

## **FROM MOORE TO CALVINO. The invisible cities of 20th Century planning**

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### **Abstract**

The contrast between the social and urban *Utopia* of Thomas Moore and the English Society of the sixteenth century can be used as an excuse to reflect on the concept of *Utopia* as an idea that is not possible to concretize when it is proposed but can be feasible some years later.

In the planning of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century New Towns we often find a strong component of *Utopia* due to the inadequacy to the social and/or technical conditions of the moment. The contrast between the ideal plan and the construct results (when there are any) is often strong, allowing us to consider the existing of an *invisible city* that is hidden behind the actual urban spaces; it can be a utopia waiting to be concretized or a dystopia caused by an unforeseen evolution of urban spaces and social dynamics.

In the 1972 work of Calvino, *The Invisible Cities*, we find a poetic discourse about the city that can be interpreted as a critical reflection on the ideas and results of the coeval urban practices.

In this paper, we intent to present an interpretation of some of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century urban ideas based on the reading of the eleven themes of this book. The links that can be established between the various *Invisible Cities* (moving and combining them, like the pieces of a chess game) inspire the formulation of several assumptions that can be related to the images, forms and ideas of some Archetypes and Utopias of 20<sup>th</sup> Century planning: Corbusier's Ville Radieuse, Mies van der Rohe's plan for the IIT in Chicago, Minoru Yamasaki's Pruitt-Igoe housing complex, Robert Venturi's (et al.) studies on Las Vegas and Levittown, the images produced by Archigram and the theoretical work of Jane Jacobs, Aldo Rossi, Kevin Lynch, Rem Koolhaas, François Ascher and Joel Garreau.

**Keywords:** Calvino, Utopia, Invisible, Cities, Urban

## 1. Urban Utopias, from Moore to Calvino.

The word *Utopia* was invented by Thomas Moore,<sup>1</sup> to use in the title of his 1516 book; since then, the contrast between the social and urban ideal presented by Thomas Moore and the English society of the sixteenth century has been responsible for the definition of the concept of Utopia, as an idea that is not possible to concretize when it is proposed but can be feasible some years later (Musil, 2008).

The book *Utopia* presents a conversation between the author and a Portuguese sailor named Raphael Hythloday, an adventurer who traveled around the world. Moore highlights Raphael's description of an island (named *Utopia*) where society is organized and ruled in an equalitarian way, with assumed influence of Plato's writings in *Republic* (Moore, 1516, p. 54);<sup>2</sup> its social organization was clearly utopian (for the political context of sixteenth century) and was correlated to an ideal urban organization:

There are fifty-four cities on the island, all large and well-built (...). The streets are very convenient for all carriage, and are well sheltered from the winds. Their buildings are good, and are so uniform that a whole side of a street looks like one house. The streets are twenty feet broad; there lie gardens behind all their houses (Moore, 1516, p. 63-69).

This fragment<sup>3</sup> of the description of Utopia's cities is sufficient to illustrate Moore's ideas on urban planning: imbued with Renaissance principles and possibly

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<sup>1</sup> The Oxford Dictionaries (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>) presents Utopia as the junction of the Greek expressions *ou* (not) and *topos* (place), but, according to Lewis Mumford (2007), it can also derive from the junction of the Greek expressions *eu* (good) and *topos*. So, it can be either translated as the *non-place* or the *good place*.

<sup>2</sup> The defence of this social Utopia is not completely assumed in Moore's discourse, who finishes the book expressing that he cannot fully agree to everything Raphael Hythloday has reported. However, it is obvious that this careful position is motivated by fear of the repressive regime of the sixteenth century English Society, the same caution that justified the fact that the book was never published in England before Moore's death; nevertheless, he was executed in 1535, by order of king Henry VIII, because he refused to take an oath recognizing the legitimacy of the new royal marriage (ACKROYD, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> For a more comprehensive description see the chapter 'Of their towns, particularly of Amaurot' (Moore, 1515, p. 67-70).

influenced by the writings of Vitruvius and Alberti,<sup>4</sup> he believed in the possibility of an ideal and universal plan, considered as guarantee for the success of an urban space.

We can establish a relation between Moore's *Utopia* and Calvino's approach in *Invisible Cities*, based in the similar number of cities referred by both authors (fifty-four in *Utopia*, fifty-five in Calvino's book), that can hardly be assumed as a coincidence. Furthermore, Calvino's revisits the tales of the Venetian adventurer Marco Polo (1254-1324) with an *utopian* and anachronistic<sup>5</sup> discourse that clearly departs from the original book, *Il Milione*<sup>6</sup>; it is obvious that the voyages of the Venetian are just an excuse to present a poetic discourse about the city, that contains a critical reflection on the ideas and results of the twentieth century urban practices. It is not a description of a utopian perfect society based in a unique urban ideal, it is a dissertation on the complexity of urban realities.

The book consists of fifty-five narratives of different cities, interposed with dialogues between the Venetian merchant and Kublai Khan (Mongolian emperor, grandson of Genghis Khan). The cities are numbered from one to five and grouped in eleven themes: memory, desire, signs, thin, trading, eyes, name, dead, sky, continuous and hidden. They are organized in nine chapters: the first and last contain ten cities and the other seven include five cities each, from five different themes.

This organization seemingly chaotic hides a complex organization (see figure 1);<sup>7</sup> on *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*<sup>8</sup> Calvino emphasizes the relations between

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<sup>4</sup> When writing *Utopia*, Moore could only know the treaties published before 1516, mainly Alberti's *De re aedificatoria libri decem* (Florence, 1485) and the editions of Vitruvius *De architectura libri decem* translated by Giovanni Sulpicio (Rome, 1486) and Fra Giovanni Giocondo da Verona (Venice, 1511); it is not likely that he knew the manuscripts of Antonio Averlino (Filarete), *Trattato di architettura* (1461-64), or Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Architettura civile e militare* (1470-90).

<sup>5</sup> In some of the *Invisible Cities*, Calvino speaks of planes, airports, skyscrapers, refrigerators, radio, light bulbs, underground trains, etc.

<sup>6</sup> *Il Milione*, the book narrated by Marco Polo (1299), was one of most popular works published before the invention of Guttenberg's press.

<sup>7</sup> The table on figure 1 resumes the analysis of the compositional structure of the book *The Invisible Cities* that can be found, with more depth, in *Towards an imaginary cartography* (Silva, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Calvino, 1988) is a posthumous recollection of the unpublished texts from a series of conferences that Calvino had scheduled at the Harvard University, before his death (in 1985).

*The Invisible Cities* and a chess game, recalling one of the dialogues between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan (Calvino, 1988, p. 89).

Order number	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Memory</b>	Diomira I	Isidora I	Zaira I	Zora I	Maurília II
<b>Desire</b>	Doroteia I	Anastásia I	Despina I	Fedora II	Zobaida III
<b>Signs</b>	Tamara I	Zirma I	Zoé II	Hipácia III	Olívia IV
<b>Thin</b>	Isaura I	Zenóbia II	Armillia III	Sofrónia IV	Octávia V
<b>Trading</b>	Eufémia II	Cloé III	Eutrópia IV	Ersília V	Esmeraldina VI
<b>Eyes</b>	Valdrada III	Zemrude IV	Bauci V	Fílias VI	Moriana VII
<b>Name</b>	Aglaura IV	Leandra V	Pirra VI	Clarice VII	Irene VIII
<b>Dead</b>	Melânia V	Adelma VI	Eusápia VII	Árgia VIII	Laudomia IX
<b>Sky</b>	Eudóxia VI	Bersabeia VII	Tecla VIII	Períncia IX	Andria IX
<b>Continuous</b>	Leónia VII	Trude VIII	Procópia IX	Cecília IX	Pentesileia IX
<b>Hidden</b>	Olinda VIII	Raissa IX	Marozia IX	Teodora IX	Berenice IX

**Figure 1.** Associating the cities by theme and order number (1 to 5, on each theme), we notice that the diagonals correspond to the chapters (I to IX) of the book (Silva, 2013).

This idea of a chessboard is present in several parts of *The Invisible Cities* (p. 21, 64, 121-122, 131) and seems essential to decipher the hidden structure of this book: ‘Kublai reflected on the invisible order that sustains cities, (...) he thought he was on the verge of discovering a coherent, harmonious system underlying the infinite deformities and discords, but no model could stand up to the comparison with the game of chess’ (p. 122).

To understand this analogy, we must remember that Calvino has a passion for numerology.<sup>9</sup> A chessboard has sixty-four squares and *Invisible Cities* has seventy-three parts, if we add the fifty-five cities to the eighteen dialogues between Polo and Kublai Khan, present in all the nine chapters (both at the beginning and at the end). However, if we consider that these eighteen dialogues can be grouped in pairs, the total number of parts of the book equals 64. Furthermore, as in a chess board, the pieces are alternately black and white: Calvino combines a discourse on positive factors (values and situations) with its opposite, a difference that may occur in the contrast between the discourse on different cities or in the duplicity and ambiguity presented in each one.

## 2. The Invisible Cities as an urban idea(I).

In *The Invisible Cities* there is a recurrent discourse that relates the narrative of Marco Polo to Venice, his hometown and the starting point of his journey.

Throughout the book, we can find references to the imaginary of this Italian city: Anastasia (*Desire*, 2, p. 12)<sup>10</sup> is 'a city with concentric canals', Esmeralda (*Trading*, 5, p. 88) is a 'city of water' where 'a network of canals and a network of streets span and intersect each other' and in Phyllis (*Fílias, Eyes*, 4, p. 90) 'you rejoice in observing all the bridges over the canals, each different from the others'. In these examples the formal allusions are quite clear, but there are many more where the character, the history and the vitality of Venice comes to mind.

These recurrent references are clearly assumed in the dialogues between Polo and Kublai Khan: "Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice." (...) "To distinguish the other cities' qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice." (p. 86)

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<sup>9</sup> See his discourse on the geometric composition of 'La vie mode d'emploi', from Georges Perec (Calvino, 1988, p. 142-3), which can be important to decode the compositional structure of *The Invisible Cities* (Silva, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> To reference the various quotations from "The Invisible Cities" (Calvino, 1972) we indicated the theme (in this case, 'Desire'), the number of the city and the number of the page of the consulted English translation. When the original name of the cities is altered in the translation, we also present the original name, like in Phyllis (Fílias, Eyes, 4). In the quotation of the dialogues between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, we only specified the page number.

However, this is not true for the whole book: in many of Polo's narratives, the memories of Venice can be implicit,<sup>11</sup> but the city described presents a very different kind of images and/or ideas.

Calvino presents us with a holistic discourse on the coeval urban realities and problems, in the way an author can perceive them in the early seventies of the last century (but with a clear intuition of their future evolution). This is particularly clear in four of the eleven themes of the book: '*Cities and signs*', '*Thin cities*', '*Cities and the sky*' and '*Continuous cities*'.

The five cities of the theme '*signs*' address an important issue of urban space: semiotics. This was a very fashionable subject at the time: the parallel publication (in 1966) of Aldo Rossi's typological approach in *The Architecture of the City* and Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, that presents a clear emphasis on the relationship between language, form and meaning, dominated the architectural/urban theoretical discourse in the end of the sixties,<sup>12</sup> and paved the way for Venturi's later reflection on symbolism in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972).

Published in the same year, '*The Invisible Cities*' presents the same concern with the relation between signs and meaning. In Tamara, the '*eye does not see things but images of things that mean other things*'. If a building '*has no signboard or figure, its very form and the position it occupies in the city's order suffice to indicate its function*' (Signs, 1, p. 13-14). We can find in this description the famous dichotomy 'Duck' / 'Decorated Shed' (Venturi, 1972) but also a classical idea: the order of the city communicates its functional hierarchy.

In Zirna (Signs, 2, p. 19) this discourse on semiotics is reinforced, but now the signs are perceived in the movement and activity of '*streets of shops where tattoos are drawn on sailors' skin*' and in '*underground trains crammed with obese*

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<sup>11</sup> '*Memory's images, once they are fixed in words, are erased (...) Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little.*' (p. 87)

<sup>12</sup> The emergence of this theme on urban studies is often related to Noam Chomsky linguistics studies; to understand the variety of approaches (Quincy, Castells, Bohigas, Rossi, Bachelard, De Fusco, Eco, etc.) that can be find in this field, we suggest '*Teoria das tipologias como estruturas generativas no marco da produção urbana*' (Portas, 1972).

women'. Here, Calvino's speech bifurcates into two complementary conclusions; *'The city is redundant: it repeats itself so that something will stick in the mind'* and *'Memory is redundant: it repeats signs so that the city can begin to exist.'* The association of these two different notions implies that the cognitive perception of the city can result from the redundancies of signals, behaviors and memory.

An opposite view is presented in Zoé (Signs, 3, p. 34), the city where the function does not affect the form and the architectural language: in *'every point of this city you can, in turn, sleep, make tools, cook, accumulate gold, disrobe, reign, sell, question oracles.'* This description brings to mind Charles Jencks' criticism of the uniform language of Mies van der Rohe in the IIT buildings (Chicago, 1962)<sup>13</sup> or the ironic statement on standardization that Jacques Tati presents in the movie *Playtime* (1967), creating a modernized Paris made of 'Miesien' steel and glass buildings. Like Zoé, these are places of *'indivisible existence'* that raise a crucial question: *'why, then, does the city exist?'* (Signs, 3, p. 34).

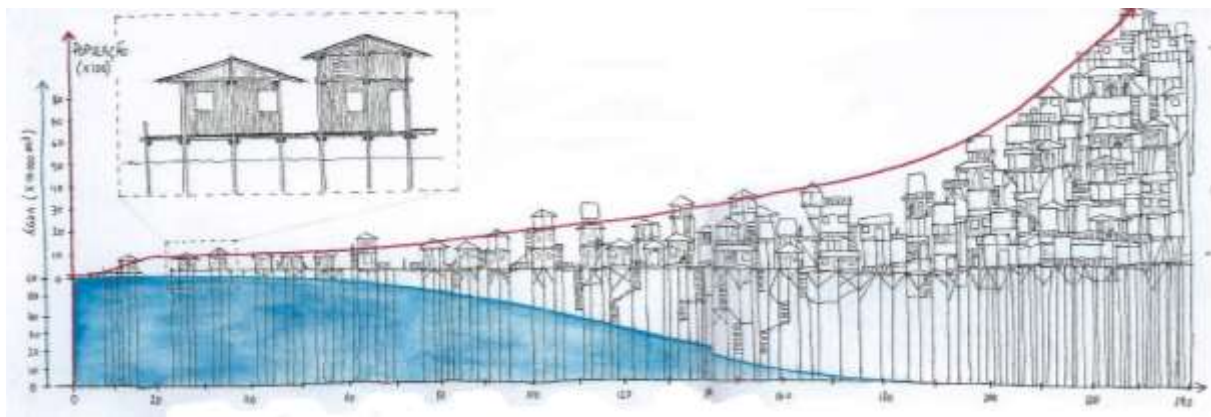
Otherwise, in Hipácia (Signs, 4, p. 48), Polo was confronted with a city where signs form a language, but not the one he knows. Finally, in Olívia (Signs, 5, p. 61), he concludes that *'the city must never be confused with the words that describe it'*. This opposition between the discourse on the city and its physical reality is the theme presented in the five chapters of *Cities and names*; it's a matter of identity, that in Olívia leads us to conclude that lies are not *'in words'*, but *'in things'*. This notion takes us back to Las Vegas, but now to Frampton's (1985, p. 291) review of Venturi's approach: *'the ruthless kitsch of Las Vegas'* is, in fact, *'an exemplary mask for the concealment of the brutality of our own environment'*.

This ambivalent discourse is a recurrent feature that Calvino presents throughout the whole book. In the narratives of the *'thin cities'*, this ambivalence is redirected to the relations between form and function, and the discourse expresses a fascination for the apparent fragility of urban forms that present unusual solutions on structure and/or infrastructure.

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<sup>13</sup> Jencks (1973, p. 95) recalls that the chapel of the IIT had to be identified with a written sign, to distinguished it from the other buildings.

Isaura, 'city of the thousand wells', is described as an agglomeration of moving mechanisms and thin structures: 'the buckets that rise, suspended from a cable, (...) the revolving pulleys (...) the columns of water, the vertical pipes, the plungers, the drains, (...) the weathercocks that surmount the airy scaffoldings of Isaura' (Thin, 1, p. 20). In the description of Zenóbia, city 'that stands on high pilings', we find the same idea of fragility: 'many platforms and balconies placed on stilts at various heights, crossing one another, linked by ladders and hanging sidewalks' (Thin, 2, p. 35). But in this city, like in Baucis (Bauci, Eyes, 3, p. 77), where the 'slender stilts that rise from the ground at a great distance from one another and are lost above the clouds support the city', it is not clear what are the causes of the peculiar form described: 'No one remembers what need or command or desire drove Zenobia's founders to give their city this form'.

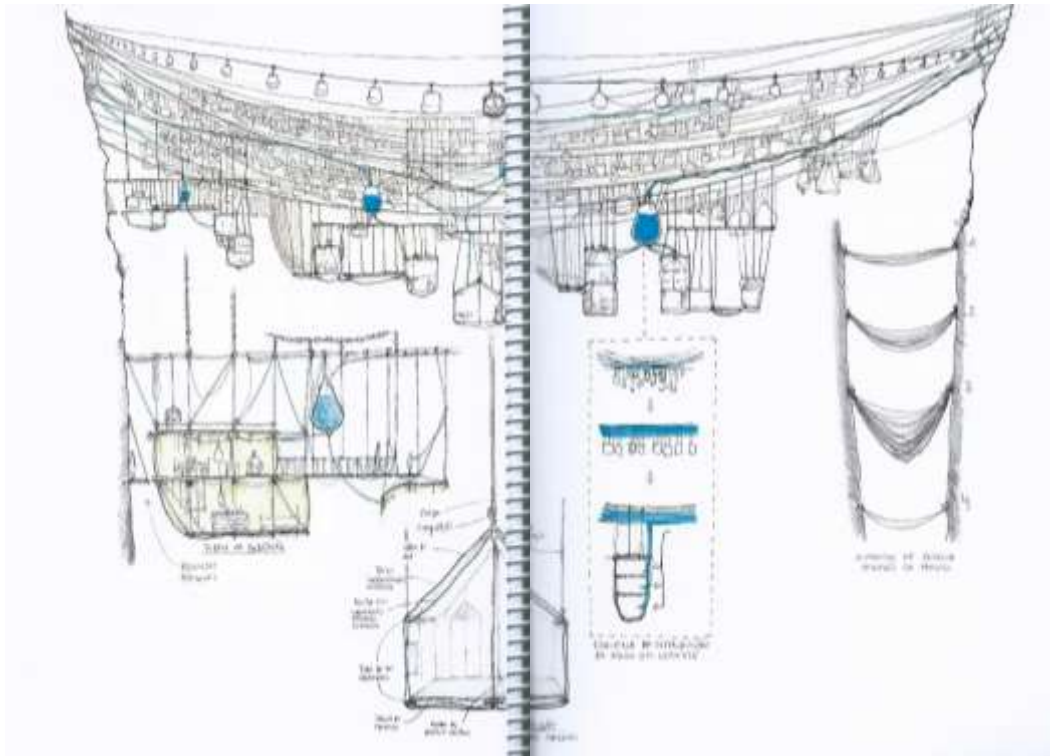


**Figure 2.** Zenóbia, hypothetical illustration of its evolution in time: as the population increases, the water diminishes (Acosta, 2013).

The same can be said about Armilla (Thin, 3, p. 35), mysterious city that 'has no walls, no ceilings, no floors: it has nothing that makes it seem a city, except the water pipes that rise vertically where the houses should'; here, again, nobody knows if it 'is like this because it is unfinished or because it has been demolished, whether the cause is some enchantment or only a whim'. Also in Octavia (Thin, 5, p. 75), 'spider-web city', the reasons behind the form are not presented and the



idea of fragility is dominant in Polo's description: '*Suspended over the abyss (...) the net will last only so long*'.



**Figure 3.** Octavia, hypothetical illustration (Acosta, 2013).

Finally, in Sophronia (Sofrónia, Thin, 4, p. 63), the ambivalence between form and function is tested to its limits. The '*half-city*' made '*of stone and marble and cement*' is temporary: '*when the period of its sojourn is over, they uproot it, dismantle it, (...) transplanting it to the vacant lots of another half-city*'; on the contrary, the '*half-city*' formed by '*the shooting-galleries and the carousels*' is permanent, and its inhabitants wait the return of the other half, so that a '*complete life can begin again*'.

This fascination for the aesthetics of fragility, complexity and motion can be related to images created by 60's utopian visions of the city, which seem

particularly adequate to illustrate '*Thin cities*': the work of the Japanese Metabolists (Kurokawa, Isozaki, Tange, Kikutake, etc.) and, mainly, the designs of the English group Archigram, whose peculiar ludic approach on this aesthetics resulted in unusual relations between the architecture and the city, assuming structure and infrastructure as main characters of the form (Banham, 1978), like in the Fun Palace (Cedric Price), the Walking City (Ron Herron and Brian Harvey) or the Plug-In City (Peter Cook).

In contrast, the discourse presented in *The Cities and the Sky* seems to be an allegory on the impossibility of perfection in urban planning. Eudóxia (Sky, 1, p. 96-7), a city that '*spreads out shapelessly, with crooked streets, houses that crumble one upon the other amid clouds of dust, fires, screams in the darkness*', is '*the true map of the universe*' while its representation (a '*carpet, laid out in symmetrical motives whose patterns are repeated along straight and circular lines*') is just '*an approximate reflection, like every human creation*'. This idea is reinforced in Thekla (Tecla, Sky, 3, p. 127), the city in permanent construction, following a blueprint written in the starry sky, and in Andria (Sky, 5, p. 150), where the inhabitants are '*convinced that every innovation in the city influences the sky's pattern*' and plan the changes to their city calculating '*the risks and advantages for themselves and for the city and for all worlds.*'

The duality between the immobility of the plan (ideal representation restricted by human limitations) and the permanent changes in the organism of the city is reinforced with the example of the perfect plan of Perinthia:

*(...) the astronomers established the place and the day according to the position of the stars; they drew the intersecting lines of the decumanus and the card (...). They divided the map according to the twelve houses of the zodiac (...). Perinthia - they guaranteed - would reflect the harmony of the firmament; nature's reason and the gods' benevolence would shape the inhabitants' destinies. (Períncia, Sky, 4, p. 144)*

However, all this efforts did not avoid the birth of succeeding generations of '*cripples, dwarfs, hunchbacks, obese men, bearded women*' and '*children with three heads or with six legs*'.

The description of Perinthia's fate evokes the results of many urban experiences, where the strong belief in the reliability of the plan was later denied by the evaluation of the results. One well-known example of these failures is the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex in St. Louis, design by the '*distinguished architect Minoru Yamasaki*' and '*subject of a laudatory article in the magazine Architectural Forum*' (Hall, 1988): completed in 1956, it was imploded in 1972 and became a symbol of failure, the failure of Athens Charter's urban ideas in the second half of the twentieth century. This '*rigid process of planned production*' (Tafuri, 1976) often failed to create good urban environments, mainly because social problems are not an architectural issue, they are a planning matter; thus, it is more important to try to understand the real necessities of the people than to draw blueprint that *reflects the harmony of the firmament*.

But if the results of well-intended planning can be negative, what is the consequence of having no plan at all?

In the *Continuous Cities*, Calvino seems to address this question. Leonia (Continuous, 1, p. 114), archetype of the contemporaneous city of the economic globalization, lives divided between '*the enjoyment of new and different things*' and '*the joy of expelling, discarding, cleansing itself of a recurrent impurity*'; because it shares this characteristics with every other city, '*the whole world, beyond Leonia's boundaries, is covered by craters of rubbish, each surrounding a metropolis in constant eruption*'. In Procópia (Continuous, 3, p. 146) we find the same discourse on incontrollable growth, but now directed to the increase of the population: each year, as soon as Marco Polo arrives in the same hotel room, he can count more faces in the landscape he sees through the window, until the day when '*even the sky has disappeared*'.

The other three cities of this theme reflect on the incontrollable and unplanned growth of urban space. Trude (Continuous, 2, p. 128) is a city with no identity, where nothing is new: the '*world is covered by a sole Trude which does not begin*

*and does not end*’; the cities are all the same, *‘only the name of the airport changes’*. In Cecilia (Continuous, 4, p. 152) the growth of the city (*‘Cecilia is everywhere’*) occupies what used to be the meadows where a shepherd used to herd his goats. Finally, Penthesilea (Pentesileia, Continuous, 5, p. 162) is a continuous suburb: we *‘advance for hours and it is not clear to you whether you are already in the city’s midst or still outside it’*; we can’t even understand if *‘there exists a Penthesilea the visitor can recognize and remember, or whether Penthesilea is only the outskirts of itself.’*

Reading *Continuous Cities* is slightly disturbing because we tend to find possible allusions to many contemporary discourses on the city, although knowing that the book was published in the early seventies. His visionary discourse makes us admire Calvino’s capacity of foresight: Leonia is a Metapolis, a product of the third modern urban revolution (Ascher, 1995); Trude is a Generic City (Koolhaas, 1995); Cecilia and Penthesilea can either be related to the American Edge City (Garreau, 1988) or to the diffuse landscape characteristic of the valley of the river Ave, in Portugal (Portas, 1986). In all these spaces, reading Calvino’s meaning between the lines, we find a concept that is related to all the others: Marc Augé’s (1992) *non-place*,<sup>14</sup> a space that cannot be defined in terms of identity, relationships and history. Clearly, this is not what the author considers urbanity; it is the opposite of a city.

Calvino’s urban idea(l) is portrayed in other parts of this book: it is made of many fragments and mingles different topics, sometimes by analogy, sometimes by contrast, sometimes with an ambivalence that expresses opposite views on each subject.

Both in *Cities and Memory* and in *Cities and Names*, Calvino speaks us of identity, nostalgia and illusion: the city *‘does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps’* (Zaira, *Memory*, 3, p. 11); but if we try to preserve it unchanged, and force it *‘to remain motionless (...) in order to be more easily remembered’*, it will be destroyed (Zora, *Memory*, 4, p. 16). Divided between

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<sup>14</sup> Non-place is one of the possible meanings of the word Utopia (see note 1).

nostalgia and the needs of the modern times, we have to remember that *'sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another'* (Maurília, *Memory*, 5, p. 30).

In the *Cities and Desire* the approach is similar, but now Polo's speech wanders on the relation between urban spaces, material possessions and lust:

(...) while the description of Anastasia awakens desires one at a time only to force you to stifle them, (...) one morning your desires waken all at once and surround you (...) you can do nothing but inhabit this desire and be content. (Anastasia, *Desire*, 2, p. 12).

In *Trading Cities*, Calvino's ideal vision of the city is divided between the possibilities of change (opening new opportunities) and the prevalence of the need to socialize. In Euphemia (*Trading*, 1, p. 12) the main subject is human relations and communication (social trading): *"what drives men to travel up rivers and cross deserts to come here is not only the exchange of wares";* at night, *'by the fires all around the market'*, the merchants share (and trade) their tales.

The other side of urban communication is presented in Chloe, a city where *'people who move through the streets are all strangers'*<sup>15</sup> but this unfamiliar condition does not limit the imagination: *'when some people happen to find themselves together (...) meetings, seductions, copulations, orgies are consummated among them without a word exchanged, without a finger touching anything, almost without an eye raised'* (Cloé, *Trading*, 2, p. 51). On the contrary, in Ersilia (*Trading*, 4, p. 76), *'relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency'* are emphasized and symbolized by strings that produce a web, the only thing remaining when the inhabitants leave the city; like Ersilia, Eutropia (*Trading*, 3, p. 64) is recurrently abandoned, so the inhabitants can find a different life, with

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<sup>15</sup> This description resembles Jane Jacobs's definition of a city: "...cities are, by definition, full of strangers. (...) The bedrock attribute of a successful city district is that a person must feel personally safe and secure on the street among all these strangers." (Jacobs, 1961, p.39-40).

*'a new job, a different wife, (...) another landscape (...) different pastimes, friends, gossip'.*

In *Cities and the Dead*, we find a similar discourse on social trading, but now in an approach that considers the passing of time, the cultural inheritance of the urban societies, the presence of the legacy of our antecessors in our present occupations (Eusápia, *Dead*, 3, p. 109), social habits (Melania, *Dead*, 1, p. 80) and even in the physiognomy of the people we see (Adelma, *Dead*, 2, p. 94).

Otherwise, in the *Cities and the Eyes*, Calvino reflects on the different ways we can see the same city, on the cognitive perception of urban space (Lynch, 1960): they can compete with their own reflection, like Venice (Valdrada, *Eyes*, 1, p. 53), depend on the *'mood of the beholder'* (Zemrude, *Eyes*, 4, p. 66) or *'elude the gaze of all, except the man who catches them by surprise'* (Phyllis, *Eyes*, 4, p. 90).

Finally, in the *'Hidden Cities'*, we find a recurrent tale of the birth of a new city within a preexisting one: Olinda (*Hidden*, 1, p. 129) *'grows in concentric circles, like tree trunks which each year add one more ring'*; Raissa (*Hidden*, 2, p. 148) is an *'unhappy city'* that *'contains a happy city unaware of its own existence'*; finally, Berenice (*Hidden*, 5, p. 161) *'is a temporal succession of different cities, alternately just and unjust.'*

*Hidden* can be seen as a synonym of *Invisible*; thus, this last theme is the perfect corollary for the whole book: this idea of permanent renewal, of continual vitality, and the opposition between the need for development and the importance of the past exists in almost every page. It embodies the dilemma of Marco Polo, divided between the memory of Venice and the fascination for all the novelty he finds on his journey. But it is also the problem of the modern planner, throughout the twentieth century: from the modern plans influenced by the Athens Charter to the more recent experiments of rebuilding the city within the city in the *third generation plans* (Secchi, 1985) or in the organization of international events (Expos, Olympics, etc.), architects and urban planners are always facing this opposition.

But what is especially interesting in Calvino's idea(l) of city, what makes his approach a valid contribution to this field, is the importance granted to the ambivalence created by the different human visions, concepts and interactions: identity, nostalgia, seduction, fear, anger, illusion, delusion, envy, greed, lust and pride are vital variables, that can transform an ideal plan (with blueprints that *reflect the harmony of the firmament*) into an urban failure.

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