Idola and planning (design)

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On one hand, it has become less relevant, almost "vanished in the air", the **distinction** between the **quantitative** and the **qualitative** tools; we could better say between hard and soft approaches to the territorial transformations.

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Then, **the procedural character** of these approaches was brought into discussion, with their sequences of phases - of knowledge and action, of analysis and project -, as if it was possible to find without knowing where to look for, and to look for, without knowing what should and could be found.

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But above all, what has changed was the idea of **forecasting**, a change that should not only mean the awareness and the acceptance of the impossibility to construct the desirable futures (which would simply be the end of the project), but also the awareness of the necessity to operate upon the possible futures and upon the possible scenarios that describe them.

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What exactly has changed in the practices? There has been no change in the need to **govern the processes**, to use a **plan**, to define the constraints and regulations; what has disappeared was the idea that all that can happen just by a demiurgic will of the decision-maker (whether political or technical, makes little difference), and that there was a "before" and an "after" clearly distinguished.

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The transformations, the definition of common visions and objectives, the construction of the common good, all that require a process of choosing and planning intrinsically accompanied to the implementation and to the **management and government of projects** (the decision and the evaluation cannot be separated neither).

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And then, other mutations have been induced by the rapid and unpredictable **technological evolution** in the last few decades; an evolution that has had several agents and several causes: the market forces, the creativity and the collective construction of the knowledge participated almost spontaneously by millions of people, the individual behaviours and needs, the "astuteness of the history".

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An evolution that touches in many ways the territory and the government of its transformations: from the profound reshaping of the concept of spatial contiguity, to the richness and versatility of the information technology tools , to the possibility to account for and treat the complexity of the spatial systems with the use of extremely refined and flexible techniques and models, and at the same time to read and to re-compose its single fragments (**the complexity and the fragment** are two inseparable aspects of the "projectuality").

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Finally, the technological evolution makes the **simulations** possible and effective, user-friendly and verifiable, and renders the information available and easy to disseminate at low costs, imposing to the discipline to interact and to be "contaminated": splendid perspectives, but not totally free, and not completely automatic.

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Reading, describing, interpreting, orienteering and governing these radical transformations bounded within a fundamental objective that assures the **social equity**, the **extension of rights** and the **sustainability** is the task and the challenge we need put in front of us, each from his or her own point of view.

But we have to be aware of *idola*.

Dogma of continuity	Fallacy of extrapolation	Assumption of retroactivity of moral principles	Pretension for the universality of behaviours
Obliviousness of counter-intuitive effects	Syndrome of *defroqué*	Hypothesis of rational behaviour	*Querelle* reductionism vs. holism

Complex system = A system composed on many parts (variables, parameters) interacting in a non-linear manner; the complex behaviour is exhibited only for some combinations of values of parameters ("pits"). A good way to "design" is to keep the systems far from those "pits" (when it is possible). When impossible one can try to design resilient and not fragile strategies.

Complex social system = The "autonomous choice" of individuals are a special feature not occurring in "normal" complex systems and – in general – they cannot be "reduced" to the lower level.

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The complexity of real social systems is twofold, once as they are composed on many parts interacting in a non-linear manner, and twice as they are composed of "objects" – human beings – capable of "free" actions and acts of will; in describing them, a bit of reductionism is inevitable and the only reductionism to avoid is the one that pretends to switch and to infallibly trespass between different "scales" (from the atom to the whole society). Different scales impose different techniques, and should we use extremely rigorous methods at the level of the sciences of society (from statistics to the carbon isotopes), it should not be done for the purpose of inferring about the properties of one scale (level) starting from the properties of another lower scale (level).

As it is with history, also in the sciences of society it is impossible to apply the scientific method *stricto sensu*; rather we could consider a *clever* use of techniques; an use that can serve to make the decisions of a project understandable and communicable, to motivate and to confront them, to discover the mechanisms the actions and choices are produced with, to determine the sensitive and critical spots of actions, to improve the knowledge and awareness.

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The “epistemological fixation” on the *dogma* of continuity (“big causes are needed to obtain big effects”) is responsible for many of the great planned economies’ errors and for the disastrous effects of the “organic” conception of (master)-plans, and is forgetful that great objectives are reached with *great* policies, non necessarily with *big* policies, bearing in mind that many social subsystems have great adaptability, the capacity to maintain and to reach equilibrium, and the possibility of *autopoiesis* . In substance, a good politician intervenes when and where is necessary, with maximum economy and takes as much as possible advantage of “natural” tendencies, knows as much a possible the system and its “physics”, and makes as much as possible “open” and reversible decisions.

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One of the frequently committed errors is to disregard the counter-intuitive behaviour of systems and to imagine that what is a “logical” contradiction is also “operatively” a contradiction. Systems are, nevertheless, a set of variables linked by a set of relations, so that it is not always true that for example traffic-congestion necessarily gets reduced along with the increase of the road capacity.

The idea that the expansion of tele-communication (the “immaterial movement”) implies, eventually, a reduction of physical movements (the “material movement”) is theoretically “true” (if I can phone I don’t need to go there personally): it is not necessarily true as a matter of fact; and for many good reasons.

Good intentions are the solution to all the problems: these are never unveiled in all their complexity, with the totality of relations and retro-actions that feed them, with the necessity to articulate and distinguish, but always in a disparate and over-simplified fashion, without ever pointing at a true enemy of a true problem.

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Had the sail manufacturers from the end of the 18th century "extrapolated" the sailing ship production data and taken their respective investment decision consequently, they would have (as many indeed had) brought their enterprises to a "catastrophe": the maritime transportation was in expansion, the number of ships and passengers was increasing, many steamships were exploding; but, for any phenomenon, there are many possible extrapolations, many changing variables, many reciprocally influencing parameters: the 24 will show up once out of 37 times, there is no doubt about that, but maybe it is going to happen on the nearby *roulette* with a much higher frequency, or in a nearby *casino* or in a much more distant one, or on another night.

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There is no doubt that Jefferson was a racist, Voltaire an anti-Semite, that Einstein was exploiting his wives and has abandoned a daughter, Simenon and Kennedy had a prostitute procured to them on a daily basis and Lewis Carrol could hardly escape an accuse for paedophilia. As for the rest, “no great man is such for his butler”, and generally, as Woody Allen would have it: “no one could make a bet on the state of one’s own underwear”.

Moral principles changes through time and the following edifying story proves it: “Euclid had just finished to explain a theorem to a student, and the latter, a young and rather avid man, wanted to know what he would gain out of it. The mathematician directed then his word to a slave, ordering: ‘Give him three *oboloi* since he absolutely need to profit with what he learned.’ Edifying story indeed, except for the fact that the great Euclid was not ashamed for having a slave working for him. Is the lesson less great? Is it entirely insignificant that the great Euclid was such – also – because he had a slave at his disposal?

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Each culture and each sub-culture (even the best and the worst ones) involve behaviours that some other culture disapproves and demands them to be disapproved.

Without indulging in a cultural relativism of a fascist stamp that justifies excision and the barbaric oppression of Saudi-Arabian women (a country nobody even dreams to banish out from the civil international community!), I think that no mentally sane person would impose to Muslim children to eat ham in kindergartens' cafeteria or would forbid the smoking of marijuana or tobacco or the drinking of wine to responsible adults, or video-games and television to children. And – in the past – how had it been accomplished that not too many heads got cut off during a revolution? So that sometimes, the question – asked by somebody with a certain cynicism – is: "too many or too few?"

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No quotation is more abused than the one that states that only imbeciles never change their mind. Nobody recalls that inferring from this that one who changes his/her mind is not an imbecile is a logical fallacy; and then it depends on how many ideas are changed, how many times, with what frequency, whether in worse or in better.

Often the former-priests are the most ferocious “priest-busters”, the ex-communists the most intransigent “teo-cons”.

The rage and the acridity of *defroqués* perform a bad service to history and to predictions, makes every evaluation a *redde rationem*, prevents from capturing details and even from seeing facts as they are: the immense tragedy of Stalinism and *Gulag*, erases the resistance of Red Army, for years the only adversary to nazi-fascism in Europe and the indispensable condition for Alliance’s victory. And finally, Napoleon was not exactly an angel, nor can one say only admirable things about the Nation’s Fathers from Italian “*Risorgimento* (1848 – 1866).

But – good or bad –things went that way.

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The users do, as they want: this is not necessarily a good thing, but is surely an irreducible fact (and it is a lesson that Architects and Urban Planners would do well to always remember). They change, distort, bend means and objectives in order to make them fit their own aims. They have done that and are still doing it with telephone, mobile phone and with cars. The students do it with school, the residents with neighbourhoods and cities (transforming "non-places" in places and vice versa), and the children with games.

That is why the rational approach to decision-making does not always work, and that is why it is <u>always</u> insufficient (even if it is – we want to reaffirm it – almost always useful).

But the people's behaviour is not completely "free"; it depends on the fashions, conditionings, ideologies, and invention of traditions, advertisements and it belongs to other "levels".