

The project of the Capital *for-itself*

WALTER TOCCI

Abstract: Today is certainly not a high time. And the crisis of politics in Rome will still last many years. In the worst periods, in fact, the weaknesses, the corporatism, the welfare have found protection in the state intervention, which in doing so has sterilized the autonomous capacities of the social body, further aggravating the dependence on the administration, in a vicious circuit of amplification of the income as a mode of economic organization. The weakness of politics is the occasion to interrupt these negative processes and help the Roman society to find other ways of development. It is an opportunity to experience the capital *for-itself*, preparing the social and cultural materials that will constitute the humus of future and innovative political experiences. The new leaderships will not be born from the current political class but only from a new social generativity.

Keywords: Rome Capital, Pasolini for Morricone, the clash of ideas, a world pole.

It takes a certain sincere and serene state of mind to recognize that a historical cycle has come to an end. The task of Rome Capital as we have known it since Porta Pia has now come to a close. It is no accident that the cycle closes in the decade of the last global crisis. It is narrated as an economic crisis, but in reality, it is a major transformation of the world, geopolitical balance, production and consumption distribution, and even of the collective imagination. When the world changes, also capitals are transformed. Daily stress as Massimo Teodori here recalls, certainly call into question the responsibility of the present administration and of the previous ones. But there is a more structural basis, since when a city comes to the end of a historical phase, everything becomes more complicated, even the problems of daily life; even potholes become more dangerous when a history has concluded. It is our duty to complete a crucial passage: from a capital city *in-to elaborate the itself* to a capital *for-itself*. Until now we have lived off the legacy of its millennial history, of the center of Catholicism, and of the symbol of the belated national unification. There was no need to add anything to this capital in itself. The future will, however, depend

on the capital *for-itself*, that is the ability of the present generation, as well future, to re-elaborate the symbol and function of Rome in the new [emerging] world.

In the absence of an adequate political program, it would at least be important to elaborate the awareness of the passage. If we think back to what we can no longer do, it would be clear what we have not done previously and what we must realize in the century that has just begun. In taking leave of the past we better understand the meaning. That of Rome Capital is an important history, that has transformed a small papal city into an European metropolis of about 3 million inhabitants, even with serious contradictions and imperfections.

Precisely by situating the events of the capital at their height one can better see the collapse in all its dimensions. First of all, the symbolic. It suffices to say that it was felt necessary to write Roma Capitale ("Rome Capital") on all municipal signs and police officers' cars. If it must be spelled out it means it is no longer a symbol. And more importantly it means nothing to the new generations and it has greatly deteriorated at the national and international level.

The territorial expansion that had created one of the largest low-density European conurbations without infrastructures, at the limits of sustainability has exhausted itself. With the bursting of the housing bubble there are signs of return of city residents. The flow of coming and leaving have gone back to the level of the 1970s.

More importantly, the economic motors of expansion have diminished: primarily the returns on real estate, as well as public spending of the state centralism and the great center of mass consumption which has always influenced the national commercial tendencies, as one can gather from the use of Roman dialect in advertisement. These three components will no longer be driving forces in the new century and we will, therefore, look to different economies and resources.

The unusual character of this history is the speed of its development. In 150 years it has managed what other European capitals have managed in 4 or 5 centuries. Precisely this whirling pace prevented urban settling and determined the fragmentations and imbalances. All this came about under the impulse of an external ruling class that has changed the secular history of its sites based on an artificial image of the capital, as professor Barbera reminds us. It is the same settlement logic as that of newly founded cities of colonial empires. That is why

one talked of Rome as “colonial city”. This is not an accidental expression in the language of the great historians of city planning, Benevolo or Insolera. And curiously it arises in a completely different contest, in the poem by Pier Paolo Pasolini written for Ennio Morricone precisely for the occasion of the capital’s centenary: “*non si piange su una città coloniale*” (one does not cry for a colonial city). It is a beautiful and mysterious verse that each of you may read in your own way. For a long time I have racked my brains for the true meaning. One may interpret it in an assertive sense: Rome is like that and always will be. Or in a derogatory sense: it does not deserve any tears, it is not worth cerying over. But I like to read it in an exhortatory sense: one does not cry for a colonial city, meaning, we must roll up our sleeves to achieve something good in theory and in practice.

When a story ends its beginning always comes to mind. Even in personal events, the beginning of a love story, of one’s career or civil commitment opens many roads, but then one chooses one direction and abandons all others. When the chosen road comes to a dead end, thoughts turns to the roads that had been left behind, interrupted when we began the new one.

See, I believe it is very useful to reflect on Rome Capital’s interrupted paths. What had not been realized in the nineteenth century presents itself once more as suggestions for the future.

European intellectuals raise two problems in the dialogue with the learned class of the Historical Right. In the first instance, the danger of limiting the universal character of Rome in a national container. “Remember that Rome may be only governed with a universal idea,” thus Mommsen admonished Sella prior to Porta Pia. And the Savoy minister, later the most loved by the Romans, responded that it would not become a bureaucratic city and nor an industrial city. but rather a center for the creation of knowledge. He used a beautiful expression – the site of the “*cozzo delle idee*”, the clash of ideas –, to emphasize that knowledge is produced in the contrast of ideas and even in the conflict of understandings. With the language of idealism and positivism it represented a project for a city that precisely today finds a cogent relevance in the society of knowledge. It is an encouragement to rethink the universal character of the capital founded on a cultural foundation, not only for its past legacy, but for contemporary intellectual achievements, thanks not just to ancient merits but for what the new generations will be capable of.

The European intellectuals had another question: how to solve the problem of the *Agro Romano* (from *Ager Romanus*, the Roman countryside). The topic comes from the literature of the *Grand tour* which had expressed the wonder and the worry [reverence] of visitors when crossing, after the beautiful Tuscan landscape, the malarial, mysterious and wild countryside to then find themselves suddenly at the Porta del Popolo, finally in Rome. It was the great emptiness, represented by (Gioachino) Belli as a desert in which there is nothing but the “*bbarrozza cor barrozzaro ggiù mmorto ammazzato*” (“the cart with its driver murdered alongside”, tr. note: the double consonants are pronounced forcefully). In fact, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the *Agro Romano* becomes a research theme for different fields of knowledge: in the health sciences, the study of malaria; in economy, the study by the young Sombart on local development; in engineering, techniques of reclamation; in painting, the study of landscapes; and so on. Despite the fervor of studies and projects in the nineteenth century, the Rome of the twentieth century solved the problem in the worst possible way, by exporting its outskirts to the farms and then to regional area.

The most ambitious programs of Rome Capital – the clash of ideas and the rebirth of the *Agro Romano* – were either denied or distorted. Precisely those interrupted paths today indicate the way out of the crisis of the colonial city. The idea of a universal Rome, apart from the idealistic and positivist rhetoric, finds its relevance in the global network of cities of knowledge. The problem of the Roman countryside can find new solutions in the dimension of the regional city.

This is not just an extension of local and global horizons, but a paradigm change. If the nineteen-twentieth century capital had been generated by the pair city-nation, the capital of the new century will find its opportunities in the pair region-world. The first pair had activated vertical relationships, of a political-bureaucratic nature, in the exogenous and protected economy. The second pair should be thought of as a set of horizontal relations, of a social and cultural nature, in an endogenous and creative economy. The passage from a vertical to a horizontal paradigm is another way of representing the transition of the capital *in itself* to a capital *for itself*. The future of Rome will no longer be based on the relation Municipality-State, but will play out in the two wider and more open dimensions: what it will be able to do in international relations and what it will be able to do in its regional area.

The international function comes from the legacy it has inherited, but now the question becomes: how will we be able to re-elaborate the legacy in the contemporary production of culture, of economy, and of science. This, I believe, will be a decisive step. There are many parameters that can indicate the direction of development of a city in the world of today. The most important and the greatest reach is the ability to attract the young. In the globalization the flow of new generations indicates trails of urban innovation, as we saw in Berlin in the last twenty years.

Precisely in this task do we see the inadequacy of the capital. A simple indicator suffices: how many young people from other parts of the world feel the need to live in Rome? Unfortunately, an exodus of young Romans, especially with high professional skills, prevails. And yet for the entire modern era the voyage to Rome was an indispensable element of the *Bildung* of young creative Europeans. As recently as the 1950s, the great architect Louis Kahn wrote, to study in the eternal city means to live inside of the textbook itself. Today everything is different, even the textbooks are outdated, though this hand may still be played, if there were a strategy to seize fully the opportunities of globalization. There is a growth in the demand for education and training especially, but not only, in developing countries. The larger U.S. universities are preparing themselves to become the multinationals of knowledge. Surely, it is difficult to compete at that level, but for Rome it would be sufficient to carve out a niche in the global demand in fields legitimized by its tradition, which could be further developed. In various institutions one can clearly see that the demand could grow if the offer were not held back by the shortsightedness of norms and cutbacks. If the Academy of Fine Arts in Ripetta could hire young professors it would acquire an enormous increase in requests to enroll coming from sons and daughters of the Chinese middle class. If the Istituto Centrale del Restauro (Central Restoration Institute) had adequate resources it could increase tenfold the enrollment of young people from all over the world that appreciate Cesare Brandi's Italian school. Even the Auditorium, that has become an European cultural engine, as Vittorio Emiliani said earlier, could dedicate new resources to the international demand for training. Even in the three universities there is a new growth of demand which however is not fully met due to lack of professors and accommodation facilities.

One could imagine a world training center of art and the city, capable of renewing the tradition of the voyage of learning, integrating the training offered by the universities, the academies, the institutes, the museums and the superintendences. This requires a project of extremely high quality, with the aid of the most advanced technologies and efficient accommodation and residence services. Foreign universities should also be invited to participate. Foreign universities should also be invited to participate. Many already have campuses in Rome, but the process could be further stimulated by rendering by making public buildings which are underutilized available, for example transforming the Forlanini, the barracks at Pietralata, or Santa Maria della Pietà into modern international centers of learning would have a positive effect in those areas of the cities. A global training center for a young enthusiast of the art of the city would make coming to study in Rome indispensable, just as was a period of training in American diversities imperative for young scientists in the 1800s. Only in this dimension can we think of a rebirth of Rome today. As the Ludovico Quaroni said: "It is a city that when it is not for everyone in the world, it is only the moral misery of a country."

Even in regional dimensions of Rome opportunities and weaknesses have parted ways. Those European cities that in the last 30 years have managed a leap forward in their aim towards development had the full support of their respective regional areas. Just consider the strength of Catalonia for Barcelona and that of Bavaria for Munich. In that same period Rome has exported its periphery to the regional area, thus accentuating the territorial hierarchy.

An enormous low density nebula of buildings has been created, with poor infrastructural innervation and oriented towards intense centripetal gravitation. Considering only since the year 2000, almost two hundred thousand Romans, approximately equaling the residents of Cagliari, have moved to the city suburbs, coming back every morning to work, mainly automobile commuting that has saturated the already weak mesh of consular routes.

The income differential between city and region is similar to that between the north and the south of the country. One can detect innovative ferments in Lazio, especially in the new agriculture and in industrial innovations, but the gaze of politics, media and public opinion is mainly directed towards the center. Rome has no future if it remains closed within municipalism, around itself it needs a structured, productive, and varied region.

The priority is the realization on rails capable of bestowing a posteriori a network to the urban hodge-podge created by the mayors of the hinterland, that have inflated building permits to make up for the budget cuts, a sort of real estate mint as it were. There is an enormous opportunity that has not yet been put to use: finishing the Alta Velocità (high speed railway) has lightened the load on the national railway traffic for Naples and Tuscany, whose potential has not yet been fully re-utilized in local transportation. It is possible to endow the Rome-Lazio territory with a modern network of regional subways, like the German S-Bahn or the Paris RER. It is not only a transportation policy, but a lever to trigger a new economy for the territory. The renovated stations should make the most of the localized advantages to attract new activities of services and innovations in the tourist, agricultural, environmental industries, of social assets and new technologies.

This, however, requires an urbanistic idea of the regional area. The planning management of the last thirty years got lost in a thousand rivulets, pandering, de facto, to processes underway, without identifying instruments and objectives adequate to the large scale of the transformation. The most painful point of the area is also where the cure should begin. All of the contradictions of the century have accumulated on the GRA (the motorway encircling Rome), as the objective of the second postwar leap in scale and the third in the transition to the new millennium. Today it is a soggy territory, dissolved by squatting and heterogeneous settlements, and yet it must bear the weight of the interface between the city and the region. Its transformation is decisive to give to Rome of the new century a regional structure.

The GRA is the only large infrastructure that serves the unauthorized housing and public buildings; it is the territory where a million Romans live, almost unknown to the other two million Romans; it is the cardan joint that regulates the urban and metropolitan movements; it is the crown of the consumption centers of the vast area; it is the logistic network self-planned by obsolete operators and by digital ones; it is the new Via Venti Settembre of ministerial offices agreed upon by state bureaucracies with builders with no planning.

Moving the ministries in Piccinato's idea was the opportunity to realize a new linear city as a bridge between the historical center and the region. The rational and planned utopia of the Asse Attrezzato (the project of an eastern Central Administrative and Business District) was

replaced by the visceral and unauthorized heterotopian GRA. And yet, the imagery of the structure built is no less powerful than that thought of in its time: the perfection of the great ring that tempers the unregulated recklessness, the self-sufficient roadway that rises above the urban magma so as not to be contaminated; the ring that attracts unto itself all the junctions till the desertification of the relationships of neighboring fabric, the semiotic code that supplies the access keys to Rome, like the sequence of exits in Guzzanti's song ("Grande Raccordo Anulare" was a parody of a popular song). It is no accident that cinema, literature and art have understood the surrealism of this infrastructure better than the planners that even bears the name of the project engineer, Gra.

Precisely for the compresence of symbolic, urban and infrastructural elements the GRA is the most important topic for the capital of tomorrow. To it should all the energy of analysis, planning and realization should be dedicated. Instead the 2008 PRG (regional regulatory plan) has not even included it in the strategic areas, even though it has bogged it down with new commercial and residential expansions, rhetorically called centrality; confirmation of a plan that has aged even before it was born.

The most passionate challenge consists in being able to make new cities of the Roman region emerge from the encrusted construction magma around the GRA. It is a difficult undertaking, that implies a radical rethinking of all the planning and implementing tools. The younger planner are more aware of the necessary disciplinary discontinuity, starting with those present here today: Marco Pietrolucci, who has studied the microcities of the GRA and Alessandro Lanzetta, who has shed light on the informal and Mediterranean aspect of the ring city. It has to do with activating the spores of a recomposition of the fabric, operating by integration, recovery and demolition; organizing new flow of sustainable mobility; safeguarding and managing the immense plant heritage; promoting new productive and re-utilization cycles of local economy. It is necessary to deal with the imagery of the GRA thinking of it as a site to be re-invented, including burying some portions, at crossings with rail lines, create artificial grounds on which representative architectures of the new cities may be built, and eliminating at the same time all the other planned constructions that threaten the Agro. These sites could serve a double function, the new centers of the GRA cities and also the Porte di Roma (Gates of Rome), which evoke with

irony the image of the ancient walls and overturn their function; not an enclosure but rather a relation between the regional area and the historic city, in the weave of the large parks and rail network.

If the future of Rome is played out in the dimensions of the region and the world, then what of the relationship with the State? It could become a sober operative relation, precisely because it has exhausted its symbolic function. It could be directed at improving central and city administrations, precisely because unburdened by rhetorical loads.

It could be dedicated to manage the heritage of the colonial city. In Rome, statalism is not an abstract concept, it has left a physical trace, it is materialized in the buildings, in the terrain, in the schools, in treatment centers, in the stations, in the barracks, in warehouses, and in factories. A good portion of these functions are being dismantled or in any case radical restructuring. It is an enormous public patrimony, it was built with citizen's money, and was the place of work and production of the collective will. How these goods will be managed is another decisive question of the coming years. It should be the opportunity to give to the future of the city the public wealth accumulated in one hundred fifty years of history.

Unfortunately, the ideology of our times – due to a distorted vision of the market which damages the economy itself – would impose the squandering of the heritage. Politicians and bureaucrats alienate public goods because they don't know how to do otherwise, they do not imagine new functions for these containers, they do not take into account of the urban effects of selling off, they ignore that an intelligent management of the dismantling could create economic interests far greater than being auctioned off. These patrimonies constitute fundamental leverages to promote the economic and urban transformation of the Roman region and are sites available to host cultural resources of internationalization.

Finally, the capital *in itself* also implies a remembrance of the best pages of the post-union history. Not out of nostalgia but to gain awareness that if some moments it has been possible to express a high function of capital, it is then also possible in the future, a cynical and cheat destiny does not prevent it.

Usually we remember great mayors, but I tend to emphasize, being a member of the category, also the role of coun-

cil members. There have been two that alone relate the century past: Giovanni Montemartini represents the apex of twentieth century modernism and Renato Nicolini prepared the advent of twentyeth century post-modernism. Two gifted personalities that have shown how Rome could find itself at the vanguard of its time.

The first, a reformist socialist, was called to Rome by Nathan to put into practice the municipalization of the services which he had developed in an internationally renown theoretical essay entitled "*Dei servizi pubblici.*" It was he who created Acea (gas and light services) and Atac (transportation service), at that time highly technological undertakings, and then the thermoelectric plant in Ostiense which permitted the distribution of public lighting. At the end of the century, no longer used, it was restored and became the beautiful Montemartini museum, that stores the statues of ancient Rome under the large turbines of the plant in a suggestive dissonance between twentyeth century modernism and classical art. The second, with *Estate Romana* (Roman summer, an attraction pole for culture and amusement) understood the new aesthetic sensibility of postmodernism just when this phenomenon was being theorized by European culture, for example, in the "The Postmodern Condition" by Lyotard in 1979. Anything but ephemeral, Nicolini was able to elicit a new form of recognition of urban space on the part of citizens. The circus in piazza Farnese that reclaims Baroque festivities as a popular phenomenon, the Samba at the Fori Imperiali, "Napoleon" by Abel Gance in the coliseum, and the poet's festival at Castelporziano were collective experiences of the new urban imagination. In the ludic action experienced at a popular level expressed a dimension of the right to a city, as Henri Lefebvre had theorized. In short, there have been moments when Rome contributed to new international tendencies still in their dawn.

And in any case, even in the more ordinary dimension of city government are included exemplary experiences, worthwhile not forgetting, at least as possibilities open to a re-elaboration in an indeterminate future. When this political force became absent the city sank into its public and private dissipations. In Rome there is no half measure: either the will to glory or plebeian abandon. There are no half measures because there has never been a bourgeoisie capable of forming a rational and continuous equilibrium. It is no accident that the refined-popular tension is the dominant aesthetic code in the modern image of the city. Today is certainly not a high point. And the political crisis in Rome will

last for many more years. I hope I am wrong. Let's try to at least look at the positive aspects, like the opportunity to cure addiction to politics that has grown in the past. In the worst moments, in fact, the weaknesses, the corporatism, absentiaisms, have found shelter in state intervention. which, in so doing has sterilized the autonomous ability of the social body, further aggravating the dependency on the administration, in a vicious cycle of amplification of revenue as mode of economic organization. The weakness of politics is the opportunity to interrupt these negative processes and help Roman society to find other paths of development. It is the opportunity to experiment the capital *for-itself*, preparing the social and cultural material which will constitute the *humus* of future and innovative political experiences. The new leadership will not be born among the present political class but only from a new social generativity.

There are many indications, even if uncertain and fragmented, of this molecular reaction to the crisis. In some cases, only as mere adaptation to the difficulties: rapid growth of new small businesses often evolving as precarious labor; use of the housing patrimony as services for tourist accommodation, diversification of the offer of *food*. But there are also innovative responses to the transformations: the significant presence of start-ups even though often in the service of major businesses outside of Rome, the invention of new services by women entrepreneurs, the development of social economy and of short production chains, collective activities to recover abandoned sites and buildings, the explosion of color in the *street art* in the old *borgate* (suburbs), the accommodation of migrants by numerous volunteer organizations, artistic performance in the new language of the young, etc. Among the many expressions of the capital *for-itself* I would like in this university setting to appreciate the flowering of studies of the city which in recent years has reached a fecundity never before seen. It is sufficient to list a bibliography of only books published in the last five years to fill numerous pages.

The authors are for the most part young scholars, some here present, animated certainly by the curiosity of research, but also by the civil passion aimed at doing something for Rome, at least with the intellectual tools available to them. Our universities should valorise these studies, sustain them with an adequate research policy and divulge them for the public at large. The university can do a lot, also because today the problem of the city is not only administra-

tive, it is not only urban planning, it is not only infrastructural, it is also a cognitive problem. To govern an urban system requires ever more the grafting of knowledge in the organization of collective life and at the same time requires social learning of urban know-how.

The present relationship between university and city based exclusively on individual contributions is not sufficient. The individual professor called upon as consultant, as planner and in some cases as council member or president of the municipality. I take this opportunity to give my best wishes to Giovanni Caudo who has just been elected president of the Third Municipality which has already become a laboratory of innovation at the city level.

The university however should be involved in local government systematically, as a development of applied research in the urban sphere, such as innovation of productive, social and administrative forces, as growth of the diffused knowledge of its citizens.

In academic jargon one speaks of third mission, but the expression is often vague. It should, instead, be translated, into an ambitious cultural project of governance of the city in the century to come, a reacquiring in modern key of the Sellian project of the “clash of ideas.”

It would be an astounding fact. A leap forward in the production of knowledge of the city would nourish the already existing innovations and generate new social and economic experiences. The Roman university could become a powerful catalyst of the transition to a capital *for-itself*.