Geography as a *library bookshelf* and a *toolkit* of memories

Giuseppe Campione[*]

Inhabiting the distances is becoming the oxymoron whereby the overwhelming contradiction between a renewed need for territorial *roots* and the growing sense of belonging to elsewhere is best described, that one between localism and *deterritorialisation*, between the experience of *staying* and that of *passing through*, both materially and immaterially speaking. Thus we continue, perhaps with difficulty, without imagining to be able to categorise and represent migration iconographically and without any sense that we ought to simplify things.

Perhaps there is a way of suggesting meanings, values, inactive and/or unexpressed orders by forms of persuasive communication, so as to discover hidden meanings in well-known factors.

Even if the mythology of anti-urbanisation and the apocalyptic view of the fate of cities may seem outdated, one must not surrender to the intellectual temptation of broadening the problems. The fact remains that *cities no longer guarantee what they have promised,* the promise of freedom to citizenship, a lessening of the unequal distribution of resources, a multi-cultural society, bringing about more open lifestyles and so on and so forth. That being said, *a nightmarish vision* of the city will not help us either.

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[*] Universiy of Messina

In any case, the *geography* of *common sense* increasingly focuses attention on places and on seeking out meanings that are far from banal, or, as Lévi-Strauss (2003) would have put it, they are increasingly *'listening to the wheat growing'*. Precisely, the complexity of cities has proven to be no more or less irreducible than the complexity of societies themselves.

In order to exorcise social disintegration and to re-establish the rule of citizenship, we must take slum districts into great consideration. We need to discuss their modes of production, fear engendered by neglect, an *unsafety* which is somehow deliberately sought out (almost as a sort of *slipknot*, being their challenging response to the narrative of urban modes of production) (Farinelli, 2003). However, will the development of cities be able to recover from marginality and low quality of life? Above all, as far as areas which are usually neglected are concerned, it will be able to lessen the emergence of the dangerous effects of *alternative* and *parallel* citizenship thus begetting anti-values that in turn lead to social aggregation and to provide people with a shared sense of meaning in life and even with a parallel system of welfare. This may be compared with Santi Romano's (1983) *alternative* and/or *parallel* institution or Zagrebelsky's (2007) *juxtaposition* of histories.

Everyday narratives and renewed discussions will be a way to restate and institutionalise the immediate situation, thus contributing to a shared construction of meaning and to an ascription of sense that might prove useful in bringing about a new social order.

The city and the territorial space, to use L.B. Alberti's metaphor (Clementi, 1996), are local areas whose contours are ill-defined, overlapping, and that '*in their overall assemblage will turn into more dynamic places'*. From this connections and relations a *system* will emerge from within a network of attractions and hierarchies (Campione, 2003; Guarrasi, 2002).

The *narrative* of the city and the construction of its *myths*, are becoming genuine strategies of urban marketing. At the same time they are influencing, more or less consciously, the means and implementation of change and the *make up* of the city. The city blossoms by nurturing its own fable, by forgetting lapses and distortions, and by devolving its strategies for sustainable development to, sometimes unconvincing, *planning logics.*

Therefore *going through* the city, somehow *walking* it and *reading* it, become, in such a context, actual instruments for *writing* it.

Thus, the mental map of cities can even be said to be created by the sum of their representations and discourses. Calvino (1995), for example, argues that, *'Before being a city of the real world, Paris for me, as for millions of other people in every country, has been a city that I have imagined through books, a city that you appropriate when you read.'*

Augé (1993) quotes what Lyotard (1979) called the *'end of great narratives'* -a moment corresponding to the loss of illusions, that is to say the founding myths, which have long since disappeared, to the eschatological myths of the future. Now, rethinking the utopia of cities as places for living by turning to urban-planning methods, that are supposed to leave behind ancient logomachies on the priority of assumptions, does not mean *sailing* towards some *non-existent island*, but rather it means imagining an anti-geography of that cities which does exist. That is, we have to return to the city as an *ideal* and the *driving force* of a new and harmonic, inasmuch as it is possible, *regionality*. The region as a *space* constructed by a history which has been reconsidered and which has been unconsciously deposited in anthropologies and territorial logics that have not come up to its expectations (Gambi, 1972).

Geography, and later urban planning, should have devised a plan of overall rethinking, taking into account *at the same*

time of all the social, cultural and economic factors; '*these are the only ones that will be able to modify our life conditions*', declared Adriano Olivetti (1958) well before Campos Venuti's (1987) third generation, when all that *poetry* seemed after all to be confined to the inner sphere.

Is this vision, which also seemed to be confined within the realm of utopia, still a reference point for those custodians of local histories and projects, of plans which were supposed to last and that should have represented a fundamental resource with which to experiment more effective models of city governance. That is, actions of urban planning that result from dialogue and are monitored by social and cultural forces and that, in order to establish a different relationship between strategies and projects, ought to involve shared actions and inter-institutional forms of collaboration; this implies a shared re-reading of development options and a rethinking of their dynamics.

Hence we have the urgency to pursue the project of reconstructing the city, in order to reconsider in a more complete way, the real potential of urban planning through the mobilisation of resources, aspirations, intelligence and professional skills as well as the *places* of a demanding society.

So far, we have not managed to guarantee those *epiphanies* that we had promised, precisely because of the lack of a discourse on the city, new developments, from the culture of liberty to the culture of citizenship, from multi-culturalism to the promotion of more open lifestyles and so forth. Therefore, the *urban promise* is still a challenge, and as part of this process we are all faced by the disorder that is the other side of the *sciolism* of development and of unsustainable growth. In other words, we should retrace a new and a more general experimentation of the suitable cultural options, also in order to allow consistent governmental involvement. In this way, we could

determine possible maps of a social capital that is rich in invention and strong thinking and which aims, in action resulting from dialogue, at the themes of living together in a superior way.

That would be tantamount to asking for significant approaches to forms of governance and of *quality* citizenship, rather than for mere *government*. Subsequently, we need to rediscover the sense of locations, adding to our *tool kit* other distant kinds of knowledge are able to offer. The result will thus be a mosaic full of references to potential developments that are often surprising, that is to say potential developments where the local and the global encounter, add up and suggest keys to the reading of our territory and of our '*complex insularity*', Febvre's (1966) '*îles de terre*' (mainland islands), to agree that '*the territory, with its devastation, is the real evidence that will have to be presented in the courtroom of history*' (Campione, 2007b). This is because the territory is not merely a construct whose significance is essentially related to politics and governance, it is actually a principle which informs the whole of a political community by providing it with a bond to the land.

This space, despite its variations in form and immateriality, will in any case *radiate* from its generating and co-ordinating hub. Therefore cities do not disappear in the labyrinth of globality, quite the contrary, they *reassert* their controlling role in the emergence of networks because they are local territorial systems and the nodes of global networks at the same time (Campione, 2007a). Thus, as Calvino (1993) says, a city contains its past and its various realities in everything that the mind and eye may perceive.

Thus Borges (1985), in his inventions, reads his Buenos Aires as '*hose things that death extinguishes*', a city out of time, as eternal as water and air, which floats among words and verses. But such a city could be any other city, such as the universal places and landscapes located '*within*' man.

Such places are little by little swallowed up and contribute to create a habitat in accordance with the vital needs of a community which is unique in its development and emancipation. We could add to these the places that were devised by an architect and accomplished with rational integrity, such as Le Corbusier's *Chandigarh* (Lucan, 1987), the '*silver city'*. Chandigarh was built according to the scheme of man, the *Modulor*, whose hand, open '*to give and receive*', is the symbolic monument at its very centre. We could also consider the Holocaust Memorial designed by Peter Eisenman (Quigley, 2005) a labyrinthine path through a wide grill of concrete columns that becomes a metaphor of the dark and complex inner path one goes through when one remembers the *Shoah;* an obscure and abstract metaphor of unspeakable horror.

Geometries, structures and calculations for the patterns that can repeat themselves endlessly, following a system recalling Borges's (1983) Library of Babel in his Buenos Aires, a city which is a mirror and a metaphor of the world and where the *Aleph*, the centre of the Universe, is located.

From a metaphorical point of view, again, the security of belonging, of living in places shared also from the historical point of view, allows man to arrive at the hidden core of a community. It is not by chance that Borges (1983) talks about a library made up of books and shelves. Patterns of thought and of concepts, hence of culture, that, amongst galleries and perfect geometries, risk changing their features (albeit something which seems necessary for their development) and eventually being turned into other books that obviously are to be read from a more global point of view than that of the *self* or the *individual*. Is the city then some sort of *library bookshelf*, (Calvino, 1993), bearing memories?

Of course, the answer is far from being simple, but it should not be separated from the whole of our

considerations, from an analysis of collective feeling inspiring movements and events, producing meaning and elaborating processes of myth-making, symbolic emphases, and which will subsequently connote the manner of organisation and governance of the territory.

Also, it claims significant approaches to forms of governance that might give substance to quality citizenship, rather than mere government. There is a reflection in the preface of Hegel's *Phenomenology* (2008) wherein he talks of the bud which gives way to the flower and disappears, as if the flower refuted the bud, then the fruit appears and clarifies that the flower is actually '*a false form of the plant's existence*', whereas the fruit is rather its true nature. Nevertheless, the fluidity of these moments does not make them incompatible with one another, that is to say, they do not '*supplant one another*', they are indeed moments of an organic unity '*where they not only do not contradict one another*', but '*one is as necessary as the other*', and '*this equal necessity of all moments constitutes alone and thereby the life of the whole*'.

This is an alternative way of experiencing geography, a useful way of interconnecting different kinds of knowledge, at the crossroads of a long- and short-lived Italy. It is like having a history and at once perceiving a lack of cognition of its questions (Dematteis,1995). Maybe it is this oxymoron that holds everything together. Yet let us go back to the whole sense of our reflection, given the absolute need to reflect on geographies.

According to Olsson, a Swedish geographer, '*With its traditional stress on space, measurability and visual landscape, geography has committed itself to the surface features of the external. Since the external is in things rather than relations, we have produced studies of reifications in which man, woman and child inevitably are treated as things and not as the sensitive, constantly evolving beings we are… This is why a more humanistic perspective is so sorely*

needed not only in geography but in the social sciences at large'
(Olsson, 1980).

Geographies of personal experiences include people's suffering. If the tears of a baby question God's omnipotence, after Auschwitz (Jonas, 2004) one can even declare the end of such omnipotence. How can one think that such pain might not change the earth, and we do *narrate* the earth, we *inhabit the distances*. Is it not a land without men, as in Morselli (1985)? Is it possible to go on merely with magnificent defining procedures or with elaborate descriptions of descriptions? The ethic of geographic knowledge is the ethic of life, of freedom, of peace and most of all, the ethic of causes and their effects.

Taking Sicily as an example, here too we find the *bookshelf* of memories and the *tool kit*. The contrast between the different sides of Sicily shows on the one hand a rapidly declining Sicily, the old rural Sicily, the deep Sicily, condemned by the crisis in traditional agriculture to export its men, indeed the essential part of the active population, to factories and offices. Even the small industrial fringe bears witness to the fragility of Sicilian industry. Except for a historical process of high quality craftsmanship, local governance is still lagging far behind. Finally, and most of all, the urban growth reveals at once the crisis of rural society and the rise of a huge public and private tertiary sector and nourishes a spectacular and chaotic boom, however one which shows no respect whatsoever to rules and regulations. All in all, Sicily seems to be shedding her old robes of being a closed and insular reality. This is all the more evident at the level of the common perception in the collective imagination (Crisantino, 2012).

The "Atlante dei tipi geografici" (Atlas of Geographical Types) (IGM, 2008) shows up a confluence of the Noto Valley, Enna, the former centrality of Messina (Campione, 2009; La Torre, 2000) and the "Stretto" conurbation, on

the northern outskirts of ancient Valdemone, towards Catania- an *unaware* metropolis, in Giarrizzo's terms (1986). The "Atlante" (Atlas) also shows up moribund hinterland areas, with the exception of those projected onto Palermo, an ancient capital now stranded, characterised by its mostly parasitic tertiary sector and its consumption usually made possible by *improper* financial gains (i.e. derived by a non-linear and murky division of labour). Finally, the promising vitality of the Trapani district remains in that area.

Thus one might think of the many possible Sicilies that overlap with one another, as well as at a cultural and anthropological level, and certainly not in a schematic way. First of all there is the urban Sicily, the area of urbanised coastal communities, which are actually interspersed populated areas with natural elevations as their confines. This urban Sicily is often characterised by an uncritical *ingestion* of external models, inflated by the fact that it is a place where consumed resources are mostly produced elsewhere, that is to say a kind of consumption expedited and broadened by the inexorable philosophy of surviving on welfare and whose income, especially in the Palermo area, may often be illicit.

This system is governed by the *mediators* of such resources, the old class of intellectuals who have now self-referentially transformed into the professionally astute representatives of a political and parasitical bourgeoisie enjoying the rewarding roles long belonging to it. We find all of this within a mixture of backwardness, functional lack of public services, degradation of the local environment and architecture, lack of basic welfare, social unease and mafia-like mass culture; on the whole, at its core there is a common alternative form of citizenship. Carelessness and blameworthy distractions are artfully positioned at the nodes of a consensus that still blooms in

the mechanisms of exchange and that often seems to make use of widespread unease as a form of life annuity. The emphasis on difference and on statute uniqueness, which stresses claims to reparation and/or vindication, also belongs to the aforementioned mediation level.

On the contrary, it would have been better *'to develop autonomy (the quality of government and, most of all, of management) from within, looking outward not in order to go on with exhausting confrontations and unlearned and repetitive bovarism, but in order to draw on ideas, perspectives, lifestyles and ways of living together and introduce them in, and intertwine them with, the motley aspects of Sicilian reality, in a logic of useful and reciprocal enrichment'* (Corso, 1983). Maybe that is why, especially at institutional level, there has seemed to reappear, and set in, a permanent condition of insularity. Over the past years it has gradually turned into a haughty, and at the same time complaining, reflection on an unlikely difference, laced with a desire to shut themselves away that echoes the *repressions* voiced in so many quarters of the country. These attitudes have ended up going into *free-fall* or an endless *snowball effect*. Most of them have preferred contrasting the way Sicily is *told* rather than grasping its real sense, often renouncing the necessary comprehension of the *morality* of situations and of the dramatic complexity of the issues in question. In order to try to activate new processes and to imagine a sense of modernity with the aim of not reaffirming the state of civic backwardness and, therefore, that of *'radical losers'*, says Henzensberger (2010), it will be necessary to bear in mind that an acceleration of the rhythm of crisis is a constant feature of modernity. Here, though, one cannot detect any substantial crisis of the system. History is permanent and self-referential. Sometimes it vacillates, but it does so only apparently. The events are all subsumed in a long-term *Thermidor*, the

structures resist remorselessly, at the very worst there may appear some form of inherent victimism.

In an almost distant past a government praxis was experimented, characterised by a *willing* and aggressive strategy seeking to circumvent laws and regulations, in order to compete with the Mafia in an imaginative effort to tame it. At other times inspirational moments came offering a different direction to the well-established and continual processes, yet, given their anomaly, they were all broken by applying different levels of *violence.*

Godelier (1984) writes that the most important factor is not the violence of the rulers but the ideological consensus of the rules, that is to say from tolerant and indulgent to actual supporters; healthy carriers of *mafia,* with a demeanour that emphasises specious inventions of tradition (Hobsbawm, 1983) and the substantial exclusion of modernity and novelty. Is it possible to imagine a new weaving of the social fabric? Until the establishment of a new culture of citizenship that is substantially different in anthropological substance to that may be approximately, yet not without foundation, compared to the code of *Kanun* (Resta, 1997).

Regrettably, as Steiner (2002), paraphrasing Heidegger, states, we do not know how to think, we '*have not yet come out of the prehistory of thought',* and '*the ability to think thoughts that are worth thinking, let alone express and preserve them, is a comparatively rare one'.* Maybe that was what Tarrow (1972) was thinking about when he tried to understand why the *Left* and the *South* seemed to be an oxymoron, or Banfield (1976) when he analysed fragments of society and of well-established behaviours in Lucania, that would nevertheless have been the same with regard to Calabria or Sicily. Banfield came to the conclusion that an anti-state illegality governed, yet is was was not perceived as such and was experienced as necessary and sacred in that it was imbued

with the only possible value, that is to say an *amoral familism*, as in Putnam's (1993) conclusions on the civic tradition of Italian regions.

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