

# MELBOURNE VERSUS SYDNEY: SEMIOTIC REFLECTIONS ON FIRST AND SECOND CITIES

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*Abstract:* Urban marketing has recently been adopting the concept, and the label, of “second city”. However, this concept requires sharper theoretical definition in order to turn heuristic. Thus far, it has been conceived in relation to an “ideology of ranking”, strictly related to the worldview of post-modern globalization. A more fruitful definition of “second cities” results from Charles S. Peirce’s idea of secondness: a city is second to another not in quantitative, but in qualitative and relational terms. The semiotic model of Jurij M. Lotman offers a suitable methodology to analyse this relational definition, as it is exemplified by the case-study of the rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney. A historical survey of their relation shows that the latter progressively embraced an identity of “secondness” so as to successfully market an alternative vision of urban life. Melbourne therefore provides a model for non-quantitative construction of urban distinctiveness.

*Keywords:* second city, city ranking, C.S.S. Peirce’s secondness, Jurij M. Lotman’s semiotics, Melbourne *vs.* Sydney rivalry.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ‘SECOND CITIES’?

What is a ‘second city’? In Wikipedia, second cities are defined as follows: “The second city of a country is the city which is second, usually after the capital city, in geographical size, population, cultural significance, economic or political importance. Which of these criteria are used is subject to debate and varies between countries and there is never any official recognition of such status”. The Wikipedia article ‘List of second cities’ is currently being considered for deletion in accordance with Wikipedia’s deletion policy. The definition above is problematic under several aspects. First of all, it is not clear why cities should be ranked first, second, or third with reference to a country, that is, a national state. Given the complexity of the supranational economic, political, and socio-cultural networks that define the identity of a city in the era of globalization, determining its rank within the framework

of a national state might seem, at least, reductive (Huysen; Sassen; P. Taylor). For instance, the identity of an Italian city like Milan arguably stems less from its relation to, and comparison with, other Italian cities like Rome, than with non-Italian cities with which Milan competes globally from the economic, political, and socio-cultural points of view (Bonomi; Foot; Rampini). When formulating policies for the management of the airline hub of Milan Malpensa, local CEOs must worry not only, and maybe not predominantly, about its rivalry with Rome Fiumicino but also about its competition with Flughafen Frankfurt am Main (Piccoli).

A corollary of this first problematic aspect is that the definition of second cities with reference to capital cities admits so many exceptions that such reference is better dropped from the definition altogether, especially as regards federal states such as Australia, Brazil, Switzerland, the USA, etc. Canberra, Brasilia, Bern, Washington, etc. are all federal capital cities but can hardly be defined as ‘first cities’. In some circumstances, even their definition as political capital (and, therefore, ‘first’) cities would be naïve, for it would neglect how many important political decisions are actually taken in Sydney, São Paulo, Zurich, New York, etc. (Slack and Chattopadhyay).

The second problematic aspect of the definition above is that it offers a list of criteria: “geographical size, population, cultural significance, economic or political importance”, indicating diplomatically that their application varies between countries (another reference to national states!). The problem does not consist in the specific listed criteria but in their being listed separately, as if second cities could be determined according to geographical size in France, population in the USA, cultural significance in Italy, economic relevance in Australia, political importance in Israel, and so on and so forth. Such separation misses a fundamental point: if such a thing as a second city exists, or rather, if it is useful to speak of certain cities as ‘second cities’, then their identity will more likely stem not from one of the criteria listed above, but from a holistic conglomeration of them all.

Put bluntly, the main issue about the concept of ‘second city’ is to understand whether it can be heuristic from the scholarly point of view, meaning that it can lead to a better comprehension of certain urban phenomena, or it is just a

trendy advertisement formula to promote emerging cities around the world. Comprehensibly, several cities that cannot possibly win the gold medal (no city in the UK will soon strip London of its primacy as the economic, political, and socio-cultural first city of the British state) are now competing for the silver one (Manchester and Birmingham, for instance). It is not just a matter of urban pride; being labelled as 'second city' might attract material and symbolical capitals that are not 'captured' by first cities.

However, the question from a scholarly point of view is another: do urban studies actually need a reflection on the concept of second cities? The answer is certainly affirmative if the heuristic character of studies on second cities is defined in the same way as that of studies on B movies in film scholarship. Reviewing the bibliography of urban studies from its inception on, it is evident that major cities around the world (can we call them 'first cities'?) have usually attracted the attention of researchers more than secondary urban centres have (Leone 2009c). Such unbalance can be easily accounted for in the terms of the sociology of scholarship: predominant urban centres attract not only material but also symbolical capitals, including the meta-discourse of urban studies scholars (Andersson 2010).

And yet, as the history of cinema would be incomplete if built on the analysis of masterpieces only, so would urban studies be partial if founded exclusively on the study of major cities. This is the main contribution studies on second cities can give to present-day urban studies: they suggest angles, methods, and objects of reflection that have not emerged in the literature on first cities. Nonetheless, it is exactly because studies on second cities might play an important heuristic role that second cities must be defined more rigorously than they have been thus far.

For instance, if Chicago was defined as the third American city simply because of its geographical size or population, then one of the most important trends in urban studies, the so called 'Chicago school', should be considered a result of the attention given not only to a second but even to a third city (Guth). The idea that urban studies should be saved from an excess of concentration on first cities would sound simply ridiculous. On the contrary, if second cities are defined in a

more subtle and complex way, then Chicago could be considered, at least in some phases of its history, not only as ‘the second city’ (as it is often nicknamed) but even as the first city of the USA from certain points of view, for instance, that of the rate in the accumulation of capitals (Madigan).

### WHY DO WE RANK CITIES?

Any attempt at developing a new trend of scholarship on second cities must be preceded by reflection on two questions: ‘how do we rank cities?’, and, more generally, ‘why do we rank them?’

The latter can be answered only in the frame of a cultural history and semiotics of ranking. How did the practice of ranking change with the advent of modernity? Is ranking actually a consubstantial element of modernity? When did individuals and social groups start ranking cities? Furthermore, what is the cultural meaning of ranking, and what connotations does ranking add to the identity of a city?

The literature on ranking is still scarce and not as interdisciplinary as it should be (Leone 2012). As regards cities specifically, it might be argued that the obsession for ranking them is a consequence of the new role cities play in modernity. Modernity is an ambiguous concept variously defined by an extremely abundant scholarship. However, what matters here in the relation between modernity, cities, and ranking is that the advent of modernity can be seen also as coinciding with an increasing expansion of the domain of choice. Whereas in pre-modern societies and cultures, most aspects of human life, from dressing codes to marital relations, were regulated by tradition, in modern societies and cultures, freedom of choice concerns a growing amount of existential aspects, from the choice of one’s partner to that of one’s religion (Elliott and Urry; Leone 2009b; C. Taylor).

It could be argued that the advent of modernity also entailed the perception of cities as a matter of free choice. The present-day ‘Western’ mentality is so accustomed to the idea that individuals can more or less freely choose the city where they study, work, establish a family, spend leisure time, or even die, that it is hard to imagine the way in which a city

might be conceived in the pre-modern era. At the time, it was not a matter of choice, but a heritage: something that deeply defined the identity of individuals from birth to death. To a certain extent, modernity has reversed the semantic relation between individuals and cities. Most individuals in present-day 'Western' societies and cultures like to believe that they are not bound to the city where they were born, but that they can freely choose the city that suits different phases of their lives and identities (Leone 2011).

That this belief might be delusional, skilfully nurtured by an ideology that identifies identity with choice and, therefore, consumption, is not relevant here. What matters is that the modern conception of cities as elements in the free construction of personal identities opened a space for a more articulated comparative discourse about cities. Since cities must not simply be inherited, but can also be chosen, they can and must be compared. In other words, freedom (or the illusion of freedom) has brought about a space for uncertainty, and uncertainty has brought about a space for persuasion.

Since the 'sacred bound' between individuals and their birthplace was broken by modernity, urban communities have increasingly realized that they could shape themselves also by attracting or repelling material and symbolical capitals through the construction of a persuasive discourse that, when it works, is like a self-fulfilling prophecy: an urban community that thinks of itself as 'trendy' will attract 'trendy' people by building a 'trendy' image of itself. Or, conversely, an urban community that thinks of itself as 'inhospitable to cultural diversity' will repel migrants by constructing an 'inhospitable' image of itself (Denis and Fainstein; Minca; Sánchez).

Conceiving the city as a matter of choice has resulted in the need and practice of urban marketing, but also vice versa: the symbolical discourse of urban marketing feeds the modern attitude toward cities, their being thought of as elements for the construction of personal identities.

Given this framework, ranking can be considered as a device of the symbolical discourse of persuasion that urban marketing displays in order to orient the global fluxes of symbolical and material resources toward cities. It is a particularly simple and, as a consequence, effective persuasive device. The main pragmatic principle behind ranking is to translate the

qualitative comparative discourse on cities into a quantitative one. Whereas the former is complicated and might not give rise to sharp decisional grids, ranking translates, or pretends to translate, the complexity of the qualitative comparative discourse into the simplicity of numbers. From this point of view, ranking works analogously as prices do: they simplify the qualitative comparison of options and the resulting choice by translating it into an easily readable numeric form.

The numerous, mostly international, agencies that through different methods produce rankings on the quality of life in world cities do nothing but translate into numbers a complex comparative qualitative discourse on urban communities, a discourse that is surely also based on quantitative data. Needless to say, only from a naïve point of view can these agencies be considered as *super partes* and immune from economic, political, and socio-cultural ‘urban lobbies’: huge interests of all sorts can be affected by the persuasive power of ranking, so that it is quite understandable that urban communities and their agencies go through considerable efforts in order to influence them.

The answer to the question ‘why do we rank cities?’ is important in order to understand that no matter how scholars decide to answer the parallel question ‘how do we rank cities?’, their answer will contribute to the intellectual legitimacy of ranking as a persuasive device of urban marketing. Whether geographical size, population, cultural significance, economic or political importance, or whatever combination of these criteria is adopted as a parameter to determine first, second, and third cities, such adoption will inevitably result into an intellectual legitimization of the symbolical discourse that ranks cities in order to regulate the circulation of symbolical and material resources in the globalized world.

Such awareness might lead to the possibility to not play this game; to reject the idea of first and second cities and the significance of ranking from an intellectual point of view; to venture that different parameters might give rise to completely different rankings, and that the truly fundamental parameters cannot be easily quantified and translated into ranking numbers.

However, there is a way to interpret the concept of ‘second cities’ that escapes the persuasive logic of urban marketing and its quantification of values. The third section of this

paper will propose a qualitative understanding of the notion of ‘second cities’ based on the semiotic philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce.

### A SEMIOTIC DEFINITION OF ‘SECOND CITY’

The concept of ‘secondness’ plays a fundamental role in Peirce’s semiotic epistemology. Although Peirce did not elaborate this concept for application to social sciences or urban studies, its formulation can offer a new theoretical framework to conceive the idea of ‘second city’ not quantitatively but qualitatively, not as an objective property that can be measured and ranked, but as an inter-subjective quality that can be relationally construed.

In his multifarious philosophical writings, Peirce dwelled on the concept of ‘secondness’ on several occasions. The purpose of the following paragraphs is not to propose a philological analysis of these passages, nor to develop a theoretical interpretation of Peirce’s concept of ‘secondness’. More modestly, the paper will seek to draw philosophical inspiration from Peirce’s several definitions of the quality of secondness.

In a 1904 letter to Lady Welby, the American philosopher wrote: “Firstness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else./ Secondness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third./ Thirdness is the mode of being that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other” (CP 8.328).

What practical insights can result from such an extremely abstract philosophical definition of secondness? Put simply, it might be argued that ‘second cities’ can be defined as such only in relation to ‘first cities’. Furthermore, the difference between ‘first’ and ‘second cities’ should not be quantitatively measured in terms of geographical size, population, cultural significance, economic or political importance, or whatever combination of these criteria, but construed relationally: as in Peirce’s definition of ‘firstness’ and ‘secondness’, first cities are those whose identity is “such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else”, whereas second cities are

those whose identity is “such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third”.

In simpler words, Paris is not a first city only because it has a greater geographical size, population, cultural significance, and economic or political importance than Marseille or Lyon, but because its identity is not systematically thought of in comparison to those of Marseille or Lyon. Vice versa, Marseille or Lyon are not ‘second cities’ only because they have a smaller geographical size, population, cultural significance, and economic or political importance than Paris, but because their identity is systematically thought of in comparison to that of Paris.

More generally, one might say that first cities are such because the complex network of economic, political, and socio-cultural agencies that shape their identities encourage individuals and groups not to conceive them in relation to other cities but in a purely intra-systemic manner. On the contrary, it could be said that second cities are such because the same complex network encourages individuals and groups to conceive their urban identities in relation to those of other cities, and in particular in comparison to those of first cities.

There is an interesting corollary to this conception of ‘first’ and ‘second cities’, a corollary that stems directly from Peirce’s definition of firstness and secondness. Whereas values embodying the identities of first cities are construed in absolute terms, those composing the identities of second cities emerge from their structural relation with the values included in the identities of first cities. This is one of the reasons for which second cities might be so interesting from the point of view of urban studies: conceiving their identities relationally and, therefore, in comparison to those of first cities, they tend to shape them according to ‘alternative values’.

The relation between the identities of the urban communities of Milan and Turin exemplify this socio-cultural process very well. Milan is a ‘first city’ in comparison to Turin, but this is not because of its greater geographical size, population, cultural significance, or economic or political importance. Many individual and collective agencies in Turin would vigorously reject the idea that its cultural significance might be second to that of Milan, and of course, such ranking would clearly depend on the definition of ‘cultural significance’. Yet, it could



still be argued that Milan is a first city in comparison to Turin because, as in the definition of firstness and secondness proposed above, whereas the urban identity of Milan is not generally thought of in relation to that of Turin, the opposite is extremely common.

In other words, the discourse that constructs the urban identity of Turin often does so by stressing the difference between Turin and Milan, whereas the discourse constructing the urban identity of Milan rarely refers to a comparison with Turin. Milan constructs its own urban identity in comparison to Rome, not to Turin. Rome therefore is the first city in relation to which Milan constructs its secondness, although one might argue that in several circumstances this relation is reversed. This is so because the relation between the Milanese and the Roman identity is more symmetrical than that between the identities of Turin and Milan. In this second case, it will be mostly individuals and groups participating in the urban community of Turin to consider that of Milan as a term of comparison, and not vice versa (Bagnasco 1996).

As it was suggested before, the asymmetry between first and second cities often results in an interesting socio-cultural process, according to which the urban identities of second cities are built not only in comparison with those of first cities but also as alternative to them. In the case of the asymmetrical relation between Turin and Milan, for instance, one might argue that individual and collective agencies in Turin often make a conscious effort to build the identity of the city as an alternative to that of Milan.

From a semiotic perspective, the outcome of such socio-cultural process is a 'semi-symbolic system' in which the identity of the second city is embodied in a series of values that are semantically contrary to those shaping the identity of the first (Calabrese; Leone 2004). If individuals and social groups in Milan are seen by the urban community of Turin as ostentatious, then the identity of the latter will be constructed as an alternative, stressing the discreetness of individuals and social groups in Turin. If the urban community of Milan is considered by that of Turin as overindulging in popular culture, then the former will build its identity as an alternative, emphasizing the elitist dimension of its cultural life, and so on and so forth.

It is important to stress that such structural construction of the identity of the second city as an alternative to that of the first is not based on objective and quantifiable data but on the interplay between perceptions and self-perceptions. Nevertheless, as it was argued above, whereas the urban communities of first cities mostly perceive themselves in absolute terms, those of second cities mostly perceive themselves in relative terms, through their perception of first cities.

Of course, no first city will be completely immune from secondness: Rome and Milan, as it was suggested before, often perceive one as the first or the second city of the other, depending on the dimension of urban life at stake. Even megalopolises such as London and Paris, although not developing a relation of secondness toward any other city in the same national state, certainly do so in comparison with other megalopolises: Parisian individuals and social groups, for instance, will not build the identity of the *ville lumière* in relation to those of Marseille or Lyon, but will do so in comparison to those of New York or London.

In any case, the socio-cultural process through which second cities construct their own urban identities as alternative to those of first cities makes them particularly attractive for urban studies, since it turns them into a sort of spontaneous laboratory of new ways for structuring urban life. Whereas first cities lean toward a kind of complacency concerning their status and achievements, second cities are the underdog of urban life: their attractiveness often consists exactly in their capacity of thinking of themselves as different, as alternatives to first cities.

#### CASE STUDY: MELBOURNE VERSUS SYDNEY

The fourth part of the paper will consist in the analysis, within the theoretical framework described above, of a specific case study: the semantic relation of firstness/secondness characterizing two major Australian cities: Melbourne and Sydney.

However, before proceeding with the analysis, certain methodological caveats must be put forward. Although the qualitative understanding of the firstness/secondness of cities

rejects the cogency of quantitative ranking, it must not turn into a collection of clichés on cities and their identities either. In other words, the qualitative discourse on first and second cities must by all means distinguish itself from the impressionistic discourse on comparative urban life that is so often produced in small talk.

In order to achieve a certain degree of rigorousness, the qualitative analysis of the urban identities of first and second cities must adopt a precise methodology. The present paper suggests that the theoretical, methodological, and analytical framework elaborated by Jurij M. Lotman (the ‘school of Tartu’) might be extremely suitable for conducting research on this subject. One of the central methodological procedures of Lotman’s semiotics of culture is to study civilizations starting from a rigorous analysis of the ways in which they define themselves, often in opposition to other civilizations or to that which they conceive as ‘barbarism’ (Leone 2009a).

In the same way, an initial step toward the analysis of the urban identity of first and second cities must consist in a rigorous study of the way in which they define themselves, for instance, through the discourse produced by both individual and collective agencies. Textual analysis of such discourse will be able to reveal the socio-cultural dynamics through which the urban identity of second cities is constructed.

In the six months I spent as a visiting professor at Monash University in Melbourne, conversations with colleagues and friends frequently returned to the comparison between Melbourne and Sydney. While I expressed my sincere appreciation for several positive aspects of urban life in Melbourne, Melbournians usually received my words with discreet satisfaction, but then would often inquire: “have you already visited Sydney?”. Later on, upon returning from my first trips to Sydney, the same Melbournians would meet me with a mixture of curiosity and mistrust: had I, by any chance, changed my perspective on Melbourne after visiting the eternal rival in New South Wales?

Such an obsession for the comparison between Melbourne and Sydney struck me as well as Melbournians’ tendency to conceive and describe the urban identity of their city in systematic relation to that of Sydney, as if it was impossible or very difficult to assess the qualities of Melbourne on their

own and in absolute terms. This attitude affected every aspect of urban life: “weather in Melbourne is certainly less sunny and more changeable than in Sydney, but allows one to avoid long periods of heat and concentrate on intellectual work”; “beaches in Melbourne are certainly less spectacular than in Sydney, but allow one to avoid the vulgarity of the surfing crowd and read a good book”; “public transport is cheaper and better organized in Melbourne than in Sydney”; “coffee-culture is more advanced in Melbourne than in Sydney”; “cinemas are more sophisticated than in Sydney”, and so on and so forth (Aly).

I found this tendency to construct the urban identity of Melbourne in comparison with that of Sydney both interesting and touching, since it reminded me of the way individuals and social groups in Turin, the city where I usually live, constantly refer to Milan in order to define their own urban identity.

Beyond the simple anecdotic experience, this tendency reveals a socio-cultural process that is typical of the self-perception of second cities and their inhabitants: it would be wrong to believe that differences between Melbourne and Sydney push the inhabitants of the former to constantly compare themselves with those of the latter; on the contrary, such differences are singled out as a consequence of Melbournians’ attitude to conceive their urban identity through comparison with that of Sydney. In other words, it is the general frame of comparative self-perception that triggers the construction of endless semi-symbolic systems, in which Melbourne and Sydney become the yin and yang of urban life.

At least two arguments support this interpretation. First of all, in small talk, the comparison between Melbourne and Sydney is mostly stereotypical. Its goal is not to single out subtle differences between the former and the latter, but to depict macro-oppositions between them. For instance, a famous Australian saying, uttered with particular satisfaction by Melbournians, is the following: “the first question you’re asked in Melbourne is: ‘Where did you graduate from?’, the first question you’re asked in Sydney is: ‘How much money do you make?’”.

This saying aims at expressing, quite wittily, the stereotypical macro-opposition according to which Melbourne is the Australian city of intellectual refinement whilst Sydney is the

Australian city of economic empowerment. But, again, such a comparison is not drawn with sociological purposes, but for the sake of highlighting the differences between the two urban communities or rather, for the sake of stressing that the two urban communities are different. This is why the saying above fails to consider the excellent universities and research centres of Sydney as well as the booming real estate market of Melbourne, just to give a couple of examples capable of, at least, nuancing the Manichean contraposition between the two cities.

The second argument is that if differences between Melbourne and Sydney triggered the systematic comparison between them, and not vice versa, then individuals and social groups in the latter city would revel in such comparison as much as those in the former do. But, at least in my experience, this is not the case. Or, to be more precise, this was not the case until recently, for reasons that will be described later in this article.

In my anecdotic experience, small talk about the rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney is more frequent in the former city than in the latter. Thus, according to the theoretical framework described above, Melbourne would be the Australian second city and Sydney the first. Individuals and social groups in Melbourne would construct its urban identity through comparison with that of Sydney whilst individuals and social groups in Sydney would construct its urban identity in absolute terms, or mostly through comparison with non-Australian metropolises like London or New York.

However, such conclusion would be simplistic. It would not take into account that the dialectics between first and second cities, between urban communities whose self-perception is mostly non-comparative (at least not within a national frame) and those whose self-perception mostly refers to the perception of first cities is not static but dynamic. It evolves with the unceasing mutation of the numerous elements that compose the life of a city and, as a consequence, its identity.

## HISTORY AND SEMIOTICS OF A RIVALRY

In order to grasp the current status of the dialectics between the identities of Melbourne and Sydney, it is useful to

retrace its history as well as to analyse the ways in which it is somehow embodied in the present-day ‘corporate communication’ of the two cities.

In the historical and socio-cultural process that led to the establishment of the Australian Federation in 1901, Melbourne and Sydney competed for acquiring the status of the federal capital city. As a result, chapter VII, section 125 of the Australian Constitution states: “The seat of Government of the Commonwealth shall be determined by the Parliament, and shall be within territory which shall have been granted to or acquired by the Commonwealth, and shall be vested in and belong to the Commonwealth, and shall be in the State of New South Wales, and be distant not less than one hundred miles from Sydney”.

The genesis of Canberra as federal capital city of Australia is strictly linked to the rivalry and competition between Melbourne and Sydney. Its geographical position can be seen as the economic, political, and socio-cultural point of equilibrium between the two cities (Davies 1990).

However, since Canberra’s Parliament House was not opened until 1927, Melbourne acted as the temporal federal capital city of Australia during twenty-six years. Furthermore, several governmental bodies continued to operate from Melbourne also in the following decades and the High Court of Australia was transferred from Melbourne to Canberra only from 1980 on. The permanence of many central governmental bodies in Melbourne even after the creation of the new federal capital city and the consequent flourishing of cultural life linked to such presence might account for the stereotype of intellectual prestige by which Melbournians like to characterize the urban identity of their city in comparison to that of Sydney.

Nevertheless, the competition between Melbourne and Sydney over the status of the federal capital city and the consequent establishment of Canberra are not a cause but an effect of the rivalry between the two urban communities, a rivalry whose roots can be traced back to the very origin of the colonization of Australia. It would be simplistic to believe that such urban rivalry is nothing but the Australian version of the countless urban rivalries that systematically characterize any national community.

On the one hand, it is true that urban rivalries are a sort of anthropological constant of human life. Given two urban communities whose mutual geographic position and logistic features make them capable of interacting with each other, such interaction will inevitably manifest aspects of rivalry, more or less heated according to historical, economic, political, and socio-cultural conditions. One could even see in this phenomenon, an urban, macroscopic version of René Girard's mimetic desire (and Canberra as the scapegoat in the rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney).

On the other hand, such broad anthropological interpretation of urban rivalries around the world must be complemented by a theoretical discourse aiming at singling out differences between rivalries, and therefore, articulating them into a typology.

From a certain point of view, the complex of secondness characterizing the self-perception of Melbourne, for instance, is a reminder of the same complex affecting the self-perception of Turin. Although founded forty-seven years after Sydney, Melbourne holds not only the status of first federal capital city of Australia (albeit only as a temporal siege), but also that of first Australian metropolis: the 1850s Victorian Gold Rush transformed Melbourne into a booming international city in the 1860s. Subsequently though, the end of the Gold Rush and especially the evolution of transport networks linking Australia with the rest of the world increasingly favoured the development of Sydney often to the detriment of that of Melbourne: it is true that, nowadays, Sydney is the major international magnet of Australia and, as a consequence, its undisputed financial capital city. The complex of secondness of Melbourne is, therefore, that of an urban community that, having enjoyed the status of firstness for a long while, happened to lose it (Brown-May and Shurlee; Davison; Lewis).

Similarly, the complex of secondness of Turin is that of the first capital city of Italy, whose political prestige was stripped by Rome and whose financial prestige was stripped by Milan. The proud melancholy by which Turin people recall how many primates the city holds and how many it lost to other Italian cities (and mainly to Milan) reminds one of the dignified nostalgia exuding from the Victorian filigree architec-

ture of East Melbourne, relic of a glorious economic past (Babando 2007).

So far for similarities. However, as it was suggested above, it would be simplistic to conclude that all urban rivalries present the same characteristics, and that the relation between the firstness of Sydney and the secondness of Melbourne is the same as the relation between the firstness of Milan and the secondness of Turin. On the contrary, each urban rivalry manifests a different semi-symbolic system opposing contrasting semantic values and their evolution.

In a nutshell, it could be argued that, for instance, the secondness of Melbourne is less nostalgic than Turin's and that individuals and social groups in Melbourne conceive of the secondness of their urban community not as a result of an unfortunate reversal of history but as the outcome of a programmatic choice: Melbourne's not being the financial capital city of Australia is considered not in terms of a previous economic primate stripped by Sydney, but in terms of Melbourne urban community's choice to construct its identity as centred on different, alternative values.

Such programmatic construction of the urban identity of Melbourne as alternative to that of Sydney is probably that which makes the former so fascinating: not only Melbourne *is* second, but Melbourne *wants* to be second. It wishes to construct its urban identity as a mirroring counterpart of that of Sydney. If the urban identity of Sydney is perceived by Melbournians as based on the appreciation of material resources, then the urban identity of Melbourne will be developed as based on symbolical resources such as culture and sport. If the urban identity of Sydney is perceived by Melbournians as centred on the production of mainstream mediatic culture, then the urban identity of Melbourne will be developed as centred on underdog cultural production.

This is the main difference between the Melbourne-Sydney urban rivalry and other similar urban rivalries around the world. Returning to the comparison sketched above, Turin has never abandoned the aspiration of being the economic capital city of Italy, for instance, by staying stubbornly attached to its glorious industrial heritage, sometimes with ambiguous consequences. Only recently, and especially after the 2006 Winter Olympic Games, has Turin developed the ambi-



tion of proposing itself as a sort of cultural capital city of Northern Italy, as a sophisticated counterpart to Milan. Overall though, since the economic ambitions of Turin have not been completely relinquished, for understandable reasons, and since the project of turning Turin into a post-industrial cultural hub has been quite timid thus far, the secondness of Turin remains tainted with grudge toward the economic firstness of Milan as well as the political and cultural firstness of Rome (Babando 1997; Bagnasco 1990; Balbo).

On the contrary, it seems that Melbourne's strategy to characterize its urban identity as alternative to that of Sydney is increasingly producing the paradoxical result of turning the former as the cultural, intellectual, and leisure first city of Australia, with important economic consequences too. Present-day Melbourne is not only the main destination of internal tourism in Australia, but also a magnet for thousands of young people who are attracted by its urban identity, focus on inner urban life, and impressive cultural offer. Recent statistic projections indicate that the population of Melbourne is currently growing much faster than that of Sydney and that, if these trends do not change, in the first decades of the millennium, the former could regain the primate of being the most populous city of Australia (Walker and Robinson).

## CONCLUSIONS

Some conclusions about first and second cities can be drawn from this rapid analysis of the urban rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne.

The socio-cultural dynamics through which Melbourne has developed into the second city of Sydney so felicitously as to become, in its turn, the first city for the New South Wales rival, epitomizes a model of urban growth through diversification that is, to a certain extent, opposite to that embodied by the marketing logic of ranking and its conception of first and second cities. Whereas the ranking of cities and their urban communities is based on an essentially quantitative rationale, which in order to measure and compare urban data has to adopt standard parameters, thus depicting an ideal scenario where all cities compete over the same material and symbolical

resources, the qualitative, Peirce-inspired understanding of the idea of first and second cities implies a different scenario, one in which cities actually compete over diversifying themselves from each other.

The urban marketing strategy following which many cities around the world in the last decades have striven to achieve the status of first cities according to the logic of ranking has often produced irrational consequences: too many material and symbolical resources have been wasted to establish the same museums, aquariums, research centres, and so on and so forth in every city aspiring to the labels of firstness and coolness. The urban marketing strategy exemplified by second cities like Melbourne, by contrast, demonstrates that there is a different modality to attract material and symbolical capitals toward an urban community, a modality that is based on diversification more than on emulation.

This is the most important lesson that, in the theoretical framework exposed in the first part of this paper, can be drawn from the analysis of the Melbourne-Sydney rivalry: the future of cities can be imagined as one in which they compete to offer different models of urban life, each appealing to a different category of individuals and social groups. If the liberal idea of being capable of choosing the city where to live is to be embraced – and actually it must be embraced, since the dream of returning to the pre-modern city, a dream that some cultivate, has very little possibility to be fulfilled –, it has to be embraced to the fullest extent: cities of the future will have to experiment with different models of urban life and let citizens choose freely between the benefits and the shortcomings of each model. The socio-cultural dialectics that competition among cities will entail will hopefully be such to dispel the danger of urban homologation inscribed in the logic of ranking, and bring about, on the contrary, second cities wishing to excel not in the same fields as first cities, but in different areas. It will bring about, or at least, so is to be hoped, second cities wishing to overtake the first ones not only in the quantitative figures of geographical size, population, cultural significance, or economic or political importance, but also in creativity, originality, and distinctiveness.

In the long run, all cities should become second to each other.

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I dedicate this article to all my colleagues and friends in both Melbourne and Sydney.

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