

Children of Unquiet

Mikhail Karikis

Children of Unquiet is a new project by Mikhail Karikis that takes place in the geothermal area of the Devil's Valley in Tuscany, Italy. Known for its legendary association with Dante's *Inferno*, this is the very location where sustainable energy production was invented in the early 1900s and where the first geothermal power station in the world was built. Until recently, five thousand workers and their families lived there in a group of iconic modernist industrial villages constructed around the power station. Following the introduction of automated and remote operation technologies in the industry, unemployment increased and prospects for the young became limited resulting in the rapid depopulation or abandonment of entire villages.

It is within this intricate natural, historical and socio-economic context that Mikhail Karikis developed the project *Children of Unquiet* in collaboration with children from the region over a period of eighteen months.

At the centre of the project is his homonymous film, which orchestrates a children's "take-over" of a deserted workers' village and its adjacent industrial and natural locations. The film features youngsters of five to twelve years of age who seize the depopulated sites by transforming the scorching vaporious wasteland into a playground; gathering among the ruins to read about love and the industriousness of bees; and coming together to sing and whistle the roaring geothermal sounds of geysers, the incessant hum of factory drones and the unremitting hiss of steam erupting from the earth that form the soundscape of their childhood.

Accompanying the film, a photographic series and a Super 8 film capture the children's visions of the future of their homes in the deserted villages as they depict them in a series of futurological drawings and urban plans generated in workshops with the artist. In addition, the project features a sound work entitled *102 Years Out of Synch*, which traces the site's legendary, literary and cinematic connections with the *Inferno* and the sonic imaginary of Hell, as well as a new board game designed by the artist to activate decision-making processes, dilemmas and conflicts that echo the conflicting narratives of the social-economic preoccupations at the site.

In *Children of Unquiet* a desolate post-industrial site exudes new potential unleashed out of the ruins by a community of children. Their "take-over" through play and song, and their speculative urban and architectural interventions generate the opportunity for individual and communal expression, asserting the younger generation's connection with the site of their childhood. By challenging narratives

of a failed human project and obligatory migration that dominate them, they evoke different possible, desired or imagined futures.

Artist's Biography

Mikhail Karikis is a Greek-born and London-based artist whose practice emerges from his ongoing exploration of the role of sound and the human voice in creating a sense of collectivity that shapes people's lives and professional identities, and challenges dominant political and cultural conventions. Karikis has exhibited at 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014); Assembly, Tate Britain (2014); Aichi Triennale, Japan (2013); Manifesta 9, Belgium (2012); Danish Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale (2011).

Children of Unquiet Review

[C. A. Jones, 'Review: Art Sheffield Zero Hours', in **Corridor 8**, 20th November 2013, Sheffield, UK]

"[...] Down the road at Site Gallery Mikhail Karikis's film *Children of the Unquiet* is playing and as the title suggests, it is not quiet. As I walk along a darkened corridor and into a deep rectangular room I am struck by what I hear long before I am struck by what I see. It is a confrontation of shots of the gurgling Tuscan landscape and the ominously named Devil's Valley – the inspiration for Dante's *Inferno* and home to one the world's largest geothermal factories. A recent technological error devastated the surrounding communities; Modernist villages stand eerily empty as the gas under the earth gurgles and groans. This is an exploration into the aftermath of a man-made disaster. Karikis collaborated with children from the community who explore and test the potentiality of their birthplace in what the artist describes as a 'take over'. The result is a sonorous feast: children play in the scorched wasteland, read aloud from works of philosophy about love and bio-politics and mimic the sounds of geysers – the whistling of steam erupting from the earth and the incessant hum of industrial drones.

That canny tactic of foiling the innocent and playful state of childhood with the more sinister effects of man-made industry is orchestrated beautifully. However, unlike those adverts using children to conjure up a type of sympathy in the audience, this film is not sad and it does not lure us into a false sense of purpose. The landscape becomes a character in its own right, a playmate for the children. And it is not one to be pitied as it hisses back – abundant, energetic and autonomous. It is we humans that are left behind and powerless.

In the film one of the children reads aloud from a philosophical text. We are told about the pollination ritual of the Hammer Orchid, a species that has come to be solely pollinated by wasps in a deceitful, non-mutualistic method. We learn about the false pretences under which the wasp approaches the orchid – the male wasp is

tricked into carrying out the orchid's work and there is no payment in return, the wasp continues to be tricked over and over again. Walking through Sheffield's post-industrial landscape it is difficult to escape the metaphor of the wasp and the orchid – under what and under who do we labour? [...]"