

INEDITED ENCOUNTERS: *EXPLORING CORVIALE WITH RATIONALITY AND IMAGINATION*

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PROLOGUE:... will a map be enough to get around?



That's just the way Rome is, sometimes it ends up lost in the open countryside, in sudden empty spaces, at a first glance in a no-man's-land, then it starts all over again even more suddenly, at times even more a city than before, sometimes even more a town than before.

This is what also happens when one goes to Corviale...

I've lost count of how many times I've been to Corviale. It hasn't been that long since the first time, and it's because of that first time – which gave me a feeling of uneasiness mixed with curiosity – that I then decided to go back there again, and again, and again ...

I'm driving my scooter on the Via Portuense, turning my head left and right to take in how the buildings become less and less around me, and I smile to myself thinking about Nanni Moretti riding on his Vespa around the Roman suburbs, and I feel like I'm lost in a cliché ... why am I going to Corviale? Hasn't everything already been said and written down?

THREE STORIES...

1. living in “the Kilometre”

Different meanings and symbols are given to the word Corviale according to who is pronouncing it. “Corviale” is that long black line on the map that you cannot miss, the exact sign drawn on any map of Rome an urban planner could put his hands on; there is “Corviale” for architects and for the history of modern architecture; there is “Corviale” for the Town Council for Suburban Policies and its policy which is attempting to improve the negative image one has of all the Roman suburbs; there is “Corviale” for ATER²⁰ and for the fact that it is managed negatively, or not at all. There is “Corviale” for the Territorial Laboratory, where one experiments ways of connecting inhabitants and the administration whose role is to guide them, give them help, look for solutions for its improvement. Furthermore, there is “Corviale” of the “Osservatorio Nomade”/ON (Nomad Observatory), an interdisciplinary group in which artists, researchers, architects, video makers take part of, and who are currently working on a project in the building, who are thinking about how this enormous space is lived in, remembered, imagined, transformed, through an articulated series of actions, mediated by the support of the Adriano Olivetti Foundation. Most of all, there is “Corviale” which is less noticeable and maybe less mediated by the families and individuals who live there, by those who have made it their own in the last twenty years, who reinterpreted the spaces, giving way to the project’s utopia.

In this built kilometre, I attempt to understand and relate to those I meet and to those who accept to speak with me, those who hide, those who say that they are tired of being considered a “rare beast” to be photographed, observed and studied. Walking around the corridors, in the gut of the building, I find myself feeling at times like an intruder, at times at home: the front-doors aren’t closed, the hallways inside are like the streets of a neighbourhood. You walk by everyone’s doorway, but who gives me the right to ring a bell? But then again, whose bell?

I start to think that it wasn’t a bad idea after all to get to know better a few people who will introduce me to these places with their own personal point of view, or go into everyone’s home, like the experimental street-TV invented by ON, I decide to concentrate my attention on a specific location in this buildings filled with conflicts.

It is about a situation known as a “free floor”, where the spaces were never used as they had been planned in the original project. Instead of becoming professional offices or shops, they were immediately occupied and transformed into homes.

A kilometre long illegal neighbourhood, between the forth and fifth floors of the city-building. I stop a minute filled by curiosity to observe an extreme situation and I decide to attend a condominium assembly; the discussion today is on the illegal tenants of the free floor. Forth lot, sixth floor, in a foyer where stairs, halls and lifts meet, where the person who designed the building thought of creating a meeting place with cement tables and benches (which haven’t budged from that spot in the last twenty years!). This is where I meet the first people, those who planned the meeting, a few women who live in the free floor. Little by little, the number of people increases, the group becomes more numerous, and so does their talk. Then here come some women holding some boxes, proudly waiving pieces of paper in the air. “We picked up a lot of them...!”, “Look here, these are the first of the lot...!” ... laughs and serious proud comments alternate before the reunion begins ... little by little I realise that this is a census of the free floors managed by the tenants themselves, and the boxes are where they had them put their pieces of paper, lot after lot. “Don’t let the cat out of the bag!!!”²¹, someone yells out, referring to the

²⁰ ATER is the Regional Agency which has the task to build and manage public housing.

²¹ Original text reads, “Scavicchi ma non apra!”, the famous slogan of a well-known Italian game show

closed boxes. Laughs all around, then all of a sudden these are interrupted by a woman yelling incomprehensibly, coming from who knows where. We all look down the stairwell and we see a woman yelling at who-knows-what-or-who. That close group of people, who were meeting in a public space, right near the infinite number of doors to private homes, were not welcome there. It was probably considered a stranger, a bother, a reason for a conflict, maybe. "She's been yelling like that for the past twenty years .. let her be", someone tries to diminish the importance of what had happened, to try to get everyone's attention and to finally start the assembly. But it still takes a few moments to catalyse everyone's attention on that cement table where the discussion is about to take place; the angry woman's voice still echoes in the kilometre-long snake (how can you not call it that?), almost as if it had been built with the purpose of amplifying the woman's anger. This is when I realise what a great amplification this wonderful building has – which was projected towards the end of the 70's. The enormous size of the building and the numerous people living there amplify everything that happens, echoing it in the physical spaces, as well as in the public opinion, fusing the real and imaginary in a sole, powerful sound. I understood in an instant that the echo of the angry woman's voice could erase the work of many other women, it was capable of communicating with greater strength the fact that there was a conflict between the many voices that sound out in Corviale, shadowing the attempt of many of these voices to cooperate, to relate to one another, to understand together how to solve the problems of living in this huge building, how to free themselves of the stereotype that living in this enormous snake automatically means living with unease, in ugliness...

2.being in the territory²²

The "snake", "monster", "spaceship", "kilometre" these are the most commonly used images in the public opinion of the city of Rome when thinking about the huge nine-storey building, most of all thanks to the media which contributed to defining it in these past twenty years as the negative symbol of living in the suburbs. But is it really so terrible to live in Corviale? Is this the opinion of those who actually live there, or rather of those who refuse to reflect on the dominating city model?

The Territorial Laboratory, promoted by the *Town Council for Suburban Policies, Local Development and Jobs*, based its strategy on these questions. Since June 2003, the Laboratory works like a job pilot and has the characteristics of an agency for local development, i.e., like a place which links the local administration and the citizens to guide them, help them, search for solutions to develop the neighbourhood. The structure of the organisation is quite simple and dynamic: the coordinator is an architect of the XIX district of the Municipality of Rome, while the "soul" of the laboratory is a city clerk, an expert in agriculture and tenant of Corviale since 1982, chosen by the town councillor since she was so close to the place. As the year passed, there were also various external collaborations with groups of professionals, as well as with interns: all people who were competent not only in architecture and urban planning, but also in economy, sociology, anthropology. Looking at the work done so far, one can find the desire to realise these projects by bringing together different types of professionalism, and they also have the strong wish to cooperate with new types of professionals with competences in diversified fields.

It goes without say that it was physically impossible to get around the building²³, the Laboratory approached the territory little by little, and got to know not only the different realities

²² The reflections on the activity of the "actors" in the following paragraph are based on interviews and conversations had with them during the months going from June to November 2004. I, of course, give them my warmest thanks.

²³ The Territorial Laboratory is under the Municipality administration, while the building owns to the ATER, see note 1.

of the place²⁴, but also through encounters with those living there. In fact, the structure, even though it is not far away from the building itself, does not have fixed opening hours, but has adopted a “mobile” approach to get to know and to be known by the tenants. This is what happened in the four months between the years 2003 and 2004, when the Laboratory’s sociologists did some research with some questionnaires, waiting patiently day after the day near the building, and listening to those who felt like stopping by them and telling them their stories, including what let them down and what their still aiming at for their neighbourhood.²⁵

The subject that really seems to be a novelty as far as Corviale improving its symbolism, is the decision to concentrate one’s attention in one’s own activities leaving behind the mere matter of its architecture, in order to integrate the projects with the goal of the quality of life. What might seem like a road one was forced to follow at a first glance, due to the fact that it was impossible to work physically on the building, is taking us to an experiment in acting on the *nonmaterial*, which is a very interesting experiment from an urbanistic point of view, as well as from a theoretical and practical one.

But how does one go about with an “nonmaterial” urban planning? What is it all about?

3. going in the territory

While the *Town Council for the suburbs* was planning its policies to improve the negative image of the Roman suburbs, other fields, apparently far away from urban planning, were reflecting on the building and ended up having many points in common.

I am referring to the Adriano Olivetti Foundation (AOF), which has been working on activities and research centred on contemporary art in urban spaces in the past few years, with the “cultural projects on public spaces and urban territories which are based on a creative and aesthetic approach to public spaces to the analysis of physical, social and cultural territories” (AOF, online).

Specifically, the Olivetti Foundation is investing a lot of energy in diffusing in Italy a “model” of public art, founded in France in 1992: “*nouveaux commanditaires*”, i.e., new commissioners, allowing the tenants of a neighbourhood to become promoters of works²⁶ of art to be inserted in one’s living context. The philosophy behind this programme is to give value back to the use of contemporary art, proposing its production after a concrete request of the citizens, thanks to the interaction of three actors: the citizen/commissioner, the cultural mediator and the artist. The programme rotates around a central figure, which is the mediator. He will find the commissioners, he will help them in expressing their needs, he will write their aims, which will try to understand the nature of the work. At this point he will be able to point out the artist who will be commissioned the work and who will be presented to the commissioners so that they can negotiate the details of the project. This role is based on the fact that the interaction between the various protagonists is complex, including the public administration (in case they finance the project or if the work of art is realised in a public place).²⁷

²⁴ Which include associations, schools, parishes, different sports, social services.

²⁵ For more on the results of this survey, please see Martini M., Parasacchi A. (2004), op. cit.

²⁶ It is probably correct to interpret the word “work” (“opera” in Italian), in its etymological sense: *opus*, i.e., “object”, but also “action”.

²⁷ This project was applied for the first time in Turin, with the “Urban II” programme-Mirafiori Nord in 2010. The Olivetti Foundation participated as an outside partner, coordinating and supporting its beginning. The mediator was the association a.titolo, which, in turn, indicated a series of commissioners. The theme was memories of the neighbourhood and improvement of green areas. For further information, please see Various Authors, (2003), *Nuovi Committenti. Mirafiori Nord*, Torino, Luca Sossella, Rome.

As far as Rome is concerned, the Foundation has concentrated its attention on Corviale – which still has an ongoing project – since it was considered to be a possible experimental field for this programme. This gave way to “Imagining Corviale”, the preliminary phase of the territorial analysis, in cooperation with the Municipality of Rome, City Council for Suburban Policies, and with the Territorial Laboratory, with the aim to reflect on imaginary elements, of the image and of the reality of living in Corviale. The Foundation’s role is of a mediator, assigning the realisation of the project to artists of various provenance. This group is known as *ON/Osservatorio Nomade*.

It is about “a project on how public spaces are lived, remembered, imagined, transformed” (FAO, online) and is divided into a series of actions. Among those already realised are five workshops, which included the participation of architect students of the University Roma Tre, and a musical laboratory with elementary and junior high-school students. Each workshop was centred on the study of an aspect of the huge building: the forth floor, the “courtyards”, the ground floor, the urban gardens, the roof. The results of the first four, and of the laboratory were presented to the tenants during a public event. Another series of actions are going public thanks to the creation of a neighbourhood TV, where the artists of ON work together with some tenants who wished to participate in the event. The goal is, after this first start-up phase of the television programmes, to give the neighbourhood an instrument for communicating, to keep going on their own. Corviale Network is made up of a series of television programmes going from studies on the lifts in the building, the reconstruction of the memory of the project, the lives of the tenants, condominium assemblies.

What meaning can we give to these collaborations? In which direction are the working methods and new approaches of the administration going to?

4...FOR A SINGLE PLOT...

Different stories which are intertwined and coexistent. It is difficult to put together the pieces of the puzzle, but it is a must to respect its complexity, even though it is possibly improbable to catch onto it.

I decide to pick a preferential explorative channel, a “creative filter” (Gargani 1999) which can help me to navigate in this space filled with multiple forms of life and action. The artistic practices between who lives in and who governs the territory became my guiding light to find stories at times so similar, at times so different, almost binding them together.

What does it mean to act as a binder? The motivation behind the point of view of the observation of the interaction between territorial laboratory and artists, between actions for local development and means to show the hidden potential and desires, is the conviction that it is always necessary to look at a city as being the production of an urban space, given by the intertwining of different practices of subjects with different power, desires, aspirations, responsibilities. A kaleidoscope of diversities and oppositions, apparently far away, yet tied to one another.

Just like in other urban contexts, in Corviale the different ways to think about planning is going more and more towards involving the tenants in having an active voice in choosing the urban transformations of the neighbourhood. In Corviale, like in other urban contexts, planning is concentrating its attention ever more often on involving the inhabitants of a location to give voice to their choices in the urbanistic transformation of their neighbourhood. This (urbanistic) practice has had to take note of the multiple (urban) practices which emerged from their relations with these new “actors”, which are characterised by different languages and different points of view on reality.

The language and the technical instruments of the cultural background of the urban planner, which developed towards the end of the XIX century up to today, and which are essentially based

on the validation of the logical rationality as the only one (or at any rate the best) to understand and modify the urban reality, clashed with the need of communicating with daily language, made up of a sole, apparently incomprehensible, mix of logical and sensible rationality.

To investigate on the means of knowledge and expression linked to the sensible and to the aesthetic²⁸ seems to imply making two modalities of knowledge communicate and to activate languages which take into consideration the concrete aspects of urban planning; to give value and a real capability to those who live in the city to create their own urban space; to enrich the technical languages of the same complexity which is one of the main vices of technical knowledge. The projects currently underway in Corviale have their roots in mutual observations in art and urban planning, which gave way in the XX century.

On one hand, it is about *artistic practices and actions*, which, especially in the '90s, were carried out quite literally in city spaces, with temporary events, meant to trigger urban transformations and which were meant as strategies to put ones roots in the place (Cognetti 2001). Many contemporary urban artistic interventions (community and public art) are helping artists get away from the logic of gallery and museum expositions and to get close to the ordinary every-day life, in order to get used to the idea of intervening socially. "Instead of producing artistic objects, they develop projects, workshops and they dedicate less and less space to the visible" (Scotini 2003); their "collaborative strategies" are more and more stimulating, denouncing the subdivisions of the municipal policies in sectors and areas which are not developing. Public Art²⁹, as far back as the late '60s, was considered an art at the citizen's service, not only referring to its usefulness, but also as a means for stimulating a different use of (public) space where it is produced, also from a symbolic, affective and psychological point of view, bringing close together ethics and aesthetics. The relationship between the artist, the context, and its audience is usually arranged by simply putting sculptures or expositions in non-conventional outside spaces. Then from the '80s onwards, one began experimenting a series of practices (the so-called *new genre public art*) which take place not only in public places, but interact *with* the audience. Therefore, the role of the artist is to give way to an event, and the public space is not only in a physical sense, but also in the sense of its being involved with the audience (the relationship between the work of art and those passing by, between the artist and the group of people working with him).

On the other hand, *the answers of the urban planning discipline* as far as the complexity of contemporary cities are going towards solutions of a technical type, with the constructions of integrated projects, taking into consideration physical, environmental and social problems, also by involving the citizens in the choices to be made for the project. At the same time, at least as far as the area of urban research is concerned, more and more space is dedicated to every-day life, to the experiences in the city, and therefore to observing what is produced by those living in the city, with the idea of grasping and showing the validity of acting on the city which is already a "real" policy or project (Paba 2002, Crosta 1998, Balducci 2002). Obviously both directions have in common the need to keep separate theory and practice while reading and putting into action their continuing intersections.

The guiding idea behind the observation of the interactions going on in Corviale is to search for relationships and fertile contaminations between two different interdisciplinary fields, which all work in the same area of study, aiming at common goals, trying to reason on problems

²⁸ In the etymological sense of the word, from the Greek *aistesis* = sensation.

²⁹ It is not possible in this article, for reasons of limited space, to go into details on a concept on which there have been many debates and for which there are many interpretations. As far as these reflections are concerned, one must know that Public Art has different meanings and declensions according to its contexts, giving not only material objects (sculptures, murals, urban designs, etc.), but also various types of action (Remesar 1998).

rather than disciplines (which is probably a hard and exaggerated task). The central point of the problem is always to allow the inhabitants to regain their contemporary cities, the capability of creating, of not having to count on others, of being active in their choices. Urban planning and art are obviously giving different answers to this problem ... why? And what do these differences mean? Could it possibly and simplistically be due to a different relationship with reality of the two disciplines? Or can they be interesting and fertile contaminations? Can “doing things artistically” be a source for planning? And what kind of source?

5... THROUGH (THERAPEUTICAL) METAPHORS

This not-too-explicit link between working on the imaginary and using a metaphor is one of the emerging characteristics of how the Laboratory and ON work.

It looks like Corviale cannot exist without a metaphor to amplify its meaning. From the very beginning, this neighbourhood-building has seen its name turned into a giant in its meaning, first as symbol of an experiment, then as symbol of its failure. It represented that modernity, that modernist rationality of a great project where everything is taken into account. Its history has taught us that the mere technical rationality cannot guarantee results, the designer's hopes to give the institutions and the tenants the “complex task of organisation and management” to guarantee the success of the project (Fiorentino, in Campanella 1995), can only be successful with great difficulty. In spite of all the predictions, and almost immediately, with the first temporary occupations with the first two lots to begin with, and then when the forth floor was permanently moved into, there was a sort of short-circuit that changed the direction of the metaphor. The auto-constructors held on to the fact that the institutions fails in their tasks (Campanella 1995) to give way to creative solutions, not to those thought of by the designers, but others, maybe less refined, but closer to the real necessities of every-day life. They used many means to put up with those difficulties that they had to face, with a single great strategy, which one was not being realised (de Certeau 2001). One must ask oneself if and how an urban plan can take into consideration creativity of who must transform that design into real life. The real problem today can be to interrogate oneself, as planners, on if it is possible to be “contemporary” (rather than “modern”), i.e., to be more humble towards those certainties on paper and be able to understand the continuous changes and transformations, with real processes of modification and continuous appropriation of those living in that space.

If we start from this point of view, it is significative to realise that one is beginning to have second thoughts in Corviale on how to go about doing urban planning and that this is happening at the same time on different aspects.

It is maybe from this new starting point that one should invent a new metaphor for Corviale to amplify its meaning into being a new way of imagining an urban plan, a project open to imagination and creativity of those who will fill it with their own lives and their own stories.

In fact, the metaphor which has always been used to translate into words of observed urban phenomena has greater power than what is commonly recognised, influencing greatly the imagination and the consequent political choices (Baeten 2001), and the symbol that Corviale represents and that it seems to not be able to rid itself of, is proof of this.

To understand and to give value to a metaphor as a privileged instrument of an analysis, based on the “synergy between the power of words and the strength of images” (Maffesoli 2000) should mean that one will be able to chose the metaphors correctly, with awareness, to which we want to give the task to tell the story of those places. As Maffesoli points put, it goes without a doubt that if we have to do with a fragmented society, rigid institutions and interpretative systems that are not able to work anymore, one can discuss about the social aspects which have become instable, only by using an instable procedure, therefore “avoiding it, alluding to it, indirectly”. The

world has changed, therefore it is necessary to change those tools which are used to understand and describe it. The signs of this change, that is described by the sociologist as “the world becoming aesthetic”³⁰ are to be found in the imaginary and in the oneiric, no longer only from a private viewpoint, but shown publicly, these signs are transforming the social and economical significance of the world, towards another significance defined “ethics of aesthetic”. This transformation forces one to read it from the bottom, based on experience, made step by step and based on the interaction with observed subjects, by using intuitive thought and metaphors, which become fundamental in capturing reality without expecting to build it from the outside, without conceptualising what one would wish, rather than what is. In other words, the author believes that the social text is, in part, already given and the metaphor helps in finding what is, respecting its internal logics, going ahead of an abstract vision of the world and making “the vitality and dynamics of the living emerge”. In this sense, it is possible to appreciate the contribution that art can give to this direction, which sociologist refer to as “bringing to light exactly what is potentially there”, realising the artist gives life to what is material. Furthermore, this attitude is explicit also thanks to Paul Klee. According to Klee, there is a “unity between ‘vision of the world’ and ‘artistic practice’”, since according to this thought, art does not produce things that are visible, but images “that are full of our vision of the world” (Di Giacomo 2003).

Telling the story of Corviale is also a metaphor of a “southern type knowledge”, which making relative the northern values, “which are dominated by producing, being active, the harshness of drama which is represented by the brutality of the concept”, also faces “the joy, the pleasure of existing, accepting the tragedy of what is” (Maffesoli 2000). A knowledge in which there is no space for what should have been, but what is not, there is no activism towards completing the concept/project no matter how much it costs, but simply accepts and lives (passively, according to most people) with was forced onto him by every-day life.

To change direction for the spaceship Corviale has become the new metaphorical imperative of the municipality administration, still unknown to the “*Corvialnautes*”, and it has adopted a working strategy to “give back to the collective imagination the relationship centre-suburbs” (Di Giovine 2004). How can one know if the symbol chosen is the right one? Who must and can choose it? Is it always the task of those who have been pointed out as those who have knowledge (Baeten 2001; Sandercock 2003), reach the point to define these images, or maybe who lives in Corviale has the right to create other, new images? And who needs this new metaphor? To those who need to regenerate the identity and that sense of belonging of those who live in the building-neighbourhood, or to make it possible to save it from the negative meanings given to it by “the other city”, i.e., the city we know better with neighbourhoods, streets and squares?

EPILOGUE (...at your choice): a route for the space shuttle!

I could make a map of the trip through Corviale and its stories with continuous convergent lines and divergent intentions, actions, results.

I believe that another metaphor, which has still not come out into the open, is still lingering on the building. Not a dangerous snake, but rather a huge tightrope walker’s pole, whose task is not only to separate city from countryside, whose place has been taken by a hyper-textual use of spaces, but is a strong borderline element which invites you to meet/clash with different

³⁰ The author refers to the etymological sense of the word “aesthetic”, i.e., “to feel emotions together” (2003)

ways of solving problems and forces to have balanced experiments between urban planning and artistic approaches.

Today it seems like walking the tightrope is bringing the promoters of the experiments to a necessary crossroad where one must start over again, make common decisions, widen one's horizons.

At a closer look, you will find that there is a compass which shows the four cardinal directions one may take. One needs to choose and have courage.

The first two directions show roads and viewpoints which belong to a specific and independent field, the artistic and cultural direction on one hand, and the urban planning on the other. The other two show possible intersections to take, by following schemes which are more or less innovative.

In one direction, there is the ideas of the Foundation, which bases its work on a given territory "starting from questions rather than offering culture" (Gennari)³¹. In the specific case of Corviale, the starting point of the project is a request for a transformation of its image, and the proof of having reached this result were the newspaper articles. But more than producing public art, the Foundation wants to promote an art that creates a public space, that creates a context, one must point out a first (superficial, but not too much) stage of the creation of a context, or, better yet, of a macro-context. This was a project that started on an urban, if not national, scale even though it was working on a local level. It is evident that only a year's work cannot invert the sign of the social and structural problems of the building. One needs a much longer period to be able to work in depth. And this is obviously the first question which is in an urban planner's mind who is interested in creating a context where people can participate, where one can really involve people in facing and trying to find an answer to long-lived questions. It seems to me that I am giving an interpretation to the evolution of the process in this direction. The ON group has concentrated its attention on two particular typologies of tenants who have obviously taken possession of the space which was "assigned" to them. In a specific case, we are talking about occupied spaces: the urban gardens which were created to give a net separation the kilometre long building with the surrounding countryside and occupying the free floor. The patient cure of who has chosen to stop there at length and interact with these people has brought about a sort of trust, also thanks to other actions which are more or less consciously synergic. The recently created Tenants Committee obviously derived from this factor. The need of giving a useful value to contemporary art has brought us to playing with the every-day language, as with the network, which was born from a parody of a generalistic TV, and has taken the public space of TV. To do public art and to make the audience understand you need to undergo a long process, experiments, pauses which who had already seen the evolution of the participation in the '70s may not be willing to take. These also sometimes mistaken the pun on the current media language (and therefore widely understood), searching for consents of the crowd, which is always more difficult to achieve. On another hand, the Foundation believes that it is essential to work on the cultural empowerment applying the model of new commissioners. It is obvious that the modality of applications of a "model" as for a strong interaction with the specific characteristics of the territory, and risking, if the contrary be true, to have applications in various directions of procedures which were created in different locations. This, of course, is a junction where ones reasoning can open into multi-disciplinary intersections.

³¹ The quotations and its authors in this paragraph refer to, unless specified otherwise, not to published texts, but to discussions held during the seminar "Strategies for a creative solution to metropolitan problems", DUN, Naples, 12-13 May 2005.

Another direction shown by the compass indicates the way towards complex programmes, the recently approved PRU and the CdQII³², following the example of interesting “mechanisms” which are already being experimented on in Turin³³, go side by side with “neighbourhood therapy” procedures (Martini), by using artistic projects promoted in order to focus the attention on a problem (in this case, especially from the outside) and to have its consequent esteem. Therefore culture is “discovered” as an instrument to be used to cure, like a new medicine in the hands of the “doctor-urban planner”. He sees these artistic actions divided between different competences as a matter of strength. But who is to coordinate the different competences? One must not forget that there are already urbanistic practices that made the paradigm “creative city” a track to follow which did not absolutely lack in problems! The approach of the creative city has the tendency to read the creative action (and most of all to consider the “creative people”) in a physical sense, zonings, functional containers to revitalise³⁴ the post-modern passage from a “hard” industry to a “light” factory. The artistic actions become fundamental vectorial carrier of images, earnings, marketing, tourism and the increase in social cohesion (in the sense of an increase of a diffuse well-being); a therapy which acts on the local symptoms, rather than the deep causes.

If you listen to both sides of the story, it seems like they both have the goal and feel the responsibility of integrating with the other, almost as if each discipline were a larger container ready to wrap itself around the other. This seems to me as the most dangerous road to follow, based on a non-comparison, on a non-communication, on not listening or understanding one another and one's competence. Let us not forget that each competence has its foundations on a single territorial context. Therefore, on one side, you have the “governance dimension taken by culture” (Annechiarico) which appears to want to take all the decision making, and on the other hand, the policies that one had in an “atmosphere of competition” (Laino) based on the brief period and who winks its eye at advertising techniques, who scares and who close their planner to whatever comparison which is worried about guaranteeing equity and a homogeneous diffusion of the public intervention.

I evidently do not believe in the local therapeutical solutions found by the paradigm of the creative city, but in the necessity of a useful art³⁵ if it leaves an opening to a functional empty space, to freedom of expression, to experiments, and even to mistakes.

But maybe this solution belongs to another direction found on the compass I am trying to create. A direction that finds interesting doing deeper experiments on the strong contact point on working on the imaginary (which are no longer there, which are often made homogeneous and weak by habit), on one hand, asked for by the works of participative planning, on the other hand a field of day-to-day-work for a public artist; making the aesthetic experience a non functional act, a (propedeutical?) exercise for imagining, which helps in recovering the taste for taking one's time and space to be oneself³⁶ and to do it in a way which is in relation to one's own living context (not only with events which landed from who knows where). I believe that this is the way to think about art as an “elastic instrument” (Parola), which “leaves open a space for freedom, for non-functionality”, and this is probably what one needs to remain balanced on the tightrope Corviale, which will allow you not to fall down...

³² PRU and CdQ are Italian urban re-qualification programs.

³³ Urban2 (UE urban re-qualification program) in Mirafiori Nord area.

³⁴ This process is present in Rome as well, but not yet in a clear form. See Gecillo, Uttaro 2005. *The Ostiense-Marconi neighbourhoods: trans-local cultures and urban planning in the consolidated city*, in INURA bulletin 28.

³⁵ In the sense given by J. Dewey (1934)

³⁶ As a girl immigrated from Cape Verde pointed out during the seminar in Naples: “we do not have the time and the possibility to be what we are”.

The point of view of an urban planner is obviously based on the urgent matter of continuity, the necessity of policies which, recognizing the value of artistic projects in society, manage to bring the necessary cures along in time. While trying to proceed in the attempt to “be at ones ease in a city seen as product of integrated policies” (Belli), it seems evident the role of link of art, almost as if it were mobile bridges (sometimes spontaneous, sometimes not, but we need them both).

Empty spaces of freedom which help unaware to keep away from institutional rigidity³⁷.

This is a useful and precise job of taking things apart little by little, but never stopping, just like a rodent which helps keep things moving, helps keep things fertile and growing.

How can we bring together the necessity of policies and strategies which work in time, with the freedom given by a non-functional job? Is it possible to be strategic visionaries?

As the author Salman Rushdie observes, literature, suspended between a dream and reality, between stories and analysis, helps us to understand the world and give us hope for the future. A slight but powerful consonance makes me think of the same reasoning for the job of the urban planner, suspended between rationality and imaginations. After all, there is already someone who claims that planning is made by telling stories, chosen to give hope for the future (Sandercock, 2003).

“Deciding what stories to tell in what circumstances is part of the planner’s art”. **L. Sandercock,**

The power of story in planning, 2003

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³⁷ Like the artist C. Pietroiusti says: when the administration does not know where to turn, it calls us, we follow their directions, but then, we actually follow our research, and find those empty spaces of action in their imposed schemes.

On the internet

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www.fondazioneadrianolivetti.it

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