance for its heroes and to Spanish tyrants, soldiers and prostitutes for its villains. Croce's work was informed by a nationalism which strove to create a strong Italian image. Croce later noted in qualification that Italians were willing participants in the cultural decadence of the 'baroque era' under Spanish domination (Pallotta, 1992; Brancaforte, 1970).

<sup>20</sup> Subsequent scholars have sought to place the 'Black Legend' stereotype of the Spanish as cruel, intolerant, and fanatical in its historical context (Marino, 2011; Dandele, 2001; Musi, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> For the Neapolitan viceroyalty, see Rovito (2003).

<sup>22</sup> Admission of new families to the Seggi was barred after 1553, apart from cases of 'resumption of status' (Visceglia, pp.822–8).

<sup>23</sup> Baroque Naples is frequently described in terms of its almost unparalleled population growth, as if drawing attention to the size of its population will necessarily prompt scholars to counter traditional neglect.

<sup>24</sup> 'Gli argenti danno in eccessi, e nella quantità, e nel peso, e nei lavori, e particolarmente quelli, che servono per adornare ne' giorni festivi il maggiore Altare'.

<sup>25</sup> The distinction between 'materiality' which offers potential and 'matter' or 'materials' treated as inert and acted upon by 'technique' is important here. For this, see Lloyd Thomas (2007); Hills (2016, pp.65–111, 123–73).

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