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City Margins, City Memories: Berlin, Milan, Paris

Re-writing Complexity through Fragments: Mapping Milan in the 21st Century

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This article engages with the powerful nature of individual fragments in challenging the stereotypical images of the city, in particular those images that tie Milan almost exclusively to fashion, design, or events like Expo 2015. Using a series of diverse texts devoted to Milan during the last five years, this article argues that in order to understand Milan in the 21st century one needs to start at grassroots level, by giving voice to its inhabitants, letting them talk about their relationships with various parts of the city, about the changes undergone by certain neighbourhoods and how people adapted to them. Despite an attention to fragments, to the individual life, all the aforementioned publications stress the need to abandon excessively individualistic positions to rediscover a way of connecting, a sense of community, and the importance of promoting tolerance and multiculturalism. In this context, graffiti are particularly important as "writing" engages with the local space of the street but at the same time is a global phenomenon (Brighenti 2010, 317), thus raising interesting questions about identity and place-making in a globalised world. Milan is an ideal case study for this kind of reflection as in the late 1980s and 1990s graffiti were frequently associated with social centres and thus their subversive nature was inevitably emphasised.

KEYWORDS: Milan, Expo 2015, fragments, mapping, graffiti, multiculturalism, marginal.

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As stated in the introduction to this volume, the mainstream imagery of the European city has become progressively oversimplified and condensed into a series of recognizable clichés like those of Paris as the city of lights and love, of Berlin as the city of war and walls, and Milan as the city of food and fashion. Whilst containing an element of truth, such images do not reflect the diverse urban fabric of any city but serve well the Neoliberal economy and the tourist industry. This paper argues that in order to produce a more inclusive, and therefore more complex, image of any city, we need to pay greater attention to those marginal groups whose presence is often visible only in disparate urban fragments. As highlighted below, although this is applicable to most cities, it is particularly true of Milan as fragmentation is the symptom of the city's fraught process of adaptation from leading manufacturing centre and capital of the Economic Miracle (the period of sustained growth that characterised Italy from the mid-1950s until the late 1960s) to service-based metropolis (Cognetti and Cottino 2003; Foot 2015).[1] Whilst in most American and European cities the demise of Fordism led first to an emphasis on culture and leisure (1980s and 1990s), and then on creativity (2000s), Milan somehow avoided the middle phase, preferring to build its reputation on fashion, design, designer lifestyles, and shopping (De Carlo et alt. 2009, 8-9).[2] This is not to say that more traditional forms of culture and cultural activities are not important for the city's identity, but they were excluded from the city's branding,[3] that is the image of itself that the city projects to the outside world. However, such an image is restrictive and unable to reflect Milan's complex urban fabric. It either reduces the city to a "product" - we only need to think of the slogan "Milano da bere" [drinking Milan] that was originally created to advertise the Milanese liqueur Amaro Ramazzotti in 1985, and then became the symbol of the entire city during the 1980s - or to a spectacle, with initiatives like Expo 2015. In order to understand Milan in the 21st century, one needs to start at grassroots level, by giving voice to its inhabitants, letting them talk about their relationships with various parts of the city, about the

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[1] Back in 1991, reflecting on the need to make buildings relevant to the people who use them, the Milanese architects Motta and Pizzigoni urged anybody interested in urban studies to focus on fragments and "recognise in the single fragment the only real possibility of change" (in Foot 2000, 17). This statement seems to emphasise the importance of the human element and the need for architects and city planners to avoid abstraction if we want our cities to be able to inspire a sense of identity and belonging.

[2] The theory of *creative cities* was introduced by Landry and Bianchini (1995) but it was thanks to Florida's controversial notion of "creative class" (2002, 2005) that creativity became a new paradigm for urban and cultural policies (Seldin 2014, 3). As Seldin points out, the "creative class" consists of a variety of different professionals, all gathered under the umbrella of producers of cognitive capital, and represents 'a consolidation of the transition from a society based on the production of consumer goods to the production of specialised services and knowledge' (3).

[3] Interestingly, the notion of branding that had been used to promote consumer goods since the late 19th century began to be applied to cities and tourist destinations in the 1990s (De Carlo *et alt.* 2009, 9) and is a symptom of the neoliberal obsession with commoditisation.

changes undergone by certain neighbourhoods and how people adapted to them. Like in a kaleidoscope, these fragments of individual lives will eventually generate new images and a multi-layered map of the city that is the product of a collective identity.

This article investigates the current drive for alternative ways of mapping the city by focusing on different forms of story-telling, using a wide range of recent texts devoted to Milan as case studies. These include: Luca Doninelli's *Michetta addio* [*Goodbye bread roll*] (2011) in which the mythical Milanese bread roll ("michetta") is used as a springboard for a series of reflections on the disappearance of the working class, the transformation of those working- class districts that for decades had represented the soul of the city, and the rise of multiculturalism; Stefano Rolando's *Citytelling* (2014), a study of the impact of branding on the city's identity; a brief anthology of short stories written by six contemporary writers, including two winners of the prestigious Campiello literary prize, *Milano* (2015). But also a series of interviews, originally published in the Milanese newspaper *Il Giorno* between 2012 and 2014 by Massimo Chiavarone, and then collected in a volume consisting of nine main chapters, corresponding to the nine zones of the city entitled *Com'è bella la città* (2015); and a volume of stories, essays, images, and factual information which is the outcome of the work of a group of researchers for the project *Re/search Milano* (2015). The article will conclude with a section on graffiti as an instrument for the negotiation of local identities and, at the same time, as an agent of cultural globalisation (Chmielewska 2007, 148 and 162) inviting reflections on the nature of mapping and place making in our contemporary world.

Storytelling, or "citytelling", to borrow Rolando's term, is seen as an ideal tool to revisit the past and imagine the future. Despite an attention to the fragment, to the individual life, all the aforementioned publications stress the need to abandon excessively individualistic positions. They represent an invitation to rediscover a we/us, in other words, a way of connecting, of transforming the "city product" into a "city of junctions" (Rolando 2011, 199). As Doninelli explains, storytelling is an important tool for integration because as a primary activity of any society – like eating or working – it enables us to learn from one another (204). The need for alternative ways of mapping our cities is also linked to the impact of the internet and information technologies on urban space and, in particular, on public spaces:

> [...] the virtual space has strengthened collective intelligence, thus multiplying the potential for education, production of culture and the raising of political awareness. To map this multidimensional space of places, people and information is to break away from the abstract representation of territory, embracing personal

narratives into new cartographies. (Grammatikopoulou 2009, 2; see also Anduga, Kanters and Rucker 2009, 3-4)

In this sense, focusing on Milan is particularly interesting as the city's history shows us that what makes a city 'grande' [great, both in terms of dimension and importance] is not traditional politics but the single individual who has the power to decide whether he/she is prepared to transform the place in which he/she lives into a welcoming and inclusive environment, or is happy to inhabit an impersonal and undistinguished place (Doninelli 2015, 14).

Milan: A mother city?

Taking the problem of integration as a concrete example, Doninelli argues that unless we prepare the ground at grassroots level by rediscovering the intrinsic (not just market-oriented) value of work, generosity, and the importance of interpersonal relationships, any official initiative or pilot project is bound to fail. In his opinion, Milan is unique as "the human factor" has always been extremely important and played a vital role in contrasting purely political or economic decisions. The city was built and shaped by its inhabitants (17) and "le opere di carità milanesi" [the city's historical charities] are a prime example of how change can be promoted and implemented even by a single individual (210-11). Reflecting on figures like Don Gnocchi and Marcello Candia,[4] whose legacies are still very much alive today, Doninelli describes their ethos as comparable to that of a mother, and invites the Milanese people to rediscover their maternal spirit (211). Doninelli uses the metaphor of the "città madre" [mother city] to advocate a return to those early Christian values of care and compassion which come together in the image of the Madonna and child, and represent some of the best features of the Western world (217). Interestingly, the Madonna has been a symbol of Milan since 1794 when a golden statue of Our Lady of the Assumption was installed on the highest spire of the city's cathedral. Doninelli maintains that the aforementioned Christian values are essential to combat the culture of fear that is causing many problems in terms of social integration in our cities. Whilst it could be argued that the use of a family metaphor is not unproblematic, given that the Mafia and other criminal organisations in Italy built their strength by exploiting family ties, Doninelli's position is in

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[4] Don Gnocchi (1902-1956) was a Lombard priest who after WWII devoted his life to helping and educating orphans and many other people in need. Marcello Candia (1916-1983), instead, was a lay missionary/ entrepreneur who after twenty-five years of successful business sold his firm and moved to Brazil where he built several hospitals, leprosaria and schools.

line with recent discourses on the importance of the mother and the maternal in order to challenge patriarchal structures and combat the most negative aspects of capitalism and neo-liberalism. The Lacanian psychologist Massimo Recalcati, for instance, in his book *Le mani della madre* [The mother's hands] analysed the role of the mother in the Western world arguing that: 'La sua lezione più profonda è quella di opporre la cura del particolare come resistenza irriducibile al turbine vorticoso che anima l'incuria assoluta del discorso del capitalista' (Recalcati 2015, 17) [her most profound lesson is the emphasis on the particular as a way of contrasting the swirling vortex of indifference generated by the capitalist discourse]. Doninelli is not alone in considering Milan a mother city. De Benedetti's contribution to the anthology *Milano*, portrays a similar picture. Having left the Lombard capital to settle in Palermo, the protagonist of De Benedetti's story suddenly rediscovers her attachment and sense of pride for her city through the memory of ordinary things, like the sycamore tree in via Palestro's garden which, although not particularly attractive, 'ti accoglie sulle radici come una mamma' (170) [welcomes you on its roots like a mum]. Here it is worth noting the use of the more emotionally charged term "mum", instead of mother, that strengthens the maternal image. Similarly, the ballet dancer Luciana Savignano, one of the personalities interviewed by Chiavarone in *Com'è bella la città*, defines Milan as her nest (256). For the Russian (naturalised Italian) author, Nicolai Lilin, Milan played also a maternal role in his life as it provided him with stability and emotional anchorage, thus allowing him to grow, not just professionally but also as a person (318). However, the most direct reference to the "mother city" is to be found in Vladimir Luxuria's description of Milan's central station. The famous transgender actress/ TV presenter/ activist and former politician compared Milan's central station to a mother's womb, always ready to welcome you and shelter you from the stress of travelling (116). What is interesting about Chiavarone's book is that many of his interviewees were not originally from Milan. They moved there during different stages in their lives and various historical periods, and yet they all perceived the city as welcoming.

Engaging with the idea of the motherly city implies focusing on the affective register, which, as argued by Thrift (2008) is often a neglected aspect in the study of cities, despite the fact that 'affect has become part of how cities are understood,' given that cities 'are progressively expected to have a buzz, to be creative, and [...] to exhibit intense expressivity' (172). Once again, Chiavarone's interviewees are outspoken in this respect and their descriptions of the city are always very emotional. The coldness of the climate and greyness

of the buildings are often contrasted with the warmth of the inhabitants (195; 291). Turin-born actress Anna Maria Barbera is overwhelmed with emotion every time she returns to Milan: 'Milano mi arriva sempre ad altezza cuore' [Milan goes always straight to my heart] (138-139). A similar image is also to be found in Carmen Russo's interview. For the famous TV presenter/ actress, in fact, Milan is her 'riserva di affetti' (160) [stockpile of affects]. If by affect we understand the ability to generate strong emotions (whether positive or negative), Milan is definitely a city of affects. The most striking example of its ability to provoke strong feelings in people is that of Chef Matteo Torretta (another of Chiavarone's interviewees) who went as far as having the flag of Milan tattooed on his back, and wears a ring on his right hand consisting of the city's coat of arms on one side, the image of the Cathedral on the other, and below the motto 'ricordati' [remember] as a constant pledge of gratitude to his native city (285-287). Naturally, it would be naive to think that the city elicits only positive emotions. Many of the characters in the collection of short stories *Milan* seem to harbour hostile feelings towards the city. One of the characters in Balzano's 'Primi giorni di scuola' expresses his hatred by saying 'Milano mi fa profondamente schifo' (120) [Milan deeply disgusts me]. Similarly, one of the contributors to the volume *Re/search Milano* uses the expression 'un cesso allucinante' (50) [an awful bog] to describe the failed attempt to regenerate the district of Quarto Oggiaro. But it is precisely statements like these that reveal the political significance of affects, not in a traditional sense, but in challenging 'the kind of macho programme-making [of traditional politics] that emaciates what it is to be human – because it is so sure it already knows what it is or will be' (Thrift 2008, 197). Milan is a good starting point for this kind of approach because, historically, after the decline of the Sforza during the first half of the 16th century, it was no longer a strong centre of political power. According to art historian Philippe Daverio, once the court disappeared, it was replaced by a multitude of courtyards that turned Milan into a distinctively "popular" city (Chiavarone 2015, 58). All our case studies seem to privilege a notion of affect inspired by Spinoza and Deleuze, that is a model whose 'political imperative is to widen the potential number of interactions a leaving thing can enter into' (Thrift 2008, 191). This spirit is captured effectively in Rolando's aforementioned expression "city of junctions", and in the general emphasis on the human element and interpersonal relationships. This is visible, for instance, in Savignano's definition of Milan as a city of people, rather than a conglomerate of streets and buildings (Chiavarone 2015, 258), or in the lesson of the 104-year-old art critic and painter Gillo Dorfles who is not afraid of saying that the most important thing in life is to build relationships with people, to make new contacts and keep them (151). This also

explains why the most popular places in Milan are very ordinary places where people meet and interact. These include the city's markets, the central station, ordinary blocks of flats, like the one where the protagonist of Paolo di Stefano's 'I vecchi sono sempre i peggiori' [Old people are always the worst] (*Milano* 2015, 73-108) lives, or 'bar-tabacchi' (small bars where cigarettes are sold), to mention just a few examples.

Challenging the rhetoric of spectacle

From the point of view of this article, what is most interesting is the shift from the macro to the micro level, from the abstract to the concrete, to everyday life, and the marginal. As Livia Pomodoro, former Presiding Judge of Milan's Law Court, declared, Milan is 'la città delle piccole cose' [the city of little things], a city that reconciles you with everyday life (Chiavarone 2015,167 and 319). All the aforementioned case studies engage with everyday life and the marginal as forms of resistance capable of challenging the rhetoric of spectacle embodied in initiatives like Expo 2015, and of offering a more realistic portrait of the city. Interestingly, four out of six stories in the anthology *Milano* mention Expo 2015 directly, voicing concerns about the impact of the event on local communities, including the widening gap between rich and poor, and exposing problems of corruption during the planning and development phases. One of the characters in Giorgio Fontana's story, for instance, is very critical of the attempt to clean up the city for the world exhibition:

> Sgombrano i centri sociali perché c'è l'Expo e insomma, la città deve apparire pulita. Le famiglie non hanno da mangiare ma tanto c'è l'Expo. I Siriani in Stazione Centrale, i vagabondi per strada, la crisi che ci hanno reso ancora più incazzati ed egoisti invece che solidali, però c'è l'Expo. Chiedono a diciottomila ragazzi di lavorare gratis, come volontari, e intanto pochi privati si arricchiscono. (34)

> [They clear out the community centres/squats because of Expo as, naturally, the city must look clean. Families can't afford to eat but at least Expo is in full swing. The Syrians in the Central Station, the vagrants in the street, and the crisis that made us angrier and more egoistic instead of supportive, but Expo is in full swing. They ask eighteen thousands young people to work for free, as volunteers, and meanwhile a few private individuals get rich]

Similarly, the protagonist of Balzano's 'Primi giorni di scuola' ['First days at school'] questions the sustainability of the project and the wisdom of expropriating the few remaining fields in order to build more glass and steel luxury buildings and five star hotels that will struggle to be occupied once the exhibition is over (135). Janeczek's story, instead, ridicules the idea that Expo, despite the controversies surrounding some fixed public tenders (68), will boost the city's economy, and that of the entire nation, as 'l'Italia deve per forza ripartire da Milano' [Italy's recovery must inevitably start in Milan] (62). Ironic is also the tone of Cataluccio's 'La stazione'. Its protagonist, a well-educated Syrian refugee in his fifties, is amused by the omnipresence of Arcimboldo, the Milanese Mannerist painter famous for his portraits of people made out of fruits and vegetables, in various artefacts and promotional material devoted to the world exhibition on food and nutrition. Neither the homage to Arcimboldo in Dante Ferretti's huge statues aimed at promoting the event, nor in "Foody", the event's mascot and logo, are very convincing in his opinion: 'nella città, capitale mondiale del design, è stato scelto come simbolo un pastrocchio ispirato allo stile di Arcimboldo (di nuovo lui!)' (187) [the city, a world capital of design, selected a mess inspired by Arcimboldo's style (him again!) as its symbol]. The entire project *Re/search Milano* is also conceived as a way of challenging the official image of the city and its territory embodied by Expo 2015, as the authors explain in the introduction to the volume (7). The impact of the world exhibition on the city is compared to that of acid on an open wound. Such devastation can only be stopped through a counter narrative inspired by underground culture and capable of revealing a totally different reality from that of official discourses (7). Even the least critical of our case studies, *Citytelling* by Stefano Rolando, is not entirely optimistic about the power of Expo to regenerate the city and its image. The industrialist Piero Bassetti (interviewed by Rolando), for instance, believes that for Expo 2015 to be entirely successful it would have to distance itself from previous world exhibitions by promoting a glocal, rather than local or national, culture as we live in a globalised world where insisting either on national or local images can only lead to stagnation. What would make sense, instead, particularly given the ambitious theme of the exhibition – 'Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life' – is to show the significance of local contributions in solving a global problem (136-37).

Expo 2015 is just one example of a much wider phenomenon. According to some of Chiavarone's interviewees, the cult of spectacle is visible everywhere, particularly in the city centre, now a symbol of ostentation (280), where one encounters a proliferation of 'interventi

di facciata' [facade interventions], like the restoration of streets and road signs, aimed at presenting an immaculate image of the city to visitors, whilst more peripheral areas are totally neglected (89). Overall, however, Milan resists the logic of spectacularisation thanks to its lack of an obvious beauty as our case studies demonstrate. The protagonist of Fontana's 'Salvi quasi per caso', for instance, in contrast to one of his friends who loathes the city, is very attached to Milan but likes what nobody else does, its sullen side, its lack of beauty: 'A Milano non c'era alcuna indulgenza allo splendore: tutto era lotta, tutto era conflitto'[Milan did not indulge in splendour: everything was a fight, a conflict] (*Milano* 2015, 19-20). When confronted with ugliness, dirt and decay in the area of the old Bullona railway station, the protagonist of Balzano's story, instead, resorts to irony, suggesting that ugliness has an educational value (121). Lucia Fontana, one of the contributors to the volume *Re/search Milano*, takes this idea a step further in her article 'La bruttezza felice' [happy ugliness] in which she argues that Milan's greatest fortune is its lack of beauty:

> Piatta, senza mare e fiumi, nessun quartiere storico lasciato integro dai bombardamenti della seconda guerra mondiale (oltre il 40% dei palazzi fu distrutto). Irriducibile al pittoresco, al turismo bieco, non correrà ma il rischio di diventare una Disneyland come Venezia o Firenze. (19)

> [Flat, no sea or rivers, no historic district survived intact the WWII bombings (over 40% of its buildings were destroyed). It cannot be reduced to something picturesque, to a grim tourist destination; it will never run the risk of becoming a Disneyland like Venice or Florence.]

In other words, "ugliness" protects the city from that rhetoric of spectacle that is depriving so many historic centres of their authenticity, as all over the world cultural heritage is used as a tool of gentrification 'and, ultimately, of sterilization and depoliticisation of the physical and social space of the city' (Athanasiou 2014, 2; Catapoti 2013, 270).

Embracing the marginal

Instead of trying to compress the city's urban reality into some kind of glamorous image, our case studies embrace the city's fragmentation, its complex social reality and cultural diversity, and adopt what could be called a kaleidoscopic approach. This means accepting that any fragment can be a resource and that the city's image/map and identity are always in flux, like in a kaleidoscope where the patterns produced by the fragments inside the optical

device through their reflection and movement are never the same. The "michetta" of Doninelli's book, that is the simple bread roll symbol of Milan's working class traditions, is a prime example of this. As the author explains, contrary to his expectations, the 'michetta' retains its popularity in terms of quantity produced but it has become less visible as it is mainly destined to hospitals and care institutions (217-18). Its metaphorical value is not lost, but transformed: it could be argued that it is now the symbol of Milan's motherly qualities. In terms of promoting a kaleidoscopic approach, the collection of short stories *Milano* is particularly interesting as all six stories engage with ordinary people, their problems, hopes and fears for the future. In doing so, they also challenge some common prejudices and stereotypes about work, migration and other social issues, forcing the reader to confront all aspects of urban living. Many of their characters battle with loneliness, unemployment or job insecurity, drug or alcohol abuse, racism, and marginalisation. Through the story of Boris Mladic, a hydraulic engineer from Serbia who settled in Milan in 1984, for instance, Di Stefano's 'I vecchi sono sempre i peggiori' ['Old people are always the worse'] offers a condensed account of the changes undergone by the city in the last thirty years from the point of view of a migrant. The block of flats in which Boris lives can be seen as a cross section of contemporary society. Its corrupt administrators are a symbol of the wider corruption that characterised Milan in the 1980s and 1990s. The tensions amongst the various inhabitants appear to be caused by problems of miscommunication and cultural anxieties, with the few remaining truly Milanese families (the Rossi and the Brambilla) using dialect as a marker of their identity, and as a way of testing people's sense of community and rights of belonging. Through language, the story problematises the very notion of identity as Boris's understanding of the local dialect is highly sophisticated and during the condominium meetings not only does he fully understand the insults that some of the inhabitants openly use against him, but he would also be able to reply in the same tone: '*Bestia, lögia, va' a dar via el cüüüüüüüüüüü*, lo vede come pronuncio bene le *ööööö* e le *üüüüüü* che neanche un milanese doc, modestamente, se ce n'è ancora in giro. Ah ah, meglio riderci su, gentile dottore....' (92) [*Bestia, lögia, va' a dar via el cüüüüüüüüüüü (Idiot, Whore, Fuck off)*, see how well I pronounce *ööööö* and *üüüüüü*, better than someone originally from Milan, if there are any left. Ah ah, better laugh about it, dear Sir.....]. The story also problematises issues of power as Boris is capable of mimicking the legal/bureaucratic language of the police to whom he is releasing a statement (75). The whole story, in fact, is Boris's digressive answer to one of the Chief Inspector's questions after having been arrested following an incident in the place where he lived. Tired of enduring abuses and discrimination, the former engineer had devised

a rather crazy plan that involved hanging himself and, in doing so, triggering a series of gas explosions to blow up the entire establishment, including his allegedly racist neighbours. It is not clear whether the plan failed or Boris changed his mind. However, it is precisely this tension between Boris's unreliability as a narrator and yet his ability to construct a plausible story that forces the reader to question the nature of facts and mechanisms of power. The act of "mimicking" also raises interesting questions about integration. As the aforementioned passage demonstrates, Boris is more Milanese that most people born and bred in Milan. Despite criticising racism, he resents the arrival of other migrants and his attitude towards the past is often nostalgic. He believes that Milan in the 1980s was a safer place where one could work in peace and move freely through the city 'senza paura di extracomunitari violenti, neri e gialli, e di essere assaliti da pazzi assassini con la mannaia, accoltellatori boia squartatori sotto nella metropolitana [...]' (78) [without the fear of violent non-EU migrants, black and yellow, of being attacked with an axe by crazy assassins, stabbers rippers executioners down in the underground (...)]. By mimicking the very discourse he wants to criticise he reveals the complex nature of identity and it is through the notion of entanglement that the text challenges our assumptions about race and ethnicity because, as Drabinski (2011) suggests, 'to see identity as entanglement we [...] have to give up the fantasy of Europe bound only to itself' (8).

The notion of entanglement is also intrinsic to the project *Re/search Mialno*. It is visible in the structure of the book which, as the authors explain, consists of a series of reflections inspired by a particular place, memory, or similarities, and arranged according to four principles: *schede descrittive* [factsheets] providing information about fringe cultural events, local craft, and independent shops; *sguardi d'autore* [authorial glances], short tales written by contemporary Milanese writers; *percorsi* [pathways], walking tours written by experts in a certain field during which the author expresses his/her views on a specific aspect of urban life, and *metix* [crossbreed], oral tales of young first or second generation migrants who identify with the Milanese underground culture. This category is particularly important because it acknowledges the fact that one quarter of the city's population is originally from other parts of the world. The use of the neologism *metix*, instead of "meticcio" or "metissaggio", is rather interesting too. Apart from expressing the idea of crossbreed, it seems to be derived from the term *matrix*, as if to stress, as Andrea Staid points out, that:

> Siamo tutti meticci! Siamo tutti migranti e la purezza identitaria è un mito
> costruito per separarci e dominarci. Ognuno di noi è migrante non solo dal punto

di vista etnico ma anche nel suo microcosmo di relazioni, accolto e invitato ad accogliere proprio in nome di una coabitzione che il mondo di oggi rende imprescindibile. (12)

[We are all crossbreeds! We are all migrants and purity of identity is a myth that was constructed to divide and conquer us. Every one of us is a migrant, not just in the ethnic sense but in our microcosm of relations, welcomed and ready to welcome in the name of a cohabitation that in today's world is essential and unavoidable.][5]

In other words, this story encourages us to see *metix* as a resource, rather than a limit, but in the 21st century, as Staid points out, to create a truly multicultural society we must respect diversity by granting equal rights to all cultures (*Re/search Milano* 2015, 13). However, as Cantaluccio's story 'La stazione' in *Milano* demonstrates, if we are to realise Staid's dream we must educate people as ignorance and lack of awareness are the main cause of hostility towards migrants and all those who live on the margin of society. Through the story of Daniel Fajnachen, a half Jewish Syrian refugee, Cantaluccio invites his readers to reflect on the meaning of democracy, justice and abuse of power, migration, tolerance and multiculturalism, whilst challenging the widespread prejudice that all migrants are uneducated and destitute (181). Daniel represents the embodiment of métis. His Jewish father moved from Poland to Syria after WWI where he married a young Armenian woman and struggled to adapt to life in a Muslim country, particularly as his name immediately identified him as an outsider. After secondary school, Daniel went to Italy to study architecture but then returned to Aleppo where he married a Muslim doctor whose parents had supported Hafiz al-Assad, the dictator who de-radicalised the country (not through peaceful methods but by persecuting fundamentalists). After Assad's death, unfortunately, the situation deteriorated and, as history teaches us, fundamentalist groups started to terrorise the country. As a result, Daniel and his family were forced to flee Syria. On their way to Egypt, they lost everything, so, when they finally made it to Morocco, they could only afford to board an old boat that would take them to Sicily. Daniel's wife and child died during the horrific journey, 'pestati e

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[5] The term *metix* also reminds us of the Greek goddess Métis, first wife of Zeus, mother of Athena, and personification of wisdom and cunning. Despite being a minor figure, as no cult developed in her honour, her importance should not be underestimated. According to the myth, in fact, Zeus swallowed her, for fear of losing his supremacy after a prophet informed him that one of Métis's children would overpower him. Through swallowing, however, a process of incorporation occurred. As a result of the intake, Zeus took on 'the cunning and resourcefulness characteristic of Métis' (Hawhee 2004, 49) and was able to retain his position of ultimate ruler of Olympus.

soffocati nella stiva' [crushed and suffocated in the hold] (178). Only Daniel and his cat Simeone survived, rescued by the Italian authorities of Operation Mare Nostrum (178). By the time we are introduced to Daniel in Milan, he is heart-broken and physically unwell but has not lost his sense of humour, passion for architecture and pedagogical spirit. The encounter with the three young waitresses in one of the umpteen sandwich shops in the station's shopping centre is particularly interesting in this sense. Having entered the shop in a position of inferiority, with enough money to pay for only one sandwich, the one with the largest amount of filling so that he could also feed his cat (184), Daniel unexpectedly finds himself in the superior position of educator. Sadly, the three friendly Italian waitresses/students had never heard of Aleppo, were barely aware of the problems in Syria and of the migrant crisis, and failed to recognise Daniel's cultural reference to Dante and the Divine Comedy when talking about his city. As a reward, Daniel was given two free sandwiches and was asked to pose for a selfie with the three of them, thus becoming 'il primo profugo siriano finito su Facebook' (185) [the first Syrian refugee to end up on Facebook]. This episode offers the narrator the opportunity to expose the excessively abstract nature of degree programmes and the failure of the educational system to tackle ignorance. After this rather amusing encounter, Daniel is picked up by two friendly police officers on board of a strange open vehicle with a flashing light and taken to the station, the very station where the homeless Giuseppe Turrisi was killed in 2008 (186). The image of Turrisi's brutal murder reminds Daniel of another more recent case of gratuitous violence by the police, the death of Michele Ferulli in 2011. Ferulli suffered a fatal heart attack after having being beaten by the police but according to the official records he died as a result of 'una tempesta emotiva' [emotional storm] (187). The absurdity of the expression "emotional storm," inevitably evokes another mysterious death in a police station, that of Giuseppe Pinelli, the anarchist arrested after the Piazza Fontana bomb explosion in Milan in 1969, and the implausible accounts of his alleged suicide concocted by the police to cover up the truth. These brief references to historical figures allow Cantaluccio to add urgency to the political reflections he wants to stimulate by making them more concrete and by increasing their potential emotional impact and educational value. The story's overarching message is also expressed through a historical character, Giovanni Michelucci, the architect famous for having designed Florence's main station, whom Daniel had met as a student. Unlike many architects who have no dreams or visions, Michelucci, like Staid in *Re/search Milano*, believed in the importance of creating multicultural environments:

> La sfida che propongo alla città attuale è la sfida di saper accogliere al suo interno i diversi di ogni tipo, non per dovere di ospitalità, ma come speranza progettuale. Il modello di una società civile che accetta dentro di sé il diverso, come ipotesi possibile di cambiamento, rappresenta di fatto una cultura superiore. (183)

> [The challenge I envisage for contemporary cities is that of welcoming all kinds of different people, not out of sense of hospitality, but as an ambition for the future. The model of a civil society capable of embracing the other as a possible hypothesis of change represents by definition a superior culture.]

Through Michelucci, Cantaluccio presents the true essence of the mother city in terms of *métis*, and as an ideal to which we should aspire. Such a model implies accepting that a map can never be complete as margins, like identity, are not fixed but are constantly being negotiated. If until now we have mainly focused on storytelling as an important vehicle for contrasting the official rhetoric of branding through the production of affective maps of the city, we must now turn to graffiti as a more physical form of mapping that encourages the re-appropriation of public spaces.

"Writing" the city

The potential of "writers" as alternative urban geographers (Iveson 2010, 26) and of graffiti as a vital site for local identity (Chmielewska 2007, 148) are now widely acknowledged. However, due to their omnipresence and, to a certain extent, similarity, graffiti have also become 'a powerful figure of mainstream visual language' and can be seen as an agent of cultural globalization (Chmielewska 2007, 148 and 162), thus raising interesting questions about identity and place-making in a globalised world. Milan is an ideal case study for this kind of reflection as in the late 1980s and 1990s graffiti were frequently associated with *centri sociali* [community centres/urban squats] and thus their subversive nature was inevitably emphasised, even though not all writers identified with *centri sociali* and many were reluctant to paint openly political subjects, particularly when working on commission (Brighenti 2010, 318). Graffiti began to appear in Milan in the mid 1980s when a group of no more than twenty adolescents adhered to a cultural and artistic movement from New York and as such differed radically in terms of values and interests from most adolescents who preferred to identify with other kinds of subcultures like that of the *paninari*, also born in Milan in those years and characterised by an obsession with fashion and designer clothes (http://www.rendo.it/graffiti/). However, according to Milanese writer Vandalo, one

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cannot speak of a proper graffiti culture until the 1990s when writers began to spray underground trains, and several halls of fame appeared throughout the city, often as a sign of an increasing rivalry among various crews (Aa Vv 2015, 159-170). With the new millennium the writing scene changes again as street art becomes more institutionalized, with many of the historic writers reducing their activities, preferring to test their skills on canvas and exhibit their works in art galleries (169). It could be argued that the scene becomes more paradoxical. On the one hand, the 21st century is characterised by bombing, that is the need to hit anything and anywhere, privileging quantity over quality, often motivated by the mere desire for a thrill (Brighenti 2010, 320). In this sense graffiti becomes a reactive form of expression, the symptom of the crisis of values caused by neoliberalism. On the other, we see also a return to a more political use of graffiti as a form of active resistance. One of the most significant examples in this context is the birth of the first Milanese open crew with the symbolic name of *Volks Writerz*[6] (people's writers) who claim that their presence on walls is 'un modo per difendere tutto il nostro immaginario di valori e di lotte e resistere ai cambiamenti radicali della città.' [a way to defend our imagery, values and struggles, and to resist the city's radical changes] (http://www.yury.it/volkswriterz-milano-graffiti-crew/). Like the people involved in the project *Re/search Milano*, they want to move away from excessively individualistic positions in order to promote a collective identity that manifests itself through their works. Their pieces are particularly interesting in terms of a volume on city memories and city margins as they are often inspired by the need to remember victims of violence and injustice as a way of educating people and promoting tolerance and multiculturalism. As stated by Flood (one of the members of *Volks Writierz*), they believe in the power of their work: 'non è certo la rivoluzione, ma è qualcosa che spesso ha saputo parlare alla gente più di quattro slogan lanciati dal furgone o di un volantino' [it is certainly not the revolution, but something that has always succeeded in reaching people, more than a few slogans shouted from a van or a flier].

[Figure 1] and [Figure 2]

Writing can be considered an example of *métis* as, by nature, it is a hybrid and intercultural phenomenon, and this is why, according to Flood, it developed all over the world (http://www.wildstylers.com/writing-with-social-awareness-intervista-con-flood/).   Volks Writerz are strongly opposed to the commercialization of street art as this limits the search

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[6] For examples of their works, see: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100011632443788&fref=ts

for new forms of expression to be tested in the street where anyone can enjoy them. The power of graffiti lies in the fact that it is an illegal activity, that it represents a re-appropriation of urban spaces and, as such, is a political act, not in an ideological sense but as a form of resistance and as a way of fighting conformism. Although less militant, another interesting case in the contemporary Milanese scene is that of La Pupazza.[7] Originally from Puglia, Eleonora di Giuseppe (her real name) decided to explore the world through the walls of Milan, Amsterdam, Berlin, London and Sydney. She does not consider herself a writer, despite the fact the she is an aerosol artist who works both on metal and walls. She dismisses any connection with street art since she never joined a crew and, despite painting illegally on public walls, she is not afraid to be seen when working. She frequently paints junction boxes.

FIGURE 3

Her signature is a very large black and white eye with very long eyelashes and her style is very colourful and playful. She often transforms ordinary objects (including food items) into human faces. In an interview with Gianni Santucci (2015) of *Corriere della sera* she declared that her work is not "dirt" but a way of embellishing the city. The sharp contrast between her bright images and the dreariness of the surrounding areas draws attention to the state of neglect of some parts of the city. Since the wall 'is an object that constitutively calls into play the interweaving of space and social relations' (Brighenti 2010, 323), even her seemingly non political works acquire a strong political value.

FIGURE 4

To conclude, what the aforementioned case studies have revealed is that mapping through fragments can foster a process of democratization of space by giving a voice and visibility to those traditionally neglected by the city authorities and official discourses. It also means to accept that a map can never be complete as margins are not fixed but are constantly being negotiated.

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[7] For examples of her works, see: https://www.facebook.com/La-Pupazza-447057870726/?fref=ts

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FIGURE 1: Volks Writerz: Milan, via Larga (photographed by Laura Rorato)

FIGURE 2: Volks Writerz: Milan, Via Bergamini (photographed by Laura Rorato)

FIGURE 3 La Pupazza: Milan, Bovisa (photographed by Laura Rorato)

FIGURE 4 La Pupazza: Milan, Affori (photographed by Laura Rorato)