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Which Interdisciplinarity?

Anthropologists, Architects and the City

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1. Introduction

The past three decades have seen an epistemological crisis in the intellectual disciplines dealing with urban planning. The terms of this crisis are expressed in the progressively greater distance between the cities' creators and their inhabitants. The political, economic and cultural perspectives employed up to now have shown themselves increasingly incapable of grasping the ways in which cities are changing and their inhabitants are adapting to and reinterpreting these urban transformations.

In search of new methodologies and analytical tools capable of decoding smaller-scale contexts, the disciplines involved with urban studies have attempted to initiate a dialogue, in which each discipline would benefit from the experiences of the others, and to experiment with more integrated approaches. However, to this point studies have tended to be interdisciplinary only formally, due to an academic system which is structurally endogamic and resistant to the creation of interdisciplinary programs of study¹, and due to the lack of convergence and communication among the various disciplines, which results in each discipline appropriating fragmentary pieces of the other disciplines' knowledge, without sharing experiences and the results of research.

Taking as a starting point my own research with the Department of History, Culture and Religion at the Sapienza University of Rome, this paper will attempt to detail what role anthropology might have in the field of urban studies, a field still in the process of being defined.

2. Anthropology, the city, and interdisciplinarity: A tale of two delays

In 2002 the Italian university system underwent a profound transformation. In that year the "Berlinguer Reform" (named for the minister who proposed it) came into force. This reform was a part of a larger process of redefining the university which has been undertaken over

¹ In 2008, in Rome, there was an attempt to create an interdisciplinary degree program, known as Asprot, among the departments of Architecture, Political Science and Sociology. After two years, the concentration ceased to exist, having been disintegrated by the centrifugal forces of the needs of the individual disciplines involved, which proved incapable of creating an integrated system among themselves.

the past 15 years in all of Europe. The intentions of European ministers of Higher Education were that the restructuring (and unifying) of university systems would promote the creation of a European identity which would transcend national borders.

Instead of a community based on the model of nation-states, Europe was to be configured as a shared space, a common narrative horizon, a metadiscourse, not only for those affected by the reform, but for the institutions themselves. The new Europe was to be constructed through the "Europe of Knowledge", and this was to be accomplished through university reform.

In Italy, the introduction of university reform could have had dramatic effects on the academic system: in the organization of relations between teachers (given managerial duties and asked to reorganize professorships which were isolated inside the system of degree programs); in the redefinition of relations between teachers and students; in the creation of new dialogues between disciplines, in the rethinking of education itself, informed by the opening of the various academic disciplines to the world of work; in the revision of consolidated hierarchies between basic and applied research.

For anthropology, the opportunity arose to close the seemingly unbridgeable gap dividing it from sociology inside the field of the social sciences. For the first time it was possible to earn a degree in anthropology. And this new possibility was interpreted as the opportunity to bridge the gap with sociology, which even had its own department.

In the words of Alessandro Lupo, then president of the newborn BA in Theory and Practice of Anthropology, "The fact that there were entire departments of sociology, while anthropology was an invisible discipline hidden among other departments, represented a situation of imbalance. With the transition to the New Order, we seized the opportunity to correct a seeming imbalance between two sister disciplines, both of them born from the ribs of Durkheim." These words echo those written by Professor Alberto Sobrero in the first guide for students in the new degree program:

It has been almost 150 years since the first professorships in anthropology were created in Italy, but only this year, with the university reform, was it possible to offer a degree in our disciplines. It is the first year of the new order, but we certainly are not starting from zero. The history of our Department of Humanities and Philosophy can boast of an important tradition in this field. Many of us were trained -- and in some cases began to work -- which those from our University who have contributed to the growth of our disciplines: Vinigi Grottanelli, Diego Carpitella, Tullio Tentori, Alberto Cirese, Bernardo Bernardi, Vittorio Lanternari, Giorgio Cardona, Italo Signorini. We owe them many things, and above all we owe them the passion for research and teaching which does not change with changes in disciplines' addresses and perspectives.

Rather than reflecting on the elements of discontinuity introduced by the reform, this text highlighted continuity with the past. The new degree program was located in the tracks of tradition, with respect to its links with the history of the Department of Humanities and Philosophy, with respect to the professors who had succeeded one another (and who had created the history of anthropology in Rome and in Italy as a whole), with respect to the figure of the anthropologist, who, now as before, despite changes in disciplinary addresses and perspectives, is located in the coordinates of pure research and academic teaching.

Sobrero was presenting the new degree program to the students, and, in doing so, he was reconstructing the context in which the passage to the New Order came to maturity, including as regarded the anthropological tradition of the Sapienza. The BA was seen as a process of gradual immersion in the world of anthropology: it began with the study of the history of the discipline and an introduction to its theoretical and methodological tools, and continued with study of the problems and questions presented by the various areas and fields of interest, finally presenting, in the last year of the program, the contexts in which anthropologists could work². There was no reference to the other branches of knowledge which students would have encountered during the BA, to the different configurations which anthropology would take on, to the insights of the other disciplines which they would have to study. Although it is true that the Department offered modules of “history, geography, literary and linguistic matters” in an intentionally created path of study which had anthropology at its center, this was not intended systemically, as a place inside which the degree program would interact with other degree programs, as a space for interconnection, as an instrument which would permit the interaction of degree programs, rather than as a container of modules and a central node of university life. In contemplating the changes which the university reform had introduced, there was no space for an interdisciplinary didactic, despite the intentions underlying the new system. It seemed that in the background lurked an autarchic view of the degree program, seen as an independent and self-sufficient entity. Beginning with the particular areas of interest of each professor, the program attempted to present its students with the most ample and exhaustive view of anthropological studies, in a mix containing both disciplinary history and individual research.

Instead of projecting itself toward the outside, beyond the narrow confines of the discipline, instead of paying attention to relationships with other disciplines and with the world of work, and to the spaces which the anthropological field could find in the world of work, the program perpetuated the idea of a university as a closed and self-referential world, founded on the system of professorships, and on the academically filial relationship of teacher and student.

Thought proceeded more along endogamic lines (training of future anthropologists) than along exogamic ones (expand the discipline into new areas, and open it to new teachings). And this logic was rendered extrinsic by the placement of professors within the same degree program rather than in various degree programs. The logic of distinction had prevailed (as viewed against the background of a them in a broader autarchic context, no one looking to the outside). Even in cases of interaction with professors from other disciplines, there was no real synergy in the creation of programs of study. There was no attempt to bring anthropology into the other degree programs, to create a network of mutual exchange, structured as a ramified web of relationships.

² Almost all of the professors were required to have two 4ECTS modules, thus following the model of the semester courses in the former system. There were foundation courses i (history of the discipline, theory and methodology), area studies courses (Ethnology of the Mediterranean, Ethnology of America, Anthropology in Italy, Mesomerica), and courses on themes (such as the study of consumption, of cities, of institutional logics and of the creation of identities), which were particularly well-suited to ethnographic approaches and anthropological reflection.

The three-year degree programs could have been an opportunity for an interdisciplinary pedagogy which would have identified paths of study (such as the study of cities, for example), in which every discipline could offer its own point of view, its own theory and methodology. In this way, the fragmentation of the old professorships into a proliferation of individual courses could have provided new educational stimuli, placing at the heart of each course, not a particular aspect of the history of the discipline or the anthropological tradition, but instead a theme to be reflected on from various perspectives. A BA, then, focusing on creation of workshops or laboratories, rather than on exclusive transmission of disciplinary knowledge, attempting to combine instruction focused on the transmission of skills immediately useful in the world of work and recognizable to the graduates themselves, with instruction focused on the transmission of knowledge of profound sophistication, like that of anthropology. In the words of Alessandro Simonicca, a professor of cultural anthropology in Rome:

On the institutional level, this amounts to understanding whether it would be more rigorous to reconstruct university communities of teachers and learners, in the medieval manner, or instead to concentrate education on a common base from which graduates could then continue in various directions and along diverse paths.³

In other words, should the universities have continued to reiterate their scholastic tradition, which holds its graduates bound to it in the teacher-student relationship, or offer its students theoretical and methodological skills which could be employed in the world of work?

With the introduction of the reform, every degree program was required to indicate educational objectives, professional capabilities it intended to transmit, and professional opportunities which it would be capable of providing. The combination of these professional capabilities, professional opportunities and education objectives laid out the territory of the degree program, defined by its teaching spaces (the university and locations participating in the Erasmus and Socrates exchanges), by the spaces in which anthropology could be applied (schools, entities and associations dealing with social marginalization, museums, institutions, and NGOs, with which internship arrangements were made), and by the spaces of research (areas and fields in which individual professors had expertise, ethnologic missions and new fields for research, cultural exchange arrangements, etc.) On paper, the degree program offered a network of possibilities which students could take advantage of. The internships constituted a window on professional environments; the Erasmus projects offered the possibility of exploring different anthropological contexts, and the open research missions offered programs in which it was possible to develop one's own specialized path of study.

The development of educational internships represented an opportunity to experiment with interdisciplinarity. As Alessandro Simonicca, the ex-coordinator of internships for the BA in Theory and Practice of Anthropology puts it:

When I arrived in Rome, I was asked to define the field of university internships and I began to imagine a map of the urban environment in which the intercultural or multicultural

³ Simonicca, A (2006), *Quindici anni dopo*, www.antropologie.it.

dimension would be evident. One must roll up one's sleeves, I was told, because, in contrast with the strong interest in the "traditional" provincial and regional zones, the Capital did not seem like such a pleasure to the anthropologists. Translated in other terms, it meant studying modernity. And what object was more nearby than the city? (...) To map the anthropological spaces of the Capital...an interesting project, but with what criteria?

The planning of practical internships with agencies, museums, institutions, NGOs, hospitals and former asylums, represented a challenge for Italian anthropology to confront an anthropology of home (rather than an anthropology at home), and an environment which associated anthropology with images of the exotic, the primitive and the bizarre. Instead, in the creation of programs of study, the spaces set aside for interdisciplinarity, and for the extra-academic and publically useful dimensions of the discipline, the idea of an education which would involve more frequent instances of practical research exercises and reflexive methods⁴, to be encouraged in class, beginning with an analysis of familial contexts and networks of friendship (Coleman, Simpson, 2004), with exceptions made for sensitivity and personal and isolated interests, were marginalized relative to the canonical courses on ethnology, history of anthropology, and area studies.

In this way the idea was perpetuated which associates the anthropologist and field research with the Malinowskian archetype⁵, who – as Gupta and Ferguson (1997) write – departs alone and goes to a small, far-off place, lays groundwork and goes into depth in an idealized form of field work, through which the anthropologist becomes an expert on a particular geographical area or on a particular, inherently anthropological, object of study. These two aspects are often strongly correlated: if cultural difference is localized in precise geographic areas (a tight link between space and cultural identity), then the only way the anthropologist can understand cultural differences is to travel. This view, according to Gupta and Ferguson, has contributed to the diffusion of an idea of culture which is tightly linked to space, whether in reference to ethnic categories (e.g. the Kurds), religious categories (e.g. the Islamic world), linguistic categories (the Bantu) racial categories (black Africa), or to specific categories which arise from the study of a certain area (as in the case of the honor/shame syndrome in the ethnology of the Mediterranean). To these categories are attached subfields linked to a geographic area: the field of economic anthropology has been linked to

⁴ Reflexivity here does not mean a private act or a mere exercise of consciousness (Strathern, 1987) but instead an exercise of continual self-contextualization, of negotiation of one's position, in order to interpret the logics underlying the contexts and the conditions in which one works. As the British anthropologist Susan Wright puts it (2004: 40): "It was this kind of 'political reflexivity' that I sought to engender in my students. By this I mean an ability to analyse daily encounters, their reactions to them, and signs of how other actors seemed to expect them to act, in order to uncover the detailed ways in which boundaries, hierarchies and power relations operated in the institution in which their learning was taking place. I aimed for them to perceive how they were positioned within the daily processes of this institution, and for them to be able to use this knowledge actively: if this positioning was constraining their ability to learn, how could they use their knowledge to negotiate a more conducive environment?"

⁵ Photographs of Malinowski have provided a visual image of what is understood as ethnographic work; they have become prototypes of research, used to establish a central idea of the field on which to judge its variants. In comparison with this example, various ethnographies appear as less "real" field work (Weston, 1997). The photographs of Malinowski, dominant mental images in research, reveal how the disciplinary community makes use of field work.

Melanesia, while religious anthropology has been linked to India, and political anthropology is the territory of the Africanists⁶. Those who intend to specialize in one of these subdisciplines know where they must go to do research. In anthropology the field – how it is chosen, how it is organized, what forces are at play – has generally been taken as a given, with little consideration of how one area is chosen rather than another, what place is chosen rather than another, and what factors (personal, professional, disciplinary) have informed that choice. And though ethnography has been the subject of much debate in recent times, «it remains evident that what many would deny in theory continues to be true in practice: some places are much more ‘anthropological’ than others.» (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 13): Africa more than Europe, southern Europe more than northern Europe, villages more than cities. And when anthropologists undertake research in locations unusual for anthropology, they are confronted with the other disciplines which already occupy those territories (as in the study of a city), and must overcome resistance from their disciplinary community («*How anthropological is your research?*» is one of the most frequent questions in these cases) and from themselves, as they are often tied to nostalgic ideas whom which anthropology has not yet managed to free itself⁷ (Pandolfi 2001).

Urban anthropology has suffered from this way of understanding the field of ethnography. It has found itself having to pay for its own low profile among the branches of anthropological study, and, consequently, in the academic system as a whole. It is not by chance that thirty or forty years after the first anthropological studies on the city, its ideas are still vague, so much so that in the *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, (Ed. David Levinson and Melvin Ember, 1996), under the entry *Urban Anthropology* is found the following definition: «At the simplest level urban anthropology is what urban anthropologists do.» As Sobrero (2011) writes: «it should be no surprise, then, that anthropologists know, or believe they know, what they are doing and trying to do in African and Indonesian villages» while the study of urban environments arouses relatively little interest.

When it has studied *home*, anthropology has used categories from other fields, depending sometimes on *political* and sometimes on *socioeconomic* studies. And, ignoring the fact that cities are inherently interdisciplinary, and that many disciplines concern themselves with cities, rather than engaging in dialogue with the other scholarly disciplines which study cities, anthropologists have chosen to reinforce their own boundaries, claiming for themselves the specificity of the ethnographic method and of fieldwork (Clifford 1997) and of an almost exclusive relationship with their own research territory⁸. When we do urban

⁶ On the topic of political anthropology, Abélès (2001) asserts that the study of politics has coincided with investigation of sociopolitical forms which are highly delimited in space (the far-off) and time (the archaic). Anthropology has thus privileged the pre-state, making the anthropologist, in the most extreme version, the bard of the “society against the state.” What could have been a favorable condition, allowing study of the state as rational agency (or system), has over time become a trap, tying anthropology to the study of “primitive” societies, of originary politics, and delegating to political science and sociology the study of western and modern states.

⁷ «Anthropologists are prisoners of their roots, and although anthropology has been in a certain sense an emancipatory discipline, which has helped us to move beyond the initial colonial view of non-western societies, which were characterized as ‘primitive’ there remains a dangerous nostalgia for that world, which today is profoundly different, or no longer exists» (Pandolfi 2001: 14).

⁸ The controlling model even now is that of the clear field of work, almost like the land of a peasant or an archaeological site, which involves a departure, an arrival, an intensive and lengthy residence, a

anthropology, on the other hand, we cannot claim any exclusive right to a theme or a territory, because cities are the object of study by many other disciplines, in comparison to which anthropology does not necessarily enjoy prominence (on the contrary). With the choice to conduct research on an ordinary context, not exotic, not isolated, the thematization of the concept of ethnography becomes an inescapable question. Indeed the definition of field work involves a mode of self-representation, of self-positioning relative to other disciplines, of understanding the evolution and the new contours of anthropology⁹. The urban anthropologist must contend with a situation in which his territory is effectively shared with others. It is not a matter of moving in a cloistered space but instead of turning one's glance on a place, the city, which is by definition a communal space. Once we have come to terms with the fact that we are part of this necessarily interdisciplinary field, we must ask ourselves what anthropology can do, and say, in the context of urban studies, and above all where anthropology is located inside this field, that is, what is its position in relation to that of the other disciplines. Those other disciplines should also ask themselves the same questions, all seeking to define their areas of interest and the questions on which they can provide the most pertinent or original contributions. If we wish to understand where we are located inside the field of urban studies and what we can offer to the study of cities, we clearly must read and study the works of others, or at least be aware of the work of those who employ other approaches: architects, geographers, sociologists, urbanists, political scientists and others as well. In this context, the challenge for urban anthropologists is to overcome an old dichotomy, the distinction between anthropology *in* the city and anthropology *of* the city. It is a question of reflecting on the city -- or the metropolis -- as such, focusing attention on its distinctive characteristics, that which makes it a city, rather than considering it only as a background on which to study certain phenomena, not necessarily urban in nature.

3. The disappearing city

While carrying out my research with the Department of History, Culture and Religion at the Sapienza, I began working with Anthropolis, a research team which has carried out various research projects for the city of Rome, focusing on the sense of place and the perceptions of urban transformations among the city's inhabitants.

combination of research practices with the particular characteristics of depth, extension and interaction (Clifford 1997).

⁹ Studying the use which is made of research allows us to understand how a certain discipline is understood in various historic contexts. For anthropology this analysis is complicated «by the fact that those people recognized as anthropologists (the relevant community) are critically defined by having accepted and done something close (or close enough) to “real fieldwork.” The boundaries of the relevant community have been (and are increasingly) constituted by struggles over the term's proper range of meanings. This complication is present, to some extent, in all community-use criteria for meaning, especially when “essential-contested concepts” (Gallie, 1964) are at stake. But in the case of anthropologists and “fieldwork,” the loop of mutual constitution is unusually tight. The community does not simply use (define) the term “fieldwork”; it is materially used (defined) by its senses. A different range of meanings would make a different community of anthropologists, and vice versa» (Clifford, 1997: 187-8). It is the relevant community which establishes which kinds of field research are anthropological and which are not, but the concept of ethnography is so significant that it defines the disciplinary community. The redefinition of anthropology and its relationship with other disciplines is thus articulated with regard to field research.

In the course of this research, we attempted an approach which would valorize voices from below and would use memory as an interpretive lens for reading the changes which the neighborhoods we studied had experienced over time. Rather than exoticizing daily realities, and treating the *here* as though we were *there*, our goal was to restore the complexity of the intricate narratives which attempted to make sense of the transformations which the city was undergoing.

We approached the study of urban transformation by experimenting with a kind of anthropology which had not yet found echoes in the academic system, but which nonetheless shared the interests¹⁰ of those fields, like urbanism and architecture, which deal with urban planning and which, faced with such rapid change, saw themselves as unprepared to interpret that change's dynamics and directions. All at once the city planners realized that they did not have suitable tools for deciphering the codes of city life and that they were creating spaces which city residents did not see as useful. Society changes faster than cities do, and urbanism struggles to keep up with both of them.

The issue is complex and involves the relationship between architecture, clients and politics; between architecture, art, social sciences and media; the public role of architecture and, ultimately, the theme of urban quality. How did it come to this situation of crisis and inability to know how to read cities and public spaces?

The resulting debate has been very contentious, and has seen arrayed on opposite sides (though with significant internal distinctions) those who lay the blame for the crisis on and Italian inability to innovate and to be able to respond to influences from the international context - now the undisputed land of archistar (Lo Ricco, Micheli, 2003) -, and those who lay the blame for the crisis on the star system system, viewed as abdicating every vocation for interpretation to the aesthetic¹¹.

The city, crossed and defragmented by flows of different types (Appadurai, 1996), becomes a hyper-place and disappear: why? Is it so because the architecture has not made itself hyper-architecture and did not follow the changes experienced by urban areas (which have swept away the usual way to imagine the places)? Or because the city got out of hand and architecture no longer has the tools to make it intelligible? In the background, there is the delicate issue of urban quality: what contributes to this definition? Aesthetic or other parameters?¹²

¹⁰ We need only think, in that sense, of the interest city planners have in cultural memory, social practices, and the symbolic dimension. In this new frame, specific projects are rethought depending on whether the topic is how the nature of planning has changed, about public politics (how many actors, with different tasks and jurisdictions, come into play, and often into conflict?), about city design, about organization and efficiency in administrative structures (how effective is the current configuration of regional and municipal agencies in tracing, mapping and interpreting urban transformations?).

¹¹ In his essays, Luigi Prestinenza Puglisi (Professor of History of Contemporary Architecture at Sapienza University of Rome) mentions the opposition between "traditionalists" and "contemporary" (see <http://www.prestinenza.it/index.aspx>)

¹² To understand how the issue is quite important, one need reflect on the fact that the City of Turin gave the role of advisor for the architectural quality to Carlo Olmo, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, University of Turin. Authoritative voice at the international level, the professor will be in the years

We do not wish to reconstruct here a debate that has gone on for several decades, which also implicates academic hierarchies and conflicts; nevertheless, if we analyze the issues related to the transformation of cities and urban quality, we cannot avoid making reference to it. And in reconstructing the current landscape of Italian architecture, we can see how we are faced with a rather articulated pattern.

Architects are now moving in a context marked by a strong international presence, a wide variety of projects and interviews with prominent personalities on the web and in the general media, an increasing number of journals, the irrelevance of the voice of Italian architects and, at the same time, great attention to the foreign stars in the public debate (Ciorra, 2011). Very interesting in this regard is the description of the Italian architecture field (Bourdieu, 1984) by architect Pippo Ciorra in his latest book *Senza Architettura* (2011): he portrays a landscape broken into two unequal halves. On the one hand, there are the archistar, about twenty super-designers, who travel the world and are part of a self-referential circuit, almost like Formula 1 drivers. These designers are a separate category, basing their strength on their own authority / authorship.

They are real media gurus, who have ceased to be masters, freed from disciplinary debate and more interested in competing on the international scene than in building schools of thought and laboratory work. Then there are all the others, who struggle on a national scale, away from the limelight of the media. According to Ciorra, the gap between these two halves has accentuated the phenomenon of parochialism, castling, and self-referentiality in our architecture. The work of archistar would thus be both a cause and effect of architecture's leaking from its consolidated historical and technical boundaries, in favor of an almost complete shifting in the media, communications, engineering bold, artistic event, putting the game out of disciplinary structures stratified and now in need of re-discussion and redefinition, in a context of maximum cultural uncertainty. Remaining "in the middle" between the certainties of a noble discipline, but one detached from reality, and the dangerous appeal of a "phenomenology of inventiveness" (Ciorra, 2011) laying down day after day its limits and its rules of operation, unable to renew, so architecture has left the field open to the archistar, gurus of the contemporary, exegetes of a city that disappears as we have understood until a few decades ago. Indeed, society itself has placed architects in an empyrean of stars, looking for performance increasingly based on the unusual, on seduction, on architecture as fulfillment of wishes and as making of dreams.

At the same time the change of established images of the place and the city (with a square, with the city center with the clock that strikes the hours, with the church and the market) has led to an implosion of the hierarchical system of classification of the architecture. The

involved in all major debates on the issues of urban transformation, and it will assume the task of reconstructing the terms of a debate often squeezed to questions of pure aesthetics, restoring depth and thickness. In an interview in 2002 to the newspaper "La Stampa" Olmo thus defines the cruxes of the matter: «Every single building is not an aesthetic fact, is something that either works or does not work, stop. The architecture is not governed only by aesthetic principles. The city exists if it expresses collective values, our task is to give new functions to the urban structure. And the architecture exists where there is conflict, confrontation, democracy. The urban design is realized when there is a strong consensus from all stakeholders, it isn't something that you create from nothing.» Not a merely aesthetic issue, urban quality becomes subject of public goods, expression of collective values. It concerns the sense of place as well as the time of artistic experimentation.

Italian architects found themselves suddenly deprived of their urban grammar, unable to adapt design tools and ways of thinking to a different hierarchy of space. According to Massimo Ilardi (2007), the transformation of contemporary cities follows a space revolution, the result of a previous social transformation which broke the sovereign territoriality, social identities pre-established forms of sedentary life. A new conception of space arises. We pass by the closed and bounded space of the city to infinity, with no points and no history of the metropolis of the globalized market. A mobile person, who consumes, who lives in the present, believes that his desires are absolute and imperative, who demands a unhindered freedom and plots the territory of the contemporary metropolis, is the next important social figure. The new city is the strength of the technique that makes everything equal and homologous; it is the spectacle of goods whose image, multiplied to infinity, tends to dematerialize reality in order to reduce it to pure play of drawings and languages; it is the space where closed and guarded architectures redefine social relations and hierarchies based on the consumption and knowledge. The space becomes hyper-place. Planetary space is getting smaller. The sense of proximity is conveyed through the media, the empirical space leaves the "here" and "now" to become a syncretic space, increasingly interconnected, no longer enjoyed through the social relations on the road. According to these visions of space, the empirical space coexists with virtual reality of other spaces, which burst and overlap with the same ease with which multiple windows overlap on the computer. In this framework, in which the crisis of modernity coincides with the crisis of Euclidean space, architecture must be hyper-architecture. The fluidity of the hyper-text replaces the linear structure of texts. And the walls, until now solid and perennial, become thin membranes that, like skin, put man in connection with the environment. In an interconnected world, like a great collective novel, where we are all artists and creators, architects should be those figures that create connections, capable of descrambling a world increasingly fragmented into a mosaic of displaced and disconnected observations. Architecture becomes the art of creating communication through communication, to join isolated individuals in connected networks, to create a language, a common code.

This view - which puts on the level of urban transformations and of public policy, which was created by the city of stone and the city of men, and sees in the architecture that knowledge able to infer the short circuit created between the space of flows and space of places (Ilardi, 2005), between territories, drawn by the logic of the market and different scales (D'Albergo, Moini, 2011), and practices of resistance and re-signification start from the bottom - is opposed to another vision that sees the clearest symbol of dyscrasia between constructing and living, between the city of stone and the city of people, between a project on paper and its execution¹³, in the figure of the *archistar*. The role of these figures in the process of urban gentrification, and their responsibility in going along with, and uncritically favoring, both the progressive glassing-in of urban centers, placed completely at the disposition of large corporations, and the reduction of public spaces in the urban

¹³ The theme of the distance between those who think about cities and those who live in them foregrounds two issues: 1. Self-examination about the nature of the project, in light of the current political, financial and economic situation at the national and international level, and of the bureaucratic procedures of public agencies; 2. The gaining, through rethinking of the project, of new means of access, new interpretive methods and new observational tools for analyzing and intervening on the urban fabric. (Cellamare, 2008).

peripheries, which are increasingly becoming bedroom communities, has been considered by important scholars like Leonardo Benevolo (2011) and Franco La Cecla (2008).

Famous firms, called on by mayors seeking world-famous architects, the *archistar* design spaces and buildings which, although using diverse architectural languages, are alike in their tendency to reduce architecture to a purely symbolic form and rather than locating themselves in the contexts in which they are placed. In the name of *cool*, both urban peripheries and city centers are transformed by well or poorly designed buildings which are isolated from the urban fabric, and constructed for the purpose of making an impression in the media and competing in an aesthetic marketplace both strange and standardized. Into the urban fabric their architecture introduces ostentatiously alien spatial codes, which have the effect of clearing the neighborhoods of their longtime residents, and eliminating gathering places and public spaces.

As Leonardo Benevolo (2011) argues, architects in the era of the *archistar*, more focused on aesthetics than on the interpretation of place, have given up on urbanism; they no longer localize people in space, and have passed over to an architecture of the ephemeral (Purini, 2010), creating isolated interventions rather than planning out public spaces which, following a more holistic vision, would provide narrative continuity to the urban fabric.

The reflections of La Cecla, Purini and Benevolo focus directly on the questions of the social role of city planners, and of the public use of architecture, and they are an indication of the epistemological crisis which urbanism is passing through as regards the themes of habitation, of the interpretation of urban transformations, and the search for more fertile ways of reading. The city seems to be getting away from us. The methods and categories used until now (typologies of buildings, functions, scales, demographic changes, social classes) no longer seem capable of grasping a reality which, as Gregotti (2008) writes, is becoming more fluid. And the same goes for architecture, which in the face of changes in sociocultural contexts, in its technical conditions, in its procedures and in the very role of the architect in society, is at risk of liquidation. There is a need for more precise analyses, to understand how citizens live in the spaces they inhabit, how they develop a sense of place, how they adapt to and appropriate the contexts in which they live. Nonetheless, in the desire for the elaboration of a new paradigm, the voices of the city seem to disappear behind the rhetorics of space which erases itself, of time which collapses, of the citizen who becomes a consumer in a global ecumene which connects everyone. In the analyses of the urbanists, a picture prevails, entirely dominated by the visual, in which information becomes instantaneous and total, advertising becomes an invasive and ubiquitous presence, tourism and the internet cancel out spatial distances, globalization produces homogenized and deterritorialized spaces, and architecture gets lost in a fragmentary practice in a fluid context, in which places are abrogated and buildings themselves become places (Purini, 2010). The place disappears and melts into the liquid tints of a space centrifuged by transnational movement, and a sense of place wiped out by the drastic reduction of public and informal spaces. Effective images like that of the liquid society or of non-places find fertile ground in which to take root, although they run the risk of fogging up the view, rendering it cross-eyed and thus less apt to reflect on the transformations experienced by cities today. In the reflections of the great Italian urbanists and scholars discussed above, the

city disappears¹⁴, it is no longer readable, we can no longer narrate it. In the past we read about it in novels, visited it in Expositions and museums, then we saw it in films, and now we encounter it virtually, but the images and words to describe it are ever more confused. We can attempt to rely on political, economic and cultural perspectives. All of these are historically important, but are of little significance now. To understand something about the matter we need to be willing to move backward, all the way to thinking about the idea of living itself. The city – ancient, modern or contemporary – is a space for living and it is, perhaps the space in which the character of living is manifested most clearly. By bringing the dimension of living nearer to the dimension of construction, anthropologists can make important contributions to redefining the methodological tools, ways of reading and methods of understanding of those disciplines currently engaged in the study of cities.¹⁵

4. Toward an ethnography of inhabiting

Paying attention to diverse practices, to uses of everyday spaces, to living understood as a territorial practice, as a way of bridging the gap between the city of stone and the city of people, between abstract and concrete spaces, is a recurring theme in the analyses and in the work of those scholars engaged in the study of cities. A great deal of the literature in those disciplines (cultural geography, urbanism, urban sociology, etc.) which are located in that academic and intellectual field (Bourdieu, 1984), locates the analysis of urban transformation in the tracks of the criticism of neoliberal politics. Instead of speaking about cities and places, the discussion speaks of geopolitical and geostrategic spaces (Vanolo, Rossi, 2010), which are subject to various processes: bureaucratic definition from above, attempts at resignification from below, and deterritorialization resulting from social, financial and technological changes.

The anthropologists who examine the social and cultural creation of spaces and their transformation into places have also adopted this way of understanding the relationship between space and place. In the approach of critical anthropology, which tries to grasp the process of the objectification of local identities, scientifically constructed by rational bureaucratic measures both national and supranational, the concept of place is deconstructed to the point of vanishing, dissolved in the constructions of force fields, of interpretive frames (the results of taxonomies imposed from above) of *habitus* and cultural intimacy (Herzfeld, 1997). As Palumbo (2003: 9-10) puts it, in what seems to be the manifesto of Italian critical anthropology, the task of the anthropologist is that of analyzing and making evident.

The processes of the institutionalization, of the objectification of culture, which are central both in the workings of the classifying and administrative machines of contemporary

¹⁴ Building on Frank Lloyd Wright's famous essay, "The Disappearing City" (1932), the sociologist Janet Worff (1992) discussed the history of the modern city as a story in three acts: the Real City, the Discursive City, the Disappearing City. We are at the Third Act. For as long as they could, novelists, urbanists, sociologists and anthropologists experimented with writing about it, and invented metaphors: the forest, the subsoil, the labyrinth: but it seems that the metaphors are not enough.

¹⁵ In the words of Secchi (2000: 123), "the urban project has become a field of study which lacks structure, a vast mixture of disciplines combining the experiences of economists, sociologists, jurists and administrators," to which we would add anthropologists, archaeologists, historians and journalists.

nation-states and in the operations of transformative forces of a global and transnational character. To accomplish this critical act, the intrusive gaze of the ethnographer must rest on objects (statues, baroque buildings, medieval churches, prehistoric tombs, archival documents) on practices (the production of fakes, festive competitions, some forms of political struggle, the realization of cultural manifestations), on poetics of space/time (the metalexical manipulation of chronological relationships, the construction of competing narratives) which, judging from the dominant rhetoric in this area, would be indices of quality representing the most intimate and traditional ways of being of the men and women who populate it. We will thus speak of local identities, conceived as integral and stratified in time, which are presumed to be connoted by a natural relationship with artistic, architectural, archeological, and anthropological material. At the same time we will show, by interpreting specific situations and events (the invention of a historic festival, the realization of an archeological excavation) how similar ways of constructing a local sense of belonging are connected with intellectual, political, social and economic processes which go beyond the local, and with the actions of people, groups, institutions and technologies (the press, the television media) who initiate, direct and model those processes.

Places are thus “produced” by a twofold movement: they are the result of description on the part of institutions which objectivize cultures and construct identities, from above, as well as of continual attempts a remanipulation, reterritorialization and refounding, from below, on the part of social actors who, in the name of local authenticities, and enfolded in the same nationalist logic, create identities in their turn.

When inserted in this sort of approach, which tries to deconstruct the objectifying categories on which identity politics are founded, the place disappears, and the force field remains. As I have written elsewhere (Romano, 2009), in such a force field, which various players employ tactics and strategies to control in a complex zero-sum economy of forces and counter-forces, events are presented in their factual dimension, and are positioned historically, but, at the same time, they are extrapolated from their historical context and placed on the level of reception, of manipulation, of resemanticization and invention. The time of events coincides with the time of ethnographic narrative, which holds together the times of specular action of these forces and counter-forces. The time of events is thus the time of their construction inasmuch as they are enacted: the time in which actions unfold is flattened between the symbolic taxonomy constructed from above and the emotional load linked to these identifying classifications from below.

In this clockwork mechanism, places are momentary artifacts and the anthropologist, simultaneously inside and outside the field compared to other intellectuals, who are, instead, actors who are unaware of the field, is the privileged interpreter of the voices from below (Palumbo, 2009). Voices become constructions which acquire sense inside the economy of the field, whose internal logic is manifested in the unreflective language of daily life, by means of expressions like “it is normal,” “it is like this”, “it is done in this way” (Herzfeld, 1998). Behind these expressions, which are based on certainty and are self-explanatory, lie the tacit taxonomies which regulate local communities. Jumping between facts and fictions (that is, the way in which things are recounted and are believed to be true simply because they are recounted), paying attention to details and diverse discursive registers, to relational frames, to the use of different registers of historicity and the connection between the local and the global levels, to the observation of respective positions

in the force field, the anthropologist is the only one able to gain that increased understanding which lies in that third space (Herzfeld, 2001) between researchers and “natives,” and of which the latter are unknowing carriers.

Instead of this framework, in which voices – means, instruments, which permit understanding of unspoken dimensions (Polanyi, 1966) and deconstruction of that which is believed to be obvious and is taken for granted – are subjugated to the logic of fieldwork, I prefer something which could be called an anthropology of voices.

The voices are those of residents, subjects who usually are moved to action in the processes of public planning, or for the more informed, of municipal politics, but who are never listened to. Through the voices of residents we attempt to reach and to manage the symbolic but very concrete dimension of the *sense of place*, that is “the cultural processes and practices through which places take on meaning.” (Feld, Basso 1996: 7)

An essay by Charles Frake (1996) speaks of local knowledge as a mixture of minute and somewhat chaotic notions, linked to an enduring presence in a certain territory. At the same time it discusses the use which is made of these notions as symbols of a particular familiarity with the place and as elements of a local style which can allow locals to distinguish themselves from outsiders. If to this we add giving names to certain parts of the territory (and not to others), having memories linked to them, considering as appropriate or not certain uses which are made of them, Frake’s version of local knowledge becomes a specific province, a limited version of the larger idea which is particularly associated with the name of Clifford Geertz (1983), that is, the particular forms which symbolic exchanges take on in a determined context. In this case, choice of label is of the utmost importance. Although it is very different from academic study, and is located in the everyday, this too is a form of *knowledge*.

From this perspective, the knowledge which we anthropologists produce is in part a knowledge which does not belong to us. At the interior of particular types of encounter (the open in-depth interview) it is provided by our interlocutors. They offer it to us, or rather, lend it to us, because later arises the problem of what we do with it, and we know well that it is not right to use this knowledge however we wish; we must try to “return” it with care and respect, for privacy and for the diversity of circumstances. The interpretations which we produce are thus inseparable from the context in which they are formulated and the points of view of those who make reference to that context.

On a more practical level, we could use the term *place-telling* (Scarpelli, 2011) to indicate the particular type of encounter which takes place in the field between anthropologists and their interlocutors. Place-telling could perhaps represent a useful contribution to processes of territorial planning.

A practice of non-directed interviewing in a working method which would programmatically centralize voices. Something which is focused on a place (as opposed to a group or a sociological category), and how it is redefined by its inhabitants. Which would valorize the specificity of localized communicative frames and the uses of memory in constructing contemporary interpretations of the place. Which aims to identify recurring “narratives” and “discourses,” examining the relationship between differing ways of narrating modes (rather than focusing on the moral and expressive force of individual biographies).

It is the *relationship* between different ways of narrating which here becomes particularly significant. Something which resembles the coordinates of a debate in which positions are taken, a narrative of references for the conversation, which at the same time reveals the presence of alternative narratives or sub-narratives, of opposing or non-overlapping points of view. A mixture of narrative and explanation which is in part planned and in part improvised for the occasion, which is animated by suffering, by refusals, by allegiances, by nostalgia: knowledge, but *not* detached from the context in which it is formulated.

The anthropologist will perform the scientific work of interpretation, using terminologies, concepts and bibliographies, to provide order, connections and meaning – without flattening internal variety, and the plurality of points of view – those aspects of knowledge of the territory which have more limited zones of circulation and more elusive characteristics. To make readable, also inside more general and less local discourses, these representations which are “near to the experience (of living there).”

As experts in place-telling, anthropologists can carve out a specific space for themselves in the interdisciplinary field of urban studies. An area of study and research which I prefer to imagine not as a cage, a new artifact, producing an expert in Harlequin costume, who knows how to do a little of everything. The notion of interdisciplinarity, then, involves both the search for an integrated approach (almost to the point of thinking of the figure of an expert who is able to draw on a broad range of knowledge) and that of systematic and structured dialogue between specializations. Both visions seem to require a rethinking of the nature and use of knowledge, sometimes in opposition to consolidated ideas on the topic (as in the case of anthropology and the concept of field research). If in the case of geography and city planning it is a matter of making more room for qualitative, negotiated and ethnographic knowledge (maps which, putting aside pretenses to absolute objectivity, aim to reproduce living and speaking territories; a remaking of connections between physical and human territories by means of symbols, aspirations and memories), for anthropology, the situation is almost the reverse. Anthropologists have the challenge of entering into unfamiliar (for them) collaborative contexts, of thinking in terms of problems, and of relinquishing their exclusive claim on the object, or their longstanding pretenses of holism, along with the tranquility and freedom of a marginal position.

Among the two approaches, I incline toward the latter. So I am thinking of urban studies as a space for dialogue between all of those disciplines which are concerned with cities, on a ladder which leads from the point nearest to institutions to the point farthest from them – thus probably from city planning to anthropology, passing through geography and urban history. To this effect I adopt Peter Gallison's (2010) concept of a *trading zone*, inside of which, via the interaction between groups from different disciplinary areas, a middle region of debate is created which allows a diversity experts to communicate, to propose potential solutions and useful ideas for allowing residents to speak, for knowing how to listen to them and for decoding what they say. In this interdisciplinary pattern, the exchange of views among different disciplines about projects, studies and analytical tools¹⁶ promotes the achieving of original results, with no need to invent new professional or academic figures, or to improvise a reckless synthesis of complex histories, ponderous founding fathers and

¹⁶ Analytical tools sometimes follow, other times are ahead of epistemological shifts. By their practical dimension, by their technical nature, they are probably the point where we can intercept disciplines in their cross-fertilisation, between jealous keeping of analytical lens and promoting common paths.

consolidated research practices. It is in this space that scholars who work on cities can experiment with interdisciplinarity, where everyone does what they know best.

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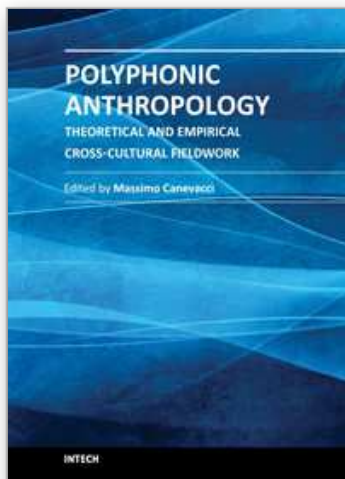
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This book connects anthropology and polyphony: a composition that multiplies the researcher's glance, the style of representation, the narrative presence of subjectivities. Polyphonic anthropology is presenting a complex of bio-physical and psycho-cultural case studies. Digital culture and communication has been transforming traditional way of life, styles of writing, forms of knowledge, the way of working and connecting. Ubiquities, identities, syncretisms are key-words if a researcher wish to interpret and transform a cultural contexts. It is urgent favoring trans-disciplinarity for students, scholars, researchers, professors; any reader of this polyphonic book has to cross philosophy, anatomy, psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, architecture, archeology, biology. I believe in an anthropological mutation inside any discipline. And I hope this book may face such a challenge.

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