

FRANCESCO MICELLI

GEOGRAPHIES THAT MADE HISTORY - THE '80S

In Rome Claudio Cerreti and Claudio Minca dedicated a second meeting of study on the theme "Geographies that made history - The '80s", which was held at the University Roma Tre, on 26 February 2015.

On the first day, which had taken place on February 27, 2014 in the same venue, the discussion was focused on three books: *Social Realities and Symbolic Landscape* (1984) by Denis Cosgrove; *The Metaphors of the Earth* (1985) by Giuseppe Dematteis; *For a Geography of Power* (1981) by Claude Raffestin.

On the second day, interest has been concentrated on two: *An Introduction to Human Geography* (1986) by Pasquale Coppola, *Human Geography* by Costantino Caldo (1979); and on two monographs: *Region and Territory*, by Adalberto Vallega (1981) and *Region and Regionalization*, by Angelo Turco (1984).

In the meetings, still led by Franco Farinelli, a young geographer together with a geographer of older generation have reasoned on each of the texts in order to understand the turning point and rebirth of geographical thought in Italy.

Since the University has broadcasted a streaming video of the conferences, here reflections and comments may prevail over the news. In other words, what the speakers have reported has been also considered as a starting point for exploration and meditation.

At the opening of the second day Farinelli understood the choice of the organizers as a definition of a watershed. On the one side he placed Coppola and Caldo's handbooks, which would end the paradigm of *géographie humaine*; on the other one, Adalberto Vallega and Angelo Turco's books, which would confirm a new interest in the Anglo-Saxon geographical literature. From this perspective, to examine the educational proposals and guidelines of the thought of a "season fertile and lively" would strengthen "Memory and strategy" of those who, in this, practice this discipline.

According to Farinelli, in the Eighties it would have been possible for Italians to choose between different geographies and to write and think in different currents of thought. The books in question, without neglecting originality and value of the authors, should therefore be examined particularly for the role played and the perspectives they opened.

Lida Viganoni and David Papotti discuss on *An Introduction to Human Geography. Fragments of a Denied Territory* by Pasquale Coppola (1943-2008). The comparison between generations in the case of the two speakers should be emphasized, because it clarifies the distance that separates us from the facts in question.

Viganoni retraces the Coppola's "handbook" chapter by chapter, with order and rigor useful also to control the emotion that stirs in her the memory of a friend and colleague. The title of the book itself is thoroughly discussed. An introduction means that the ways of the geographical discourse may be multiple, that the focus in this case is directed on the fragments that could allow the reconstruction of the territory that is denied to the vanquished and oppressed. The critical dimension and civic engagement are the cornerstones of geography, here conceived as strategic knowledge that helped "to exercise power in the territory, to conquer, to repress the attempts of re-appropriation by the masses, who were expropriated" (Coppola 1977.8).

Coppola curates *Crisis of Geography. Geography of the Crisis* (1977) by Yves Lacoste, in a series edited by Gambi, when its production is already focused on the problem of South Italy, where the responsibilities of the geographer, repeatedly mentioned in the "preliminary thoughts" of the first chapter, are already practice of life.

The choice to stand in favor of the oppressed has become a moral imperative, because accepting the idea of worthlessness and empty notionism of geography "means more or less openly exclude a part, also consistent, of the population from the opportunity to look critically at the decisions regarding the space in general, the territory it inhabits in particular" (Coppola, 1986, 25).

In the second chapter of *Geography and Affirmation of the Capitalist Model*, the ideas of Paul Vidal de la Blache, "great and undisputed master" of the French school, "powerfully reiterated" by Lucien Febvre, "his pupil" who has emerged as one of the leading historians of the early twentieth century and has been the founder with Marc Bloch of the prestigious school of the "Annales"; are confirmed as cornerstones of the geographic paradigm that Lucio Gambi set against the late Italian positivism, which young people of "democratic geography" were instructed by the teacher to develop. The note on the teamwork, which Coppola has practiced and encouraged, suggests it as a sign of the times. The friends to whom he asked for exchange of ideas, suggestions, observations and development of his "introduction" are Lucio Gambi, Massimo Quaini, Franco Farinelli, Aldo Pecora (Coppola 1986, 10).

Geography and South (1977) or *Political Geography of the Italian Regions* (1997) are examples of such collective work. The wealth of the Eighties would be also in this will to create together a cultural project, to redeem decades of depression without disperse.

Now Viganoni wonders if *An Introduction* could be defined as a handbook or if would be rather an anti-handbook. Since geography – according to the Gambian definition (eg Gambi1972, 76-78) - is

transformed into the problems of the territory, it is impossible to order in advance the fundamental news of the discipline. The problems -for definition- emerge unexpectedly and require original solutions to issues entirely or almost entirely new. Cultivating the doubt and looking beyond appearances are therefore the rules that every geographer must recognize and respect, because they are prerequisite for any cultural action aimed and every political solution meditated.

In chapter three, *The Construction of a Critical Knowledge of the Territory*, which deals with the "horizons of our house", e.g. the Italian geographical production of the nineteenth century, the figure of Carlo Cattaneo stands out, while he crowed his studies promoted by the Enlightenment and by 'Napoleonic administration, consciously merged scientific work and social engagement (Gambi 1972 9-10, but also Quaini, 1975, 60-109). Coppola developed all the signs of Gambi, but insisting on the "singular homelands", the city considered as a principle of "civilization" which failed to establish itself as this in the South. The values of anarchy, the roles of utopia are added to this geography of the problems, to the duties of militancy it imposes to prevent repetition and acriticity of scientific discourse.

The final *Bibliography*, completed with the "valuable contribution" of Luigi Stanzione and defined by Viganoni as a "text in the text", describes the library of the geographer of the Eighties. Among the *Introductory Suggestions* it can be found – for instance - the *Géographie active* (1964) by Pierre George, *Social Justice and the City* (1979) by David Harvey, *After the Geography* by Massimo Quaini (1978), *For a Geography of Power* by Claude Raffestin (1981), *The Metaphors of the Earth* by Giuseppe Dematteis (1984), but - compared to other perspectives - also *The Utility of Geography* (1977), edited by Giorgio Valussi, *Why the Geography* by Osvaldo Baldacci (1978), *The Geographical Thought in Italy*, edited by Attilio Celant and Adalberto Vallega (1984).

Eventually, readings, projects, proposals and production - similarly to the case of *El hacedor* (*The Maker*) of Borges, quoted in the epigraph - reflected through Viganoni the Coppola's image and character.

In his speech David Papotti, a young geographer, interprets this introduction to human geography as "oasis of reflection", as a moment of pause in the race to update. The originality and relevance of the text would find expression in the first lines of *Knots and Prospects of Contemporary Human Geography*, in the onset of the fourth chapter. If the problems examined in their historical specificity are the main topic, these should not be forced into academic classifications. The handbook must therefore suggest the clue to unravel, understand and address the issues of the moment. The teachers who support the "interpretative and constructive value" of this geography are then pointed out/suggested in the personalities of Lucio Gambi, Pierre George and Charles Ginsburg.

From the point of view of the history of Italian geography, Papotti distinguishes, with all the needful prudence, dated aspects and modern insights into the text. The political contexts that no longer exist could set aside speeches about Soviet school and geography, burned on the opportunity of real socialism. The theme of Marxism and geography, one of the most debated topics in the period, doesn't get no "useful recovery." in the reflection of Papotti .

The proximity of the Eighties could be identified in the forty years of criticism of cartography, which Coppola points out and starts not only thanks to the advice of Farinelli. The fact that Bryan Hardley, regularly quoted by Papotti, lacks from the bibliography of Coppola, can demonstrate the different weight that the Anglo-Saxon literature plays in the geography of nowadays.

Papotti highlights the total absence of images and maps, which would indicate how this guide can be considered more complementary than alternative, compared to other handbooks. While this observation reaffirms the originality of Coppola in his rejection of the models, the relativization of any theory, in attention to the historical specificity, it prepares in facts the ground for the comparison with the Caldo's *Human Geography*.

When Girolamo Cusimano reasons on the geographer born in Palermo, first of all he expands the boundaries of historical reflection, without focusing solely on the Eighties. The main editions of the Manual written by Constantino Caldo, dating back to 1979, 1987 and 1996, mark three moments of an intellectual history, a constant growth of interests and perspectives. According to the approach of normal science each volume would record the partial achievements of critical thinking. His shift to the historical materialism, which in the manner of Soviet geography and English geography radical characterizes the second edition, becomes episode of a cultural battle. This would support the turning point of Italian geography towards forms of thought open to the international debate, it would mark the end of late positivist schemes. The new way of analyzing, that Marxism would have disclosed, would in fact set up a meeting with other forms of thought, especially in anthropology from 1996 that will characterize the contribution of Caldo's production into the Italian geographical thought.

The interpretation of Cusimano is here drastically simplified in the belief that, so reduced, it relates effectively the main issue. The handbook, edition after edition, tells about a geography that, as "cultural science", in the Eighties would be in full progress. The problem is not therefore to assess (andrebbe bene anche consider carefully) the contents of the single edition, but if necessary to understand the time and function, to grasp the enlargement of horizons.

Marco Picone, who knew the handbook written by Caldo in 1994 when was attending the courses of geography held by Enzo Guarrasi at the University of Palermo, reasons about the history of the discipline and the duties of handbooks. The main theme of the speech is the praise of Eclettism. The 1996 edition

of *Human Geography* is obviously different from that of 1987, mainly because it has to record geo-historical changes of the decade. The association with anthropology, which distinguishes the latest from the previous edition, would be the main result of the dialogue that geography has set up with other disciplines. To explain the innovation of a knowledge no more closed in itself, Picone recalls the Northwest Passage of Dematteis. The article published in the "Italian Geographic Review" in 1989, reprinted as a chapter in *Implicit Project* in 1995, deals with the concept of landscape in its various modalities and trends. Drawn two Cartesian axes, Dematteis placed on the x-axis the opposition landscape-symbol (Eric Dardel) and landscape-model (Aldo Sestini), on the y-axis instead the subjective or objective representation. The dial of NO regards the landscape as symbolic-mental construction (Dematteis 1995, 47). To understand how representations of the external world we call landscapes do form, more disciplines are necessary. Eugenio Turri (1927-2005) - for example - to describe the Italian landscape in 1979 refers to semiotics (Dematteis 1995). What justifies both the attention to other items of culture and the use of other specialists, on one hand explains why at that time Umberto Eco was called to Palermo by geographers, on the other a more normal need to illustrate to other specialists, for example urban planners and architects, what is the utility of geography.

The handbook by Caldo registered in different editions methods and results of the discipline, but has also shown the lack of rigidity in how geography can held together speeches from time to time different. The disciplinary identity within this eclectic collection would be guaranteed by method, look and listen; in other words by the attention to a couple of aspects: the quantity and quality, the statement of what the geographer must observe, the opening to other cultural perspectives, in this specific case the acquisition of the anthropological discourse. Picone, while positively reach the aggregation of other issues in the geographical thought, points out that this handbook can translate the most difficult passages of the speech with didactic clarity, as it records the state of the art and its changes.

The coherence of reasoning and accuracy of references suggest a long reflection on the figure in question. The existence from the Eighties of a group of geographers in Palermo oriented in the sense of cultural geography seems then confirmed by the tight argument of Picone.

The Roman study days, in order to understand what the Eighties have left, have tried to find in the handbooks of the period the ideas and programs that gradually animated the turn of Italian geography. It is time to explore more specific contributions, to assess the depth of the change in the concrete cultural activity.

The text *Region and Territory*, written by Adalberto Vallega and published in Milan in 1976, is discussed by Paola Morelli and Egidio Dansero. This time the dialogue is wide open: there is not a

comparison between two interpretations, but both refer stimuli that the volume sent. Aiming to explain the "positive" impact of the work, however, the commentators must enter the contents in the overall framework of the Italian geography.

Morelli, who recognizes the Vallega's spirit of innovation, the ability to interpret the "great turmoil" of the Eighties, begins with Ernesto Massi (1909-1998). The geo-economics would require ideas that the national paradigm did not possess for developing statistical language, broaden territorial issues, cultivate demographic interests. The Vallega production and activity could point the way to overcome the barriers of tradition and practice lines of research experience in other countries of Europe, in the world of Anglo-Saxon culture in particular.

Dansero, who had faced as a student *Region and Territory* and *Compendium of Regional Geography* (1982) as handbooks, it recalls its clarity of expression and openness of horizons. But when -for another university exam - had to read the *Introduction to the Geography* of Coppola, he came to doubt that it could be really the same discipline, the two geographies could coincide.

Paola Morelli reaffirms the quality "didactically unexceptionable" of Vallega's texts and connects its ability to open up new horizons to the "programmed path" inside the IGU.

Dansero, while evaluates the Vice-presidency (1996-2004) and Presidency of the Association (2004-2006) of the International Union of geographers as an important result of cultural policy, he confirms - especially for *Region and Territory* - the clarity of graphic schemes, the usefulness of the topic indexes, the keyword dictionary. At the very moment in which he admits the courage with which Vallega disclosed "without too banalize" the theories of international geography, Dansero points out, however, the absolute silence on the concept of territory and the lacks of his bibliography.

Then he remembers the great and tidy desk in Vallega's office, the perfect placement of the volumes, the method by which they were classified and cataloged. The ability to produce books and monographs is the result of a rigorous working discipline, careful use and reuse of information without loss of any kind (cf., for example, the texts cited by Vallega 1976 Id. 1979, 151-152; Id., 1982, 192-206; Id., 1984, 42-45, 303). Morelli starts from presenting the Dansero's findings in their most positive aspects. States that the refusal to define what "territory" is it would be a "choice of field": the overused term, common in too many areas, would produce only disorder. So she affirms that the time of disclosure, always comforted by the interest of readers, is an undoubted merit of the "master".

Finally indicates *For a Geography of the Sea* (1980) as the masterpiece for its testing methodology and plentifulness of contents would eventually exceed the high levels of educational information.

On the whole Morelli and Dansero have redrawn the essential lines of Vallega's thinking and activities, comparing his work with the expectations of time, recognizing the effort of renewal of geography as a theory and practice.

If we consider once again *Region and Territory* and focus mainly on "region as a system", it can be seen near to the quotations of David Harvey, Peter Haggett, Ludwig Bertalanffy, are present at the same time the conclusions reached by the Commission of Economic Regionalization dell'IGU (Vallega, 1976, 141-147; 76, 8, 144, 15, 164). The precise observations of Morelli and Dansero could strengthen the impression that- despite what Caldo and Coppola maintained- Vallega did not intend to break the official ways of thinking and living geography, but rather rejuvenate and invigorate the tools of "normal" geographies. René Maury, when first of all admits the Vallega tenacity with which he proposed at the international level a unique theory of geography, confirms and completes the findings of the two speakers.

It's right to consider also *Region and Territory* as a sort of handbook which is careful not only to the practice, but also to the tools of the geographer, their operations, their reliability.

Now Cerreti and Minca, moderators of the initiative, together with Farinelli, face *Region and Regionalization* (Milan, 1984). The book, edited by Angelo Turco, contains the proceedings of the international symposium on Region and regionalization in research and contemporary spatial practices, that the Association of Italian Geographers held in Verona on 27-28 January 1983.

It is no longer the time to assess the fallout of new ideas in didactic terms, but to measure them in the heart of the debate. If the attempt to mobilize the conceptual apparatuses (???) suggested by the general theory of systems doesn't represent a primary interest (Turco 1984, 13), questions over the "epistemological statute of knowledge product" mark the watershed between moments of geographical thought Italian, they characterize the awaited transition to "a geography open to the dynamics of the culture, not timid, not closed, dogmatic" (Gambi 1972 38-64, here 63).

The Cerreti's comment over this collection of essays focuses primarily on Franco Angeli that published them. The publishing house is defined (jokingly) "pirate" for not paying royalties and demanding the text of individual interventions in WordStar file, one of the first programs of word processing. He recognizes the ongoing revolution: the cost of the books by this time is reduced and the control on scientific production is immediately loose.

On the subject, it must be remembered that at the end of the Seventies Giampiero-Cotti Cometti, pioneer not only among geographers, established the publishing house CESVIET (Centre for study and documentation on Vietnam and the Third World), that, by using the PCs of the period, published (elegant) geography textbooks that were sold as cheaply as possible, obviously profitless whatsoever.

Cerreti remember then how Massi, a geographer considered as traditional, had let him hand *Region and Regionalization*, stressing at the same time the value of research in theoretical geography and inviting him to retrace the "methodological tours" of many colleagues of the past. The case of Adriano de Micheli (1875-1959), the marinellian who quoted Gottlob Frege, inaugurated in fact a list of geographers for which methodological issues were not considered "sterile discussions" as - unexpectedly - even Arrigo Lorenzi had said (cf. Lorenzi, 1943, 122). However, they were called "excursions" because they did not modify the geographical monographs, because observations remained on the sidelines.

The particular role of Gambi is implied. The breadth of his knowledge, the depth of his notes also inspire the epistemological theoretical investigations now under discussion, their will to translate into daily practice (cf. eg Stems 1972 78-108; Turco 1984, 168, 212, 244).

After having stressed at the conference of Verona were also accepted contributions from Piergiorgio Landini and Maria Tinacci Mossello which were contrasting in many aspects, Cerreti insists on the contamination of knowledge, on the advantages that each opening of cultural horizons lets geography to reach. On the subject, he quotes Raffestin as, in his essay on *Territorialization, Deterritorialization, Reterritorialization and information*, the French geographer makes use of the vocabulary of the Indo-European institutions by Emile Benveniste to trace the linguistic origins of the term "region" (Turco 1984, 71).

Concluding the measured intervention, Cerreti also recognizes in the case of this dialogue the Vallega efforts directed to the unification of the geographical discourse and the formulation of a general theory of space.

Claudio Minca tackles issues that Region and regionalization proposed him.

He starts from two personal experiences. The value and fruitfulness of the systems theory did not stand the test of facts the time when he tried to describe the tourist region. The research was suffocated by the complexity: the claim to totality contrasted ways and means of the survey.

The management of a large university such as the one in which it operates as geographer bases his method, however, always in terms of complex systems, it tends to evaluate the humanities and then geography according to the contribution to guidelines that other sciences, ecology in the first place, have determined.

Once he accepted with some reservations the problem of complexity and systems theory, Minca wonders in what context has matured the conference in Verona, what kind of meaning this volume has taken within the Italian geography.

His reasoning focuses on the contributions of Piergiorgio Landini and Gabriele Zanetto.

From the first author he emphasizes the "awareness," the ability to think the recent history of geography according to the environmental, neo-idealist, neo-positivist, Marxist, humanist perspectives.

While recording the multiplicity of orientations and while following the fluctuations of the paradigms, from time to time he estimates the production of Italians, inserted in the world literature frame (Cf. Turco 1984, 176, 177, 178, 183, 186, 188, 202, 204 , 205).

It is in the very majority of papers published between 1978 and 1982 that show the recovery of our geography and that - even indirectly - justify the study days dedicated to the Eighties.

Then Minca remembers how the regionalization theory and quantitative verification constitute an inseparable pair to Zanetto. A mathematics able to assess the uncertainty in the regional limits could avoid the locking up of the system/region into mechanical-deterministic patterns; would allow the control of systemic isomorphisms; it would support the quantitative practices required to verify the facts (cf. Turco 1984 162-64).

The tensions inside the conference - the term appears more than once - are reported in this one and in other occasions. The hints to Marxism in geography - for example - they may be configured as a conflict, not just latent, with the organizational ways of knowledge criticized not only by Vallega.

With open irony Minca shows finally the cover of the book in question: it portrays a landscape, a rustic farmhouse. It would seem to remind authors as Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (1984), it would leave epistemological objectivism to the edge to propose a new, successful cultural change.

Franco Farinelli concludes the study day from taking as the starting point the great themes that Minca, in the end, raised.

Primarily he focuses on the exergue that Ludwig Bertalanffy wrote before the general systems theory: "*Manibus Nicolai de Cusa cardinalis Gottfriedi Guglielmi Leibnitii, Joannis de Wolfgangi Goethe Aldique Huxleyi, necnon de Bertalanffy Pauli, SJ, antecessoris, cosmographi*" (Bertalanffy 1983 7). The dedication is not accidental. The geographical thought recurs in the work as inspiration, as support of a global vision.

From this point of view Farinelli considers as "outrageous" to import ideas without first to probe the "exceptional heritage" of geography. However he acknowledges an important and necessary role to Vallega, because if through his "trespassing" he accepted the idea that the geographical thought has its justification outside itself, is still came to the rescue to geographers who are "hungry of theory".

In fact *Region and Regionalization* is looking for ways to develop a discipline which still in the Seventies was locked in a narrow "topographical code" by strict academic hierarchies. Farinelli does not dwell on the "childish crudity", on the "mere descriptive notionism" of the period, perhaps because Gambi described that situation with courage and - it should be remembered for future generations - with moderation (Gambi 1972, 61). But he cites the case of Eugenio Turri, the geographer who could think in terms of

phenomenology and structuralism in order to operate outside the University, and so to produce a geography that still collects the interest of readers (Cf. Turri 1979).

Italian geographers- then Farinelli adds - can write what they want because in the Eighties it has however won a freedom which luckily has not yet subjected to assessment and monitoring.

The major universities in northern Europe, which already practice them, think differently in terms of system, systems analysis, systems engineering, because they are vital centers for applied sciences and new technocracy. But the world they are drawing subjects scientific activities for purposes that are not their own (Bertalanffy 1983, 17, 25-27). The sovereignty of science, his freedom, his critical spirit, its isolation from the values and purposes are likely to be lost as well (Cf. in this regard Preti 1968, 19). There is only one way to save the geographical knowledge without reducing it to servile tasks: to launch research programs dealing with crucial problems, with the aim to open new horizons. To investigate on the relationship between cognitive science and geography could be a starting point, because eventually would develop the assertion of Ptolemy according to which the earth is a head. The results would not only erase all traces of naive realism from current productions, but may even propose geography as an archetype of a new knowledge.

When Farinelli closes the study day with these arguments, he declares his speech rhetorical. Probably he refers to the insistence with which he aims to face geography as a dynamic paradigm that uses the tradition to innovate tradition. In this sense, admits to be indebted to Gambi who bluntly accused him of "fumisterie".

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