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Three Earthquakes

Wounds, Signs, and Resisting Arts in Belice, Irpinia, and L'Aquila

*Shimmering stars of the Bear, I never thought
That I'd be back again to see you shine ...*
(Leopardi 2010 [1829]: 179)

It might have been the sight of the stars, blended with the memory of Giacomo Leopardi's verses, that kept Benedetto Croce awake that summer night of 1883. Buried by rubble up to his neck, the seventeen-year-old boy observed the clear sky above him. A few meters from the point where he was trapped, his mother, father, and a younger sister were dying under the ruins of their holiday house in Casamicciola, a small village on the island of Ischia. Decades later, recollecting those dreadful moments with perceptible emotion, he wrote:

I remained for many hours buried under the rubble, broken in many parts of my body. I regained my senses late that night, and I found myself interred up to my neck, and above my head stars were shining [...]. After a while, I understood and stayed quiet, as it happens in huge calamities. I cried out for help, for me and for my father, whose voice I was hearing not far from me [...]. Later in the morning, I was dug out [...] by two soldiers and laid on a stretcher, in the open.
(Croce 1966: 10–11)

It was July 28, a Saturday, at 9.30 p.m. It took fifteen seconds to destroy villages and towns in the Bay of Naples, and to create in the popular imagination the legendary picture of “Casamicciola” as the *natural* cataclysm par excellence. That very traumatic experience, which left so profound a trace in

Croce's body and mind, had the power to reinforce his idealistic creed and to shape the thought of Italy's last great philosopher. According to his Hegelian *Weltanschauung*, Nature is other than Mind, it is the Spirit outside itself; it has no agency, if not blind, furious, fierce, and unaware—something Leopardi again, in his "Dialogue between Nature and an Icelander" (1824), had lucidly expressed with these words:

When I harm you in any way and with whatever means, I don't notice it, except very rarely; just as I ordinarily don't know whether I please or help you [...]. Finally, if I happened to wipe out your entire species, I wouldn't notice it. (Leopardi 1982: 195–97)

Not infrequently does the Italian landscape convey the sense of this sublime ambivalence of nature. The Casamicciola earthquake, classified as "completely destructive" on the Mercalli-Cancani-Sieberg (MCS) Scale and with an estimated magnitude of 5.79 on the Richter Scale, is indeed only one of the innumerable seismic events that, from time immemorial, have stricken the peninsula.¹ A land of tremors and volcanic eruptions, Italy is indeed a geologically unquiet country. Tectonic maps tell us that it lies in a point of the Mediterranean basin where the African and Eurasian plates merge on to each other. It was this slow and powerful submarine process of telluric encounters that, nearly forty million years ago, caused the uplift of the Alps. Aged less than a million years, the peninsula is itself a "recent" formation, whose geological youth and instability are testified by the presence of four active volcanoes—Vesuvius, Etna, Vulcano, and Stromboli. This subterranean landscape is the foundation of Italy's widely unstable geography, a quivering chart where "about 2,960 municipalities, comprising 45 per cent of the national territory and encompassing about 40 per cent of the population, lie in seismic areas" (Bevilacqua 2010: 15–16). But Italy's seismic history leads to the surfacing of another landscape, one in which catastrophes are not simply the outcome of natural calamities. The social and political response to earthquakes has, in fact, contributed to shape in this country a landscape of wounds: material wounds inflicted on the historic urban fabric as well as on important portions of the natural heritage, and moral and social wounds inflicted to the citizenship's political fabric and cultural identity. This consideration not only confirms Kate Rigby's remark that "there is no such thing as

a wholly ‘natural’ disaster” (Rigby 2014: 216), but it also contextualizes this remark within the intricate geo-anthropological and bio-cultural dimension typical of Italian “natural” catastrophes.² Here, as Marco Armiero and Marcus Hall have effectively observed, “blame for the disaster or inadequacy of emergency response can be traced to moods of deities, political decisions, and architectural features, all of which depend on place and century according to a range of cultural factors” (Armiero and Hall 2010: 6).

This comment is accurate in many respects. It suggests that the violence scripted in seismic landscapes is not only abrupt, furious, and unexpected, but it can also be gradual, profound, and *slow*. In that they often disintegrate productive systems and forces along with houses and places, seismic events and periods are “historical agents” that unfold destruction over time, pushing communities (especially agricultural ones) back in their “evolutionary” path of economic progress (Bevilacqua 2000: 75). But a major component of a quake’s “slow violence” comes from the way geology “reacts” in combination with politics and society. This is clearly visible, for instance, in the “galvanization of power” (Bevilacqua 2000: 85), which takes place as central and local governments are called to rule the emergency, transforming political reality into a perennial state of exception corporeally played on the body politic. Like the kind theorized by Rob Nixon, this emerging “violence of delayed destruction” is “neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing across a range of temporal scales” (Nixon 2011: 2). All this translates here into top-down decisions over people and territories, in landscapes and ecosystems gradually sacrificed to “reconstruction,” and in the formation of new political and economic elites, which are often corrupted and not rarely criminal.

Combining with social, political, and economic forces, geological events become historical; they assume a power-centered dimension, thus reinforcing hierarchies and imbalances or producing new configurations. It is so that, politically, culturally, and environmentally, a world is undone, while another one enters the scene. In such perspective, the sudden unleashing of a powerful natural cataclysm, with the human/nonhuman agencies it triggers, is part of a cycle of violence reverberating in a series of more or less small apocalypses: Various sized ends of the world operating across a range of temporal scales. These are moments in which human beings, as cultural and social beings, are

called to reconstruct their emotional and material dimension, both public and private; they are called to re-inhabit a world literally suspended on its own end, turned *against* its own *course* (this is the etymologic meaning of the Greek “*katà strophé*”). The loss that has to be faced here is not only the physical loss of a material horizon, but a loss of sense. This end of the world is the “apocalypse”—literally, a “revelation”—that, according to Croce’s genial disciple, the anthropologist Ernesto De Martino (1908–65), exposes human communities to a “permanent anthropological risk”—“the risk of not being able to be-there in any possible cultural world, the risk of losing [...] all horizon of mundane operability [...], the catastrophe of any value-laden community design” (De Martino 2002: 219).

In the history of contemporary Italy, three seismic events, more than any others, had apocalyptic effects: The earthquake in the Belice Valley (Sicily, 1968), the one in Irpinia (Campania, 1980), and, more recently, the one that occurred in L’Aquila (Abruzzo, 2009). Whereas in Belice entire villages and towns were abandoned and relocated elsewhere, sometimes breaking any continuity with their original sites, in Irpinia the estranging and disarticulating consequences of the reconstruction have been even more destructive than the seismic shock itself. L’Aquila, finally, has experienced (and still experiences) a slow-release earthquake, one that, compared to the previous two cases, entails even more disturbing ecological and bio-political dimensions.

What is meaningful in the case of these earthquakes, however, is their repercussion on community life and narratives, and the creative ways of social self-representation they have enacted. In all three cases, the earthquake has liberated new expressive energies of resistance, disclosing “an ethical space, within which dominant discourses regarding ‘nature’ and ‘natural disaster’ might be questioned, marginalized perspectives given voice, and new modes of understanding and action enabled” (Rigby 2014: 217). With various shapes and results, writers, poets, visual artists, and filmmakers, along with citizens and other social actors, have tried to rebuild their places through a shared imagination that would give voice to those worlds apparently lost forever, filtering their silences, showing their wounds, and transforming these storied materialities into signs. Creating involuntary narrative communities, they have sought ways to retrieve a “horizon of mundane operability,” re-weaving the warps of their existences and knitting them with the woof of their lands

in even stronger fabrics. As De Martino, again, has written in his posthumous study *La fine del mondo: Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* (*The End of the World: A Contribution to the Analysis of Cultural Apocalypses*):

Human culture in general is the solemn exorcism against this radical risk, whatever the exorcising technique; and if the cultural theme of the end of a certain existing mundane order constitutes one of the historical means [...] of redemption of this risk, [...] then the corresponding risk is always present, and culture consists in facing and preventing it. (De Martino 2002: 219)

By telling the end of the world, we try to exorcise it, to avert its threat, keeping the world's horizon open—both for human and nonhuman realities. This chapter, too, is a minor contribution to this indispensable narrative. Recounting the revelations of cultural wounds and material memories, our stories will attempt to be a minuscule exorcism of the little or big apocalypses affecting our world.

I. Irpinia, 1980

There are days in which the ones who die are many. These are the days of the great misfortunes. In this land, one of such days has been the 23rd of November 1980.

(Arminio 2003: 23)

As a young girl, I also lived through the frightful experience of being in an earthquake. It happened one November night, at half past seven. It was a Sunday. I was watching television. I remember the roar of the ground, as though thunder was booming up from immense subterranean caves. Above ground, it felt like wind fiercely shattering the blinds, so strong, and loud, and long. It might have been this sense of crashing rocks and air rumbling within the porous cavities of the earth to inspire Lucretius's idea that earthquakes are caused by subterranean storms and crumples. But, at that time, I did not know anything about Lucretius or geology. Living at the foothills of an active volcano, I simply thought that this would be the end of the world.

But the apocalypse, this time, was coming from further away. This place was Irpinia, a rural mountain area a hundred kilometers east of Naples. On

that unfortunate day, hit by a seismic shock of magnitude 6.5 on the Richter Scale, nearly 2,800 people were killed and 9,000 injured. Those who lost their homes and lives are hard to count, also because the reverberations of that event occurred in many forms, both social and environmental.³ As the poet and essayist Franco Arminio—a native of eastern Irpinia—has written, “Twenty-five years after the quake / Of the dead very little will be left. / Of the living, even less” (Arminio 2011: 69). A realistic count of nonhuman losses is, as usual, impossible.

Affecting the regions of Campania and Basilicata and a territory of about 20,000 square kilometers, with 316 towns and nearly 6 million inhabitants directly involved, the earthquake of November 23, 1980 has fatally become one of the great watersheds in the history of southern Italy—a new, much larger Casamicciola. Those ninety infinite seconds changed forever the history of people, land, politics, and economy in small villages as well as in big cities, including Naples. The earthquake had indeed very long and extensive aftermaths, transforming not only the existences of those touched by it, their everyday habits and domestic geographies, but also the social landscapes of towns and cities, where public buildings—mainly schools—became a “temporary” residence for several thousands of earthquake victims, in the majority of cases low-income people. In 1991, on my first paid job, I worked for the national population census. I remember large families accommodated in classrooms, with Italy’s chart and multiplication tables still hanging on the walls, now side by side with holy pictures, footballers’ posters, and portraits of godparents and deceased relatives. Caged canaries and linnets, too, were often part of the quartered crowd. Cats and dogs roamed freely in the community spaces.

In my hometown, this little purgatory would last another decade, but it was just a shadow of the real hell. In a reportage significantly titled “I have seen the South die” (“Ho visto morire il sud,” December 7, 1980), the writer Alberto Moravia was among the first to send a postcard from the Inferno. He wrote:

On a mountain top [...] I see a mish-mash of broken and crushed wasp nests, the grey of dissolved dust, amid which a disarray of roofing frameworks emerges. [...] I look, and I try to make sense [...]; and all of a sudden the truth brutally re-establishes the tie between reality and me. Those wasp nests are houses, buildings, or at least they used to be; now they are rubble, and underneath that rubble the residents are buried, as invisible as the dead in the

cemetery I see over there, with its fence, its rows of tombstones, its cypresses.
(Moravia 1980: n.p.)

If the South was dying under the rubble, however, this was not only due to the violence of a natural calamity. Denouncing both the delay in relief operations and the abuses of power of “peacetime politics,” Moravia’s reportage is one of the first documents to give voice to the survivors’ despair: “Now we can see who stole,” someone tells him. “The newly built hospital, unveiled a year ago, collapsed. The sick are dead, nurses and doctors are dead. Why is it so? Because there has been someone who cheated on concrete, just like dishonest merchants defraud on weight” (Moravia 1980). The interesting blend of biblical echoes (the dishonest merchant who uses false scales, Hosea 12:7) and corruption practices recklessly pursued against the body politic in its corporeal thickness makes this passage extremely telling of how the disaster was perceived by the victims: A mix of paleo-Christian imagery, meta-historical despair, and intense moral indignation. If this was the end of a world, the apocalypse entailed here very concrete revelations.

What was happening in Irpinia? The places devastated by the quake were largely located in territories that many Italians were now, for the first time, visualizing on a geographic map. Reaching those quasi-unknown sites, the thousands of volunteers spontaneously coming from inside and outside the country found themselves “in a mysterious part of Italy, a secretly archaic one” (Erbani 2003: 56). This age-old Italy had been substantially unchanged for centuries, maintaining the same population as in 1861, the year of the first unified national census. There, a number of gloriously ancient urban settlements, founded by Lombards and Normans and in some cases by the Romans, were scattered in sometimes-splendid isolation, surrounded by thick forests of chestnut trees.

Populated by an anthropologically compact society of “meek and tenacious people, proud of their sobriety and silence” (Erbani 2003: 61), Irpinia had been traditionally considered as a backward and poor region. Writing about the conditions of Italy’s *Mezzogiorno* between the late 1940s and the early 1970s, Manlio Rossi Doria, one of the national pioneers of environmental economics and political ecology, included Irpinia in what he had called “the bone land.”⁴ Unlike the less peripheral, well-irrigated, and productive zones of

the “pulp land,” this southern “bone” consisted of interior areas and rugged territories, historically affected by water scarcity and cultivated with often pre-modern methods (cf. Rossi Doria 2005). Over many decades, massive migration, especially toward Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, or the North of Italy, had also contributed to strip this bone of more and more flesh.

In 1980, however, Irpinia had already begun to slowly but radically shift this trend. Its main economic sources were agriculture, shepherding, and forestry, and small forms of industrial development were also starting to appear. Research conducted in 1981 by the Study Center in Agricultural Economics of the University of Naples, again under Rossi Doria’s lead, bears witness to the fact that, in the decade prior to the earthquake, many important advancements had taken place in Irpinia, including noteworthy innovations in agronomic practices and the diffusion of small industry and tertiary sector (cf. CSREAM 1981). In spite of its relative poverty, the territory touched by the disaster was thus animated and vibrant. The historic centers of many towns and villages were orderly and well kept, full of activities and people, and interpreted by the residents as part of a spatial code filled with essential signs: Irpinia had indeed a profoundly rooted place-identity. This is to say that, in the early 1980s, these areas were not “on the verge of becoming extinct” (Erbani 2003: 62). Their “horizon of mundane operability,” as De Martino would call it, was perfectly open. As the main shock hit, Irpinia was alive.

Franco Arminio has lyrically depicted the liveliness of the world around the earthquake’s “crater” as an imperceptible “substance,” the subtle agency of a discrete *genius loci*:

There was a time when [these] places emitted a substance that the inhabitants unknowingly breathed. A sort of psychological aerosol. It was as if every place were a thermal site, and an invisible gas would filter up from beneath, helping people to stay or inviting them to leave, yet giving everyone a lymph. And so, when you talked to your fellow villagers, you had this lymph in common; and then there was the rest, from which everybody obviously drew, who knows how and where. (Arminio 2003: 35)

It was maybe a residue of this lymph that, immediately after the shock, inspired the creation of several grassroots committees and of new plans of social and territorial aggregation around the earthquake’s “crater.”⁵ But the effect of this “psychological aerosol” lasted only a very limited time. In fact,

the dynamics unleashed by the event were multiple and ill-assorted, and soon the “crater” turned into an abyss where public resources, along with social creativities, rapidly sank.⁶

Converting tragedy into “a form of territorial government” (Vitellio 2009: 51), local and national authorities inaugurated a bond of complicity with private entrepreneurs and other economic actors. In a radical falsification of natural-cultural eloquence and the places’ textuality, they maintained that the seism had struck a backward and dying community, and that no restoration on site was possible: “[S]omeone was dreaming a tabula rasa for both society and urban planning” (Erbani 2003: 62). Supported by a targeted use of disaster rhetoric, a true “catastrophe economy” could therefore rise and grow, binding together business groups and government parties in a spiral of building frenzy and unrestrained corruption. And so, after 1980, the face of this land—and, almost by contagion, the face of much of southern Italy—became finally derelict. The mind of this place, its lymph and aerosol, was suffocating under concrete and bribery.

As it clearly appears, what is at stake here is not merely the mythical imagination of the disaster, but the way natural disasters are used to establish anti-democratic mechanisms of social control and of financial speculation facilitated by political orders. This is what distinguishes between an earthquake and a catastrophe: “while an earthquake is a natural event, a catastrophe is a social/political phenomenon” (Chubb 2002: 186). The human—a *certain* human—dimension invades the scene, and dominates it entirely. What gets lost when this “invasion” takes place is the complex, more-than-human, composition of the event. This composition involves landscape, as a congealing of natural-cultural agencies, as well as nonhuman beings and more extensive eco-systemic balances, often completely fragmented and disrupted by the unsettling urbanization and overbuilding ensuing from the seismic shock.

Institutionally considered, the Irpinia earthquake typifies a system based on the “emergency,” a regime of extraordinary laws depending on the conclusive authority of the commissars delegated by the central government. The same, as we shall see, will happen in a magnified manner in L’Aquila, twenty-nine years later. What really happens, however, is that this kind of regime adopts on the one hand an exceptionally permissive stance toward individual building initiatives, and on the other hand transforms the State property areas into free

zones for otherwise fraudulent urban development. According to this system's rules, public contracts are entrusted "on concession," derogating from ordinary legislation and skipping the usual systems of judiciary control.⁷ Increasing the level of conflict between citizens and institutions, the consequences of this executive line were just another earthquake for the shaken communities. With the advantage of such unexpected scenery, the "emergency regime" destabilized long-consolidated social balances, creating new ties between political power and local (often criminal) economic actors.⁸

These are the elements composing the aforementioned "catastrophe economy," a term by which Ada Becchi Collidà has defined a pervasive financial system flourishing thanks to undisclosed political agreements in which ideological boundaries are often easily crossed. Co-essential to a "catastrophe economy" is therefore a "catastrophe party" (Becchi Collidà 1988), a transversal political guild that the sociologist Isaia Sales (1993) has labeled "the unified party of public spending." It was so that the long wave of reconstruction was extended not only to towns and buildings irremediably damaged, but also to places that had been hardly touched by the quake. Suffice it to say that, from the original figure of 316, the earthquake-affected municipalities became more than 600 for reasons that complied less with geology than with political patronage.

Certainly, unsavory business practices and political corruption were already notorious in the general phenomenology of Italian public life. Irpinia was not alien to the picture, as Moravia's reportage pinpoints and as Arminio also concurs: "[I]n Italy, the scenes of a tragedy work as coagulation points, precious chances for big and small fiddles, which few people can resist. And here in Irpinia, nobody resisted" (Arminio 2003: 44). But the levels of territorial disfigurement, ecological damage, and political alienation reached after November 23, 1980 were unprecedented. Coupled with infiltrating networks of corruption and organized crime systems, the emergency regime legally permitted a chronic mutilation of territories and lands, inexorably smothered by an avalanche of concrete. In some cases, agricultural and mountain territories were transformed into short-lived industrial areas; in other cases, unserviceable infrastructures were built at exorbitant costs in the middle of nowhere, just to be themselves, after a while, abandoned to their "natural" decline. As Erbani comments:

The land is defaced. Roads and industrial sites destroy river courses and crush mountains [...]. Highways are quite pointless here; they gouge into valleys and mountain ridges, marring woodland or former cultivations. They have been absurdly expensive, and when I happen to drive along them [...] I hardly encounter a dozen cars. (Erbani 2003: 66–9)

Some years after the “emergency regime” had been established, these scandals became the subject of a parliamentary committee of inquiry, which exposed the illegal practices jointly pursued by politicians, entrepreneurial groups, and criminal clans. The results of that inquiry remained, nevertheless, a dead letter. More recently, the interlaced system of political corruption and criminal entrepreneurship has been acknowledged as one of the historic roots of ecomafia.

Today, even though the emergency has ceased, the landscape is still suffering from this building frenzy, and the scars are visible. The most serious thing, however, is that, along with the dream of more extensive wellbeing, the citizens’ full political capacity has also drastically faded. The wounds in the landscape are the narrative of a sharp change of direction, from a decorous backwardness, bearing the incipient signs of development, to a regime suspended between destruction and patronage. A “bone land” in the midst of a painstaking resurrection, certainly Irpinia was not an idyllic place to live: It was not a “nativity scene where everyone was better and happier” (Arminio 2003: 44), but an area where poor sanitation, scarce literacy and medical care had been a serious issue for centuries. Though all the diverse scars in the post-disaster landscape, from abandoned infrastructures to legalized town-planning abuses, are the material narrative of thwarted citizenship rights, sometimes sadly perpetrated with the complicity of the citizens themselves. As Arminio has written:

These places are not born out of history, but the ballot box. These are the districts designed by provincial councilors, [...] by deputies, majors, in short, by all those mediocre executors of a makeshift democracy. Every vote is a barn turned into a house. Every election is a chance to promise asphalt and cement, so to ensure an on-site escape to those who have not fled elsewhere. (Arminio 2011: 29)

Along with the landscape, the territorial destruction has here patently affected the civil imagination of the inhabitants. “The space in which we live is

never ‘neutral,’” Salvatore Settis observes in his landmark study *Paesaggio Costituzione cemento (Landscape Constitution Concrete)* (Settis 2012: 50). Over the course of time, societies have fashioned their spaces as necessary embodiments of their various structures and hierarchies, of their economies and production forms, systems of knowledge and religious practices. For this reason, “the space of an industrial civilization is so radically different from that of a rural one. The social space surrounds and defines the body of the single individuals, determining perceptions and representations, order of values, layers of memory” (Settis 2012: 52). These values, memories, representations are collective and singular, “outside” as well as “inside.”

What is also true, however, is that the “creation” of such a space is not merely determined by the human activities happening in that space, but also always the reverse: In a constant material-discursive interplay, a space conditions and models whatever is in/together with it. As a theater and as a collective, such a space is part of a natural-cultural composition, of a system of actants, which are human and nonhuman, personal and impersonal. Most of all, however, a lived space is a semiotically organized one: “The development of modern societies and of some fundamental values (freedom, democracy, equality) has been coupled with the collective creation of a sort of ‘*space code*’” (Settis 2012: 52, emphasis in the original). The intrinsic consistency of this semiotic system becomes almost organismal, and, like for a single organism, we can talk about a “spatial health” as opposed to a dysfunctional space, both in ecological and socio-cultural terms. As Settis concludes:

The destruction of the codes according to which space is organized, of their historical, memorial, and symbolic significance in favor of an indiscriminate overbuilding [...] involves a dramatic loss of meanings. The social space, itself so full of purpose and sense, becomes itself a commodity; it is “worthy” [...] only as long as it can be occupied, “priced,” cannibalized. (Settis 2012: 54).

Attacking both pulp and bone, this cannibalization and semiotic annihilation of space is readable not only in Irpinia’s landscape, but in the landscape of all those places whose “lymph” has been dissipated by the system of socially destructive practices ironically called “reconstruction.”

II. Belice, 1968

I was born in Gibellina, aged 23. I learned mechanics in Salemi, I don't remember anything, I heard a great roar and the roof opened, I saw the sky for a moment, the stars. I've left the shovel to whoever is pleased with it, with mechanics you can expatriate. [...] I've left my mother and sister in the barracks. The others remained underground. [...] Like me, there are other villagers [...]. We are refugees, earthquake victims, with our bags, sacks, blankets. They will help us, sure, but the offense will stay.

(Consolo 1999: 6)

Just twelve years before the Irpinia disaster, another catastrophic seism had affected the Italian South. It happened in the night between January 14 and 15, 1968 in the Belice Valley, an area in western Sicily comprised within the provinces of Trapani, Palermo, and Agrigento. With a magnitude of 5.75, the quake had devastating effects on the age-old urban fabric of this internal Sicilian valley. There, the majority of the population lived in small “agro-towns,” often perched on steep hills, and hence easily exposed to landslides. In these scattered ancient villages, most houses were peasant dwellings, constructed with traditional techniques and brittle materials such as tufa and stone. This made them particularly fragile in the face of the geological forces coming from the underground, and it is not surprising that, classified on the MCS Scale, its intensity was X, “completely destructive,” as in Casamicciola. That snowy, freezing night—the winter of 1968 was recorded as one of the coldest in the Mediterranean—370 people died and over 1,000 were injured.

Compared to the figure of those left homeless (over 70,000), the relatively small number of victims primarily depended on the fact that a seismic swarm had preceded the main shock. As the big tremor occurred, numerous people were spending the night outside their homes, alarmed by a sequence of modest anticipatory waves and other “signs”: In some villages, for example, sulfur vapors had emanated from wells and reddish sludge had surfaced from the ground; elsewhere the warning had come from horses and mules disquietly bolting, barking dogs, or chickens and other birds oddly vibrating their wings.⁹ In a peasant society used to making sense of these geo- and bio-semiotic codes, this saved many lives.

Of the fourteen towns struck by the earthquake, all located in an area that ranked among the most backwards of Italy, four were completely annihilated: Montevago, Salaparuta, Poggioreale, and Gibellina. The violence of the quake on these places was so formidable that the epicenter resembled a theater of war. Overlooking the area during the relief operations, a pilot reported that these sites seemed to have been hit by an atomic bomb. "I have flown over an inferno," he said.¹⁰ Streets and houses had been sucked into the bowels of the earth, trees had been uprooted, and sulfur gases and fluids had come up from the cracked soil. For the people living in these peasant villages, the shock was huge: "An infinite force pulls you down, it smashes you against a wall and then against the opposite wall, and you are nothing. I think: the house has no roots anymore," said a survivor from Partanna (Barbera 2011: 26).

Poor and largely unknown, the Belice Valley was "another social political backwater of Italian life" (Alexander 2002: 166). Discovering this place for the first time, the national newspapers represented it as a pre-modern world, even more archaic than Irpinia would appear to their eyes in 1980. At that time, the local economy relied chiefly on traditional peasant agriculture, by and large dominated by the latifundium. Another source of income was a dawning (and still highly fragmented) industrial sector, which included both manufacturing and construction. The 1951 national census, however, pictured western Sicily as an area that considerable emigration flows were pushing toward an inexorable decline. After the earthquake, and encouraged by government stimulus, such gradual vanishing turned almost into a mass evacuation: "[L]ocal offices were set up to bypass normal bureaucratic procedures for issuing passports and to make available free one-way tickets for those wishing to leave Sicily; about 40,000 people left" (Chubb 2003: 188–9).¹¹ Nearly as violent as the seismic shock itself, emigration was an "offense" that "will stay" as a wound in the social body of this place for a long time, as lyrically argued by the Sicilian writer Vincenzo Consolo.

As in Irpinia, however, the reality behind the picture was more complex, and it would be a mistake to imagine this peasant world as one shrouded in ignorance and entirely abandoned to its gloomy fate of extinction. Indeed, the quake had affected not only surviving ancient structures, but also a slowly evolving productive system, which the common efforts of laborers and socially engaged intellectuals had been for several years laboriously trying to change. In 1957 in Partinico, the social activist, pacifist, pedagogue, and poet Danilo

Dolci had founded the “Study Center for Full Employment” (Centro studi per la piena occupazione), an organization working for the empowerment of poor farmers, and coordinating forms of active resistance to political corruption and mafia.¹² In a decade of nonviolent struggles, this combination of energies had brought pressure on the government to build infrastructure (primarily dams and roads), along with substantial policies of reforestation and environmental protection (see Dolci 1968; Barbera 2011). Less than a year before the seism, in March 1967, a huge protest march had taken place in western Sicily. Dolci’s coworker Lorenzo Barbera narrates it in his book, *I ministri dal cielo* (*The Ministers Landing from the Sky*), a key historical memoir on the Belice grassroots movement before and after the earthquake. Such was their vision in the words of a participant to the march:

Lorenzo spoke of dams, roads, forests, schools; he spoke of social cellars, farms and cooperatives; he spoke of water in the houses and of work for everyone, and he said that emigration had to be stopped. And he spoke of figures, of the jobs that could and should be created in every town and village. (Barbera 2011: 16)

In the name of a “participatory development,” Dolci, Barbera, and the Belice peasant associations had backed the timid rising of local economies, and attempted to prevent excessive emigration by way of grassroots initiatives, such as the foundation of cooperative farming and wine production. A key result of these exertions was the possibility for farmers to pay back emphyteusis lands, thus providing a tangible and durable response to the old labor-exploitative latifundium system.¹³ With their towns completely razed, these people accepted the relief operations and the “temporary” housing with a strong desire to persist along their emancipatory pathway. This was particularly important as, a few weeks after the main shock, popular committees started to appear within the tent cities, mainly with the purpose of re-establishing town councils and returning the traumatized communities to their normal activities. In those early days, the work of the committees was also crucial to ensure a more equitable distribution of subsidies and relief supplies, which had soon fallen prey to the local political elites and their patronage networks. Over the years, these popular communities gave rise to an extraordinary mass protest movement against the regional and central governments that would last until 1976, and whose traces are still alive today in Sicilian grassroots organizations.¹⁴

But let us return to those days of mid-January 1968. Although the country's popular reaction had been of prompt and generous solidarity, the relief effort was, like in Irpinia, untimely and disorganized. As Judith Chubb underlines, in 1968 Italy had no coordinated civil protection system for responding to natural calamities: "Responsibility for the relief effort was fragmented [...], with no clear hierarchy or chain of command. As a result, in many cases, the efforts on the ground remained paralyzed while relief workers waited for orders from above" (Chubb 2002: 188; see also Alexander 2002). The homeless victims were housed in prefabricated barracks, small units (25–35 square meters) made of corrugated sheet metal. The slow pace of reconstruction—not a single house was built until 1976—makes these barracks a characteristic element of the Belice catastrophe-architecture. Intended to serve for one, maximum two, years, these shelters were used instead throughout nearly two decades. This happened in spite of their evident structural and functional limits: Constantly subject to humidity and mold, the barracks were cold in the winter, hot in the summer, and provided with running water only intermittently. Eight years after the seismic disaster, in 1976, they still housed 47,000 people; as they were finally decommissioned, in 1986, 5,000 people still lived in the barracks. Even today, the disposal of the asbestos here employed as a construction material is an additional side effect of this long mismanagement.

As for Irpinia, the Belice reconstruction is an example of bad governance. The intentions at first displayed by the central government were apparently good. The claims for social growth and territorial integration coming from the grassroots movements were also heeded: Accordingly, the rebirth of the Valley had to be a sort of laboratory for modern land reform and social organization, an experiment conducted under the lead of the major exponents of contemporary architecture and urban planning. But things did not go exactly this way, and this very participatory aspect was lost in the process. Instead of coupling the physical recovery of ruined towns with the formation of modern urban structures, providing investments in order to encourage social and economic development, the reconstruction consisted in a dissemination of often-uncoordinated interventions. Moreover, necessary facilities (such as the serviceable local railways destroyed by the quake) were not reinstated, whereas here, too, like in Irpinia, huge and disproportionately expensive highways were put up in the middle of nowhere, and often even left unfinished.¹⁵ Other

issues relate, as might be imagined, to the lack of a transparent and coherent institutional framework for the reconstruction process, the proliferation of special laws (the last Belice-related act passed in 1993), corruption and excessive bureaucracy: The slogan painted on a wrecked wall in Salaparuta, “Bureaucracy kills more than the earthquake,” is the perfect epitome of the situation.¹⁶ In 1978, ten years after the seismic event, the Belice reconstruction was in fact another national case. Here, too, as in Irpinia, a parliamentary inquiry commission evinced a thick web of criminal complicities and a whole series of dysfunctions on both the political and planning levels.

But the reconstruction’s key aspect is the way the destroyed towns were reshaped. In the majority of cases, historic centers, even when not irretrievably damaged, were demolished or abandoned to their fate of ruins. Baroque churches and Renaissance abbeys, monumental complexes and noble residences were bulldozed. A famous example was Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s superb summer residence, Palazzo Filangieri di Cutò in Santa Margherita di Belice, a “sort of eighteenth century Pompeii,” with its gorgeous garden, church and theater (Tomasi di Lampedusa 1988: 58–84). In some “hopeless” cases, the decision was made to rebuild the municipalities far from the old sites, in areas completely detached from the historic centers. Here, instead of the traditional forms and structural design, the architects and urban planners appointed by the government opted for new extensive settlements, with low houses and broad roads, generally oversized, and totally abstracted from the places’ historically consolidated rationales. In the long run, this has created an identity breach in the populations, which failed to integrate in the new landscape.¹⁷

Suddenly, in fact, the landscape was speaking another language. To the inhabitants, the codes embedded in this space had lost their semiotic efficacy. And so, as for Maurilia—the diachronically ambivalent town in Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*—the old Montevago, Poggioreale, Salaparuta, and Gibellina were radically reinvented. Here, too, the old and the new were “different cities” following one another “under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves” (Calvino 1997: 26).

In the re-founded towns, almost nothing reminded of the original structures, shaped by tufa houses or imperviously castled on steep hills. Nothing

except for their names, which instead of signaling continuity seemed to express a schizophrenic geography of disconnected identities, as in Maurilia:

At times even the names of the inhabitants remain the same, and their voices' accent, and also the features of their faces; but the gods who live beneath names and above places have gone off without a word and outsiders have settled in their place. (Calvino 1997: 26)

This condition of fragmented presence and "territorial anxiety," as De Martino would call it, has profoundly affected the inhabitants, who "suffered a collective experience of *estrangement*, having lost the perception of belonging to a recognized and recognizable place" (Cusumano 2003: 201). What had gone off, along with "the gods who live beneath names and above places," was a storied landscape, a densely inhabited world representing "the living history of the other in us" (De Martino 2002: 528). The choral dimension of that shared cosmos had created inter-subjective bonds across generations. There, "the familiar, the domestic, [meant] exactly this: go on, you are not alone, you are not the first and only one, but you are part of an immense marching number of people, which only for an infinitely limited part is [...] composed by the living" (De Martino 2002: 471). Missing the horizon of familiarity—*Heimlichkeit*—of their world, these displaced populations experienced the unfamiliar—*unheimlich*—sensation of being historically and spatially alienated, dispersed, alone.

A place of a radical urban and architectural modernization in search of a novel cultural self-representation, the New Gibellina is the symbol of the material-discursive watershed introduced by the earthquake. As Vincenzo Consolo writes, continuing his imaginary conversation with Nicola, the after-quake emigrant:

In the nude, raw terrain, in the desolated vagueness, in the dissolved memory [...], rises [...] the door to the [...] metaphysical city. [...] Now you [...] come out from a house of the new town, walk along the empty street, you look around misplaced. I meet you, I ask you. "I was born in Gibellina, aged 23" ... you answer. "What do I say?... My name is Nicola [...], I have worked in the quarries of Meirengen, near Basel. My wife and children are there, they don't want to come back to this village anymore. [...] I would like to see the other village." And so we go along this barren countryside, with rare trees, and rocks, and stubble, and solitary palms. We arrive to the hill, to the ruins leveled and covered with an immense concrete cast, a white sheet, a lime shroud. "I

don't know where my home was, where the castle, the square, the church ..."
(Consolo 1999: 129–31)

Suspended between the physical ruins of the old towns and the difficult, at times incomprehensible, narrative of the new ones, the Belice Valley has seemingly lost its gods, and a real identity bond with its pre-seismic life. And so, the offense of a radical loss will stay. But, as we shall see, the wounds of the country's body have found here other unexpected ways to be voiced.

Intermezzo. Wounds/signs: Belice, Irpinia

And when I say: "Show it! Show the wound that we have inflicted upon ourselves during the course of our development," it is because the only way to progress and become aware of it is to show it.

(J. Beuys, quoted in Borer 1997: 25)

Born innocent, events can turn culpable as certain human dynamics enter the scene. This is what makes earthquakes different from catastrophes. Over time, the plot of this conversion—which is nothing else but a bad combination of natural forces and political power—becomes more and more readable in the landscapes of wounds in which we, humans and nonhumans, are embedded. But, in order for these landscapes to convey renewed spatial codes, it is necessary that wounds be transformed into signs. They have to become interpretable and translatable; they have to become narratable, thus connecting the past and us *via that very event*. To reopen futures that seemed to be closed, these wounds must creatively intra-act with our imagination and with the places' life. They must be turned into art, into poetry, into stories. And so, the wound's ostension becomes the account of the inflicted violence, being at the same time a catharsis of this violence, a higher level where bounds of *familiarity* might be re-established within communities and with the land. If not a liberation, this shared attempt is a necessary act of resistance.

In spite of all the incongruous practices of "reconstruction," Gibellina is one of these acts. It is so, because the apparent fracture with the past is not (or at least not only) the outcome of uncoordinated land planning and uncontrolled building speculation, as occurred elsewhere in Belice, but the result of a project and of

a cultural vision. With its dramatic and quasi-paradoxical radicalism, Gibellina embodies a double narrative, one entailing both memory and project. This materializes in a town that, settled in a new space and imbued with a completely different urban syntax, has used contemporary art to shape a new identity and to creatively reinforce its link to the past. The case of Gibellina is unique. With an unparalleled mobilization of Italian and international intellectuals, artists, writers, and musicians—from Leonardo Sciascia and Renato Guttuso to Joseph Beuys and John Cage—the mayor Ludovico Corrao organized, at the end of the 1970s, Gibellina's transfiguration into a museum-city for postmodern art and "one of the greatest workshops of architecture of the post-war period" (Oddo 2003: 168). Following this vision, Gibellina's art had not only to be available in a civic museum (opened in 1980), housing a permanent collection of more than 1,800 works in paintings, graphics, and sculptures (see Pes and Bonifacio 2003), but artworks had to be disseminated across the entire town and its surroundings. Here, again, paintings, sculptures, and architectural monuments, such as Francesco Venezia's *Garden*, the *Chemist's House* and the *Squares System* by Franco Purini and Laura Hermes, *Belice's Door* by Pietro Consagra, Arnaldo Pomodoro's *Plough*. And so, the reconstruction became an effort to convert a dying community into the subject of an avant-garde experiment, whose symbol should have been Joseph Beuys's planned *Sacred Wood*, an oak thicket that had to be planted on the area of the former barrack-town and destined to grow and increase over time, like his coeval *7000 Oaks* project in Kassel.

Debated and debatable in many respects, Gibellina's "model" has never been exempt from criticism.¹⁸ Accusations mostly address the abstractness of the new architectural and urban structures: Suspended between the material ruins of the old town and the difficult narrative of the novel one, the New Gibellina often conveys a feeling of "territorial anxiety." Objectively, some creations and urban structures (for example, the above-mentioned *Squares System* or Quaroni's *Chiesa Madre*) seem to overindulge in the "experimental" side of the project, often leading to a prevalence of cement over green spaces, and most of all appearing dramatically in conflict with this ancient community's traditional self-representations and small-scale lifestyles. This was the picture behind Vincenzo Consolo's polemical portrait of the "metaphysical city," oozing "broad roads, ramps, stairways, terraces, porticos, loggias, deserted amphitheatres, [...] cubes, spheres, cones, cylinders, stone

gardens, iron squiggles, marble doors [...], arcane alphabets” (Consolo 1999: 129). Considering Consolo’s active contribution to the resurrection of the town gives, however, a measure of the prevalent ambivalence toward the New Gibellina. In fact, apart from legitimate censures and problematic re-inhabitation, the project behind this coveted “cultural rebirth” (Oddo 2003: 174) was ambitious and amazing in many ways: By crafting a physical site for “Civil Art from which the entire country could benefit” (Isgrò 1993: 12), Ludovico Corrao—more or less felicitously in practice—was envisioning for Gibellina both an apocalypse and an “anthropological exorcism.”

But Gibellina’s real masterpiece—the reason why this town will always be there as a crystallized picture of the way nature and culture can be cyclically stratified—is Alberto Burri’s *Cretto*. Created between 1985 and 1989 by completely leveling out and then covering the remains of the deserted medieval village with an evocative cast of white concrete, the *Cretto* perfectly preserves the original road layout of Gibellina’s plan. The *Cretto* (a “cracked surface”—one of Burri’s favorite motifs) is “the first earthquake monument in the Mediterranean,” a quasi-spectral artwork that “provocatively jolts our conscience into perceiving an almost tangible earthquake, carved into that landscape” (Guidoboni 2010: 52). Following Corrao’s invitation to pay homage to the extinct town, Burri (1915–95)—an artist whose whole aesthetics entails an interpretation, both conceptual and physical, of materiality—captured with its cast Gibellina’s lost voice, turning its silence into a solid white cry, incorporated as an image and as a sign in the enduring life of the western-Sicilian ecosystem. “The *Cretto* is beautiful,” writes Carola Susani:

In silence, abandoned on a hill that changes its colors with the seasons, it talks of the human condition, of violence—the one we carry out and the one that overwhelms us; it talks about time and about how it stops all of a sudden, it is like a sort of wholly glorious impetus. (Susani 2008: 25)

In this “glorious impetus,” the *Cretto* is not simply beautiful, but sublime. It is, as Jeffrey Cohen would say, “inhuman”: Completely alien, and yet elementally intimate to us.¹⁹

The transfiguration of the old Gibellina into one of the world’s largest works of land art, frozen in time, visible from space,—is a material-semiotic translation of this event into a universal experience. The event here is not to be intended as the seism, but as the infinite, irredeemable loss implied by (and

Untitled (2007). Gibellina. Il *Grande Cretto* di Burri. Courtesy of Mario Macaluso.

subsequent to) it. In its storied corporeality, Gibellina is now the semiotic embodiment of loss *per se*, a house forever mirroring its emptiness in the surrounding world.

As for the new town, numerous and diverse have been the polemics about this gigantic concrete memorial, left unfinished by his author and now finally nearing completion. Many critical voices have lamented the literal erasure of the old Gibellina from the physical map of the Belice Valley. What cannot be left unspoken, however, is that Gibellina's ruins were damaged beyond repair. This non-recoverability was Alberto Burri's source of inspiration, as he first visited the site. But the undeniable outcome of this artistic metamorphosis is that Gibellina is now not merely a crucial locus of Belice's emotional geography, but a symbol. Now, it is not just an irreplaceable element in the material memory of the Belice Valley, but a figure of the post-traumatic narrative of our natural-cultural collective. Besides its material presence, therefore, Gibellina now has new immaterial, metaphorical meanings. Transcending the mere physicality of concrete cast and devastated land, it is no longer a mere *thing*, but a relation between a physical event and its idea: Its significance finally

“erases the materialist/idealist opposition” (Wheeler 2014: 404). It is hardly imaginable that a restoration work could have given to this site the symbolic power and arresting expressiveness it now possesses.

And the *Cretto* is alive. With performances of theater, music, poetry, and art, the “Oresteia” Festival that takes place almost every year in this very “earthquake monument” testifies to a will to keep the narrative flow open in multiple directions.²⁰ As the playwright and visual artist Emilio Isgrò has insightfully noted, “[p]robably, without theater, the people of Gibellina would have never been able to see themselves amid the rubble, and perhaps they would have never acted” (Isgrò 1993: 13). Only via its own representation has it become possible to turn tragedy “into a real force.” This, concludes Isgrò, “was clearly the result of a need, and not of [...] purely aesthetical experimentalism, unable to become a political act” (Isgrò 1993: 13).

Performed here, these theatrical activities entail a bond of continuity not simply with the past, but with the dead, with the “former” world. In this respect, the artistic events resemble the ancient rites officiated at the ancestors’ burial sites. Transfigured as an artwork and a proscenium for representing itself, Gibellina has possibly become abode for “the gods who live beneath names and above places,” and who had apparently “gone off” the reconstructed town. It is therefore even more scandalous for this site to be periodically exposed to the risk of being abandoned to its elemental decline as a result of chronic lack of governmental funds and, one must add, a sort of inexorable indifference shown by the authorities called to preserve and valorize such important parts of our historical heritage. In this, Gibellina’s *Cretto* is sharing the sad and unbelievable fate of many world-famous Italian monumental sites, including Pompeii.

Similarly, even though not as powerfully in terms of extension and impact on the landscape, contemporary art has also contributed to the process of “semiotization” of the wounds left by the Irpinia’s earthquake. I refer here to an extraordinary art collection titled *Terrae Motus*, since 1992 permanently located in the Royal Palace of Caserta. One of the “most original and revolutionary collections of the 20th century” (Guccione 2001: 13), *Terrae Motus* consists of seventy-one works by sixty-seven of the greatest contemporary artists, some of whom were also actively involved in the Gibellina project. Their names include Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol, Anselm Kiefer,

Luciano Fabro, Tony Cragg, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Keith Haring, Enzo Cucchi, Robert Rauschenberg, Jannis Kounellis, Bertrand Lavier, Robert Mapplethorpe, Julião Sarmiento, Mario Schifano, Otto Muehl, Cy Twombly, and Emilio Vedova. Elaborating on the intra-action between art and the every-day life of the seismic aftermaths, *Terrae Motus* put together artists from different generations, experiences and aesthetic languages, proposing “an idea of art as being at once the expression of individual poetics and collective participation” (Guccione 2001: 13). Invited by Lucio Amelio (1931–94), an *engagé* intellectual and patron of an avant-garde art gallery in Naples, the exhibit was the result of a previously open conversation between artists, transformed by the earthquake in a creative polyphony. As Amelio recollected in the documentary *Lucio Amelio/Terrae Motus*, shot in 1993 by Mario Martone, “the process leading to *Terrae Motus* had already started many years earlier in my gallery [...]. As the quake hit with its brutal force, our commitment became more intense. It was as if the fissure between art and society [...] had become dramatically visible” (quoted in Guccione 2001: 13).

Connecting artistic imagination with telluric violence, the concept behind the Amelio collection was similar to the one animating Gibellina’s open-air museum, namely, that of proving the potentialities of contemporary art as a constructive tool for a building civil narratives of resistance. As Angela Tecce has suggested, “in the stubborn will to physically bring the artists, and not simply their creations, to Naples” Amelio wanted to break “the sense of ‘colonization’” implied in the importing of already made artworks (Tecce 2001: 28). Art (and artists) had to be present on the spot, flowing from the same cracked soil, the same existential ruin. And so, interfering with the disrupted land, these creative presences were performing a ritual of mutual belonging between the narratives conveyed by art and those expressed by the earth.

Dedicated to imagining the Irpinia quake, the *Terrae Motus* artworks are *apocalyptic* *oeuvres*. In a meta-historical sense, in fact, they *reveal* the intimate and universal aspects and voices conjured up by the earthquake. Joseph Beuys was one of the first to respond to Amelio’s call. The opening work of the exhibit, his *Terremoto in Palazzo* (*Earthquake in Palace*) is an assemblage of domestic tools and objects, which become the estranged setting for a famous performance: Nestled under a table, the artist unrolled a long paper ribbon, mimicking the seismographic tape of the main shock.

Here, in typical Beuys style, not only does the artist become himself an instrument (in our case, a seismographer) apt to record the perturbed life of things, but these very common objects are “lifted up” (*aufgehoben*) to an unsuspected universality, while at the same time retaining the meaning of their irreducible singularity: that of being fragile, exposed, open to the world. Also extremely telling, Andy Warhol’s *Fate presto* (*Hurry Up*) is a series of three huge serigraphic pictures (270 × 200 centimeters) reproducing the first page of Naples’ newspaper *Il Mattino* as it came out on November 26, 1980. Magnified, multiplied, and repeated in metallic black-and-white variations, the Italian President Sandro Pertini’s call for rescue operations is here frozen into a severe echo, loaded with a tragic force which is certainly uncommon to pop-art oeuvres. Finally, Luciano Fabro’s *Italia Porta* (*Italy Door*) is an upside-down Italy (one of this artist’s tropes), which *opens* and *leads* to a reversed mirror-reality. Like Burri’s *Cretto*, which can well be taken as the larger body of the nation solidified into a stone shroud, Fabro’s double overturned Italy is the sign that this country has lost connection with its cliché-imagery of “beautiful land.” The national mind and body have here split and metamorphosed into two uncanny alter egos.

I have chosen these three examples to accentuate the intellectual climate underlying the *Terrae Motus* collection and the cross-national appropriation of this desperately local wound. International artists came to Naples in order to enable the affected territory to perform its apocalypse, namely, to show that wound, to articulate it as a sign. To attain the same goal, Franco Arminio, whom we have already encountered elsewhere in these pages, adopts a complementary strategy. Eastern Irpinia, and his town Bisaccia in particular, become the emanating fulcrum for a philosophy of places, which he calls “*paesologia*” (coarsely translatable as “placeology”). Through a narrative and poetic obsession with marginal towns and villages, all bordering some catastrophe’s “crater,” Arminio aims at creating an ethical and poetic imagination of both quake and places, an emotionally “moved geography” (Arminio 2013) that connects on one map all the “bone lands” of Italy. But the kind of catastrophe to which he draws attention is not only the huge catastrophic event. It is, rather, the eventfulness of little things, of stonewalls and shovels, of emptied squares and of people who are literally “*spaesati*,” *dis-placed* and *place-less*. This implies porosity between landscape and style. Like the towns

and things he encounters, his writing is in fact “a crumbled writing,” and the writer himself is in a constant tension of becoming one with what is around him—of becoming rubble, a feral animal, an elemental presence. Constantly piercing the boundaries between outside and inside, the landscape is here a densely physical creative space, where “earth and flesh are almost mingled, and the body becomes landscape, and the landscape is embodied” (Arminio 2011: 11).

To be rigorous, the Anglicized term “placeology” does not completely render the sense of this “discipline” “midway between ethnology and poetry,” as Arminio defines it (Arminio 2011: 10). *Paese* in Italian means “country,” “land,” but it can also mean “village,” “small town.” It is somehow equivalent to the French *pays*, and it condenses both the idea of a larger national entity and of smaller realities, dislocated from the center. It might carry—and it usually does—an emotional connotation, a sense of belonging, but also one of enclosure, of insularity. All these meanings are present in Arminio’s *paesologia*, something in which the phenomenology of peripheral realities and of their uncertain natural-cultural borders might parallel the sense of resilient hybrid presences characterizing Gilles Clément’s “third landscape” or Antoine Picon’s “anxious landscapes.”²¹ Lost and dispersed amid a voracious history, Arminio’s resilient landscape is populated by stones and empty squares, by weeds and rusty tools, by abandoned things glinting with unexpected narrative power. But, more than merely mapping such landscape, *paesologia* is a way to keep one’s eye and hands and feet and mind rooted on site. It is a way to preserve the material horizon of domestic intimacy, averting these roots from a fatal *déracinement*. And so, in an implicit dialogue with Ernesto De Martino, Arminio understands that the end of places and landscapes is the materializing of the “permanent anthropological risk” of not being-there “in any possible cultural world” (De Martino 2002: 219). The fading of this signifying horizon is the apocalypse. Therefore, *paesologia* is a medium intended to create an imagination, a language, and a system of signs for the wounds left in the landscape by both the earthquake and “the course of our development,” as Beuys says.

This attitude does not involve an idealization of ruins, but it is rather a way to feel the pulse to the hidden places, to keep them by the hand, creating a mutual bond of stories, affection, and trust. “Placeology,” Arminio writes, “is

a form of intimate resistance” (Arminio 2011: 11). But, however intimate, this resistance is active and political: “There is discomfort, there is loneliness, but there is beauty, too. From here we have to start, from making good use of our ruins” (Arminio 2011: 80).

Using Irpinia as leverage to disclose wider horizons, Arminio shows how the loss of landscape and land produces a circulation of ideas and feelings of identity and identification, creating bonds of poetic solidarity across catastrophes. He will also be present in L’Aquila to witness the seismic aftermaths. The syllogism is simple: The tie connecting people and places was, in Irpinia and elsewhere, a vital one. If these places are turned into non-places, then these people become non-people, paradoxical organisms without a bio-cultural memory of their environment. A “placeological” poetry is nothing more than the attempt to reconstruct all these loosened ties.

Faced with the vanishing of places, important discourses such as that about the Anthropocene seem therefore at once necessary and desperately abstract. The entanglement of agencies revealed by such calamities refers in fact not only to the way humans, generally considered, modify the earth’s bio-geo-chemical cycles, but also to the way, in some regions of the planet, some humans are themselves trapped in these cycles *and* in the cycles of political discourses, social discrimination, thus failing to preserve their citizenship rights and their cultural identity. Poetry and art are the voices left to speak about (and from) this apparent desert. Here, another important message of resistance is that of a creative utopia, one which contemporary art and a minimalistic poetry of places have interpreted without awe, and maybe with the very sense of their own fragility. And so, maybe the only possible creative response to these cataclysms is an art and a poetry of limit, an art and poetry that are themselves both fragment and universe, and that do not fear to house lizards and spontaneous vegetation, being instead able to show their own cracks, their own wounds.

In his book *The Fragility of Things*, the political philosopher William Connolly has observed that the vision we have to develop when confronted with disasters—whether earthquakes, tsunamis, and other events in which the combination of human and nonhuman elements is inextricable—is not that of a superior ontological necessity, but rather that of an unrelenting reaction, an ethical-cultural militancy in favor of the acknowledgment of such fragility (Connolly

2013). The world of places and people is fragile, but it is also desperately resilient. Making good use of our ruins is a revolutionary act of resistance. At least, until something or someone comes and claims their rights on these ruins.

III. L'Aquila, 2009

The Dome Square is the one that we saw so many times on television, at the time of the media occupation of the city by Berlusconi and his troops: a sort of Normandy landing ordered to convince Italians that they are governed by a good and omnipotent man. [...] The political use of ruins was at its height.

(Arminio 2013: 14)

In a bizarre coincidence, all the earthquakes in our narrative happened at night. It was at night, April 6, 2009, at 3.32 a.m., when the ancient city of L'Aquila, founded in the thirteenth century on a territory populated since the pre-Roman era, fell under a seismic shock of magnitude 5.8 on the Richter Scale. The quake, which extended to a large portion of the Abruzzo region, caused 309 human casualties and injured over 1,500 people. The homeless were some 65,000.²²

L'Aquila's story has several points in common with that of the previous earthquakes. Besides the structural antiquity or poor construction quality of the destroyed buildings, all three events display the "repeating pattern" in Italy's seismic history, namely, that "each strong quake is followed by a long, drawn-out, and irresponsible aftermath" (Guidoboni 2010: 51). The huge dissipation of public resources, short-circuiting in the chain of responsibilities, corruption and delays in the reconstruction process, and an ensuing fragmentation in the socio-territorial fabric are constant elements in this pattern. Another important element has to be kept in mind, namely, that all three earthquakes hit the South. Although geographically in Central Italy, Abruzzo, in fact, has always been historically considered a southern region, being until 1861 part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

There are also profound dissimilarities, though, between our cases in point. Unlike Belice and Irpinia, L'Aquila was not an obscure corner in a residual

pre-historic Italy. Quite the opposite: It was one of the country's jewels, oozing with artworks and splendid architecture, and bordering the sublime ecological beauties of the Gran Sasso National Park. A university town, L'Aquila was a pulsating center for arts, economy, and culture, housing more than 77,000 residents, 27,000 of whom were national and international students (Mastropaolo 2010: 9–10). Another difference is that the calamity did not take the population completely by surprise. That earthquakes are unpredictable is certainly a cornerstone of seismology (see e.g. Hough 2009). But it is also true that seismic swarms, especially in seismic zones, are likely to culminate in big tremors, and in L'Aquila an intense and worrying seismic swarm, begun in December 2008, had preceded the main shock. The comparison with Belice, where almost everything uncommon, from barking dogs to gas clouds, became an alarming sign, is tragically ironic. In L'Aquila, forty-one years later, the seismographers' alarms were not given much importance. Deliberately ignoring these alarms and the region's geological history and features, the Seismic Risk Committee and the Civil Protection Department, all controlled by the government, decided indeed to "cure" the population's anxiety with periodical "tranquillizing" communications. A prudential attitude, instead of a systematic downplaying of the risk, could have saved many lives, as the magistrates also pinned down in 2012 with an unprecedented sentence.²³

But the very gist of L'Aquila's story, the one where the apparent analogies yawn in a gulf of difference, is in the way the quake was used to transform the city into a postmodern laboratory for pushing the "hybridization of democracy and authoritarianism" (Mastropaolo 2010: 26) further than ever before. Patrolled by military forces and seized by TV shows, the earthquake-hit communities experienced new bio-political forms of social control. In a city transformed by the media into an "exercise room to display the efficiency of the Government" (Arminio 2011: 309), we are finally confronted with "the political use of ruins at its height," as Franco Arminio noted after having repeatedly visited L'Aquila (Arminio 2013: 14). This is also connected to another important difference: By means of art, of poetry, or of disputable land planning and construction works, Belice and Irpinia "arose" from their rubbles. L'Aquila, in turn, remains desperately frozen in that night of 2009, its historic palaces and magnificent churches, its very breathing urban fabric missing every day a chance to return to life.

It is not easy to tell the story of L'Aquila's quake. The combination of politics, social agony, and the city's persistent ruin, and most of all the fact that its aftermaths continue to this day, do not favor lucid accounts. Many books, documentaries, and reportages, however, have attempted to tell the wreck of the city, and all of them disclose aspects of this complex and painful story. They talk about Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's dictatorial management of the emergency and of the absolute power exercised by the government in conjunction with the Civil Protection Department, its operative *longa manus*. They talk of the "largest evacuation in postwar Italian history," with "33,000 people gathered in more than one hundred camps, and the remaining part of the population (nearly 30,000) dislocated in hotels on the coast" (Sirolli 2012: 62). They talk of the way citizens were, for interminable months, practically held hostage in the tent cities, forced to obey a surreal curfew, controlled in every move, and prevented from speaking with reporters or with simple "outsiders." They talk of soldiers, with weapons and riot gear, patrolling the entrance of camps and overseeing lunch distribution. They talk about the practice of turning the seism into a show, culminating in the impromptu decision to move the 2009 G8 summit from a luxury location in Sardinia to L'Aquila's smashed historic center, with an incredible waste of public money. They talk of "the Berlusconi model" and of his ghostly "New Towns," a "centrifugal delirium" made of "a caged heart and many scattered limbs" (Arminio 2011: 16), increasing logistical problems, traffic congestion, and personal isolation. They talk of his C.A.S.E.—a captivating acronym for "eco-friendly, anti-seismic compounds," with the double meaning of "homes," *case* in Italian—a joint occupation of a public soil and a private semantic field, here used to designate nineteen pre-fabricated residential agglomerations for 15,000 people, cut off from any urban contexts and services, served with a bottle of "Italian spumante" in the fridge and postcard bearing greetings from the Prime Minister on the table. They talk of these "houses" built on agricultural ground, and even in some strictly protected zones of the Gran Sasso National Park—"houses" presented as a benevolent concession from a sovereign power and materializing overnight as the ultimate offense to a land, a landscape, and a citizenry now definitively relegated to a second-rank role in the country's political life. They talk of the "economic shock therapy" à la Naomi Klein, inflicted on citizens

“forced [...] into a passive role with no control over their lives,” “expelled” from society,” infantilized, delegitimized (Hajek 2013: 630). They talk of the political powers’ disdained reactions in front of the citizens’ requests for more participative decision-making processes, and of the population’s disconcerted pain as police investigations revealed the scandals underlying the whole (mis)management of the catastrophe. They talk about individuals whose existence has been completely torn apart not by the seismic event per se, but by the top-down programmed community displacement—“*spaesamento*,” De Martino would name it—a missed social inclusion, culminating in uprooting, abandonment, and loss. They talk about the fact that here, after the quake, the consumption of psycho-pharmaceutical drugs as well as the selling of PlayStations has increased to unmatched levels.

They talk about all these things and many, many more. But the major narrative about L’Aquila’s earthquake is told by its rubble abandoned in the streets, the collapsing palaces suffocated by disproportionate, outrageously costly, and rapidly rusty scaffoldings. Because today, October 14, 2014, all this ruin is still there. And so, there is nothing to add. *This* is L’Aquila’s wound. And this wound is open, still waiting to become a sign.

In this narrative suspension, and not merely in the overwhelming biopolitical aspects, lies the real difference between L’Aquila’s story and that of the previous two quakes.²⁴ In Irpinia and Belice—although painful, slow, and fragmented—a creative-evolutionary shift from wounds to signs took place; in L’Aquila, in turn, this very shift is still missing. Certainly, L’Aquila’s voice is alive in earthquake victims’ movements and community protests, in blogs, videos, in the vibrating denunciations of TV shows (for example, Roberto Saviano’s *Vieni via con me*), in environmentalist essays, manifestos, calls for public responsibility issued by scholars and public intellectuals, in urban narratives.²⁵ It has also been the subject of Sabina Guzzanti’s impressive political documentary *Draquila: L’Italia che trema* (*Draquila: Italy Trembles*, 2010), in which tragedy and satire, as it often occurs in the works of this *engagée* artist, are coupled in order to dismantle the lethal metanarrative of magnanimity and power behind Berlusconi’s C.A.S.E. and the rhetoric about the government’s compassionate and proficient intervention. Backed by the media, these rhetorical forms and metanarratives covered indeed undisputable states of things, facts solidly proved by the post-quake life conditions of L’Aquila people

as well as by justice investigations and sociological studies: For example, that abandoning the historic city was a deliberate choice meant to favor new (and less democratic) building developments, or that the life in the tent cities was a form of psycho-physical coercion, and that the population was indeed being subjected to a “soft form of institutionalization” (Sirolli 2012). With more effective words, this is something that in *Draquila* a professor at L’Aquila University labels “dictatorship of shit”—a regime that does not materially kill or torture citizens, but strongly diminishes their capacity to dissent.

Works like Guzzanti’s film are important, and they have played indeed a crucial socio-therapeutic function on the population. After years of persisting inertia, however, this function has been superseded by a deeper sense of frustration. In L’Aquila, new ruins are visible alongside those created by the earthquake. These ruins do not strike only the historic center, but also the New Towns and the C.A.S.E., which, after absorbing a huge part of the public money earmarked for the seismic “emergency,” started to deteriorate soon after their fabrication.

But, if satire is a soothing cure, I would like to conclude this narrative with another semiotic attempt, in which I see both a symbol and an ethical claim. The director of photography of Guzzanti’s film was Mario Amura. Born in 1973, Amura was raised at the foothills of an active volcano, which he photographs every New Year’s Day and which is the same one whose awakening I dreaded that night of November 1980. He reached L’Aquila the day after the first tremor. With his camera, he was there to see and to document, as he had done many times before, in Naples as well as in Bosnia, in India as well as in rural China or Latin America. Mario has a secret. Whenever he takes his pictures, he becomes invisible. He is able to shoot hundreds of photos and remain completely unnoticed, like a placard on a wall or a lamppost at a street corner. I have never understood how he can do so, but maybe this is the key of art-making—being at once invisible and yet unquestionably there, compressing your own presence and voice in order to allow a magnified expression of the world around you. Something like this, the Jewish mystic Isaac Luria saw in the sixteenth century, happens to God at the moment of creation.

In L’Aquila, however, the photographer’s self-hiding was really hard, and for a simple reason: The access to the disaster scene was strictly prohibited

to unauthorized people. Therefore, in order to secretly continue his visual narrative, Amura had to wear the uniform of the volunteers and help the relief operations. He took his pictures while building tents and electrical systems, staying himself in makeshift quarters and sleeping in his car. The photos of those early few days number hundreds, and it has been hard to select the images you see in these pages. But the three you have in front of you seemed to be particularly telling about the wounds and beings exposed by this local apocalypse. More precisely, they tell us that this is a radial apocalypse, one which encapsulates in one shot humans, nonhumans, and things.

In the first picture, the sheet suspended from the balcony tells us of a sleep suddenly turned into a surreal awakening, and of how subtle is the border that separates a dream from a trauma, safety from defenselessness, a presence from an absence, a bedroom from a desert. But this sheet is also a sign of demise, and of a reality that surrenders: Knotted there, on that wrecked balcony, it is a white flag. The second picture is that of a dog near a fallen cross, at a church's entrance. Turning her back to the cross, the distressed animal is an unintentional *agnus dei* looking for food, family, or a shelter. Forcing us to diffract the events into a creaturely prism, this dog condenses the more-than-human dimension of the catastrophe, echoing Simone Weil's call to compassion: "[C]ompassion for every creature, because it is far from the Good. Infinitely far. Abandoned. God abandons our entire being—flesh, blood, sensibility, intelligence, love—to the pitiless necessity of matter" (Weil 1998: 142).

But in the last picture the epiphany is complete. From the shapeless remains of what used to be the students' house, a university dormitory almost entirely destroyed by the quake, firemen—they themselves an essential part of this weird assemblage of humans and ruins—dig up a personal ID, a picture in the picture. And so, here, too, art triggers turbulence. The photographer's eyes become instrumental for the hidden wounds to become visible. It is via these eyes that what was or had been buried now has a face and returns our gaze.

Untitled. L'Aquila, 2009. Courtesy of Mario Amura.

Untitled. L'Aquila, 2009. Courtesy of Mario Amura.

Untitled. L'Aquila, 2009. Courtesy of Mario Amura.

An ending

The central point, however, remains this one, namely, to live up to the challenge, to re-model ever again, via the value-generating work, the domesticity of the world.

(De Martino 2002: 479)

How does one recover from all these losses? Many of them are irredeemable. In the majority of cases, it is materially impossible to restore broken balances, to bring back to life ancient places that do not exist anymore, or to undo the damages that wreaked havoc in the landscapes, social ecologies, biomes, and single existences affected by the quake. We live, in many senses, in the constant condition of being victims. We—a larger “we,” referring to the people who lost their homes and status, to the citizens who lost important pieces of their natural-cultural heritage, to the living beings that lost their habitats—are all victims of these earthquakes, no matter whether we are from Irpinia, Sicily, L'Aquila, San Francisco, Turkey, or Lisbon. *We, landscape*, carry the wounds of these shocking events and of their aftermaths on our body politic, and will do so indefinitely.

For this very reason, we ought to build a cognitive repository for these wounds, and retain the geo-semiotic memory of these events. To do so, we ought to learn to read these wounds in the landscape, since it is there that we can first see signs of violence, and try to better recognize the layers of such violence. Even if this violence started underground, its signs emerge in urban sprawl and anti-social architectures, as well as in other concrete forms hurting our collective. As *landscape*, we carry these wounds on our own body.

Whether human or not, every thing is body, and, whether personal or impersonal, every thing is political. Earthquake narratives teach us that this intermingling of personal and impersonal is what is really at stake in our ecological world of natures, landscapes, and environments. The way artistic or poetic creativity can respond to this mixture of agencies is exemplary. In Irpinia, Arminio looks for the traces of disappearing places. His invented discipline, *paesologia*, in its mingling of earth and flesh as bio-semiotic and narrative agencies, is a real blend of personal and impersonal voices, a *Spoon River* of places and things. The artists of the *Terrae Motus* exhibit, on the other hand, counter the catastrophe by introducing new turbulences in our natural-cultural collective. Participating in the creativity of worldly dynamics, they enter the cracking surface of things, and insert in the disorder of nature and society “a further act of disorder, this time organized according to the formal laws that rule [the art’s] particular order” (Bonito Oliva 2001: 227). In this way, art, like an unexpected “You,” “forces the world to return its gaze” (Bonito Oliva 2001: 227–8).

The semiotic addition of these artworks to the geo-social memory of the quake creates new unpredicted emergences. This is even more perceptible in the landscape of Gibellina. Gibellina, both the old village and the new town, is the sign of a fracture and of turbulence. In their being so “allergenic” and so hard to metabolize for the body of this territory, the contemporary artworks disseminated in the new landscape are meant to become themselves fractures and turbulence in a reality that carries in its bodies the signs of hurt and disruption. The reality of Gibellina—another *figure* of the “eternal Casamicciola” that is engrained in all of Italy’s catastrophe narratives—is a broken, interrupted reality. The imposed, ghostly, petrified, and almost post-geological silence of Burri’s *Cretto* is a restitution of semiotic capacity to *us* landscape. The *Cretto* is a material narrative in which the personal and the impersonal finally melt,

becoming part of our ecology of mind. In the fissured lunar surface of this vast artwork, the land is dramatically free to show its wounds. These wounds, however, are not intended as *singular* wounds, wounds whose echo is now lost in the distance of time, but they stand here as universal categories. Via its mere presence, the *Cretto* shows that the land—every land—has wounds. Burri's work becomes therefore a fusion of singular and plural, personal and impersonal; a meld of mercy and indifference, a new non-modern sublime and an a-temporal setting where one can imagine Leopardi's Nature resting in her in coolness side by side with the "immense marching number" of all past lives. A truly apocalyptic artwork, Burri's *Cretto* is the embodied category of geo-social wounds, of all the wounds of our Anthropocene collective.

This move from wound to sign has not occurred in L'Aquila. With its culpable abandonment and its ruins, L'Aquila is slowly becoming another figure in the universal inventory of underground voices. Waiting for the liberation of these voices buried underneath rubble and political recklessness, however, Mario Amura's photography pursues ways to build a provisional bridge of meaning. Using the quake to cross the boundaries separating living beings and things, houses and waste, places and pieces, the irredeemable dismay of a dog and that of a fireman, Amura provides us with a temporary semiotic catalogue of the encounters between the personal and the impersonal. In the ethical narrative arising under our eyes, the personal becomes impersonal and vice versa; they are both characters in the story.

And so, the picture of the ID dug out of the rubble adds one last, revealing tile to the apocalypse. On this shredded piece of paper held by the firemen's hands, we see a face, and all at once we see the personal and the impersonal converge. All of a sudden, this human face becomes a sign of what has been defaced. Like the city and the entire reality around it, this face claims to be called by name, it claims to be semiotically saved, to be embodied in the im/material narrative of memory. When this face emerges from the rubble, L'Aquila's wound is wide open. L'Aquila is its own wound, and this face is its epiphany.

Emmanuel Levinas has suggested that the other's face—"le visage d'autrui"—carries an unremitting appellation: An appellation to quit violence, to quit absolutisms, to quit any self-centered master narrative. Always and again, the other's face is addressing us. Manifested in that student's face, L'Aquila is still waiting to be recognized. But looking this face squarely in the eyes is the first

step to liberate the voices and the hurt hidden under the rubble of all “natural” catastrophes. Nature, if it exists, might be indifferent or cruel, like Leopardi’s gigantic seated lady in a deserted Iceland, or like the idealists’ fierce antithesis of Mind. But natureculture—the world, of which we are and in which we dwell—has instead to be minding and compassionate. It has to dig us—all of us—out of the rubble, and let us show our wounds. It has to bring us out there in the open, point out the stars, call us by name.

Notes

- 1 Unlike the Richter scale, which determines *magnitude* from the logarithm of the amplitude of waves recorded by seismographs, the Mercalli-Cancani-Sieberg (MCS) Scale is used in Italy to measure the *intensity* of a seism based on its effects on the built environment. In the United States, the Modified Mercalli Intensity Scale is used as an adaptation of the MCS Scale (see https://scits.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/277.full_.pdf [accessed June 17, 2015]). My source about the estimated magnitude and intensity of the earthquakes I discuss in this chapter is Rovida et al. 2011 (also available at <http://emidius.mi.ingv.it/CPTI11/> [accessed June 17, 2015]). All the seismological data provided here have been revised by Dr. Nicola Alessandro Pino of the Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia. I am grateful to him for his friendly help and meticulous reading.
- 2 On this, see also Rigby 2015. Very interesting discussions on the sociological aspects of these emergences are collected in Saitta 2015.
- 3 The official figures of earthquake victims were 2,735 dead, 8,848 injured, and 280,000 homeless, 50,000 of which in the city of Naples. See Chubb 2002: 214.
- 4 On Rossi Doria (1905–88), see Bevilacqua 1990; Misiani 2010.
- 5 *Viaggio nel cratere, A Trip into the Crater* (2003) is the title of one of Arminio’s books expressly devoted to the Irpinia quake. See also Ventura 2015.
- 6 “Between 1981 and 1991, [...] Irpinia seemed to be able to drag, alone, the declining economy of the neighboring provinces. Then, everything stopped. At the end of the decade, the Avellino province found itself with 10,000 inhabitants less and percentages of depopulation reaching, in some areas [...] the 30 per cent of the residents” (Erbani 2003: 70). On this point, see also Vitellio 2009: 50–4.

- 7 The use of extraordinary legislation is not, of course, a novelty. In a juridical encyclopedia (entry “earthquake”) dating to the end of the nineteenth century, this extraordinariness is described as follows: “[E]arthquake legislation is a whole blossoming of special magistrates, following in this the old trend [...] of fragmenting power as much as possible in order to allow larger systems of patronage” (Fulci 1922: 670).
- 8 On the bonds between criminal business and politics after the Irpinia earthquake, see for example Legambiente 2000; Behan 2002: 85–105.
- 9 See Susani 2008: 28; Barbera 2011: 19–20.
- 10 This testimony is available online on *Guida Sicilia*: <http://www.guidasicilia.it/ita/main/news/index.jsp?IDNews=29093#sthash.xNX26dmD.dpuf> (accessed September 23, 2014).
- 11 On this story of mass migration and on its influence on the remaining communities, also in terms of social struggles, see Barbera 2011.
- 12 Called the “Italian Gandhi” for his nonviolent engagement in socio-political struggles, Danilo Dolci (1924–97) is one of the foremost figures of the twentieth-century Italian social and environmental activism. A short selection of his prolific work translated into English is available in Barron and Re 2003: 283–9.
- 13 Emphyteusis denotes “a Roman and civil law contract by which a grant is made of a right either perpetual or for a long period to the possession and enjoyment of originally agricultural land subject to the keeping of the land in cultivation or from depreciation, the payment of a fixed annual rent, and some other conditions; also: the heritable and alienable right so granted or the tenure by which it is held” (Merriam-Webster online Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com> [accessed December 17, 2014]).
For purposes similar to those described here, another important center, the CRESM (Centro di ricerche economiche e sociali per il Meridione [Economic and Social Research Center for the South]) will be founded in Partanna in 1972 by Lorenzo Barbera. On these aspects see Barbera 2011, Susani 2008. It is interesting to notice that a new branch of the CRESM was founded in Irpinia after the 1980 quake.
- 14 Comparing the situation of Belice with that of L’Aquila (2009), Goffredo Fofi has written: “In Belice, the presence of a few but strong-minded [...] advocates of bottom-up forms of direct democracy [...] have provided the example of an extraordinary experiment of grassroots self-government [and] of [...] very successful popular struggles. It was also a union of forces that, in today’s Abruzzo, has proven almost impossible due to the group and corporative divisions of political clans” (Fofi 2011: 8).

- 15 Of the so-called Belice-Axis, “only five kilometers out of the projected seventeen were completed due to lack of funds; this impressive elevated four-lane highway ends abruptly in the middle of the desolate western Sicilian countryside, and its sparse traffic was more likely to consist of mules or tractors than automobiles or trucks” (Chubb 2002: 198). In an interview with the newspaper *La Repubblica* (April 1976), the famous architect Paolo Portoghesi explained the choice of privileging highway construction over housing and social services thus: “It is well known that highway contracts are the most lucrative for large firms, those they can rely on for revisions in the plans and price increases in order to realize high profits” (quoted in Chubb 2002: 198).
- 16 See Camera dei Deputati 1969: 231.
- 17 As Chubb comments, “the broader issue underlying the [...] plans for the reconstruction of the Valle del Belice is the gap between the vision of the intellectual elite (among whom were the leading figures of Italian architecture and urban planning) and the reality of the local society. Despite the good intentions [...] the planning process was largely divorced from the social, economic, and cultural context of the Valle del Belice” (Chubb 2002: 194).
- 18 Some of these criticisms are contemptuous or passionately polemical, such as for example the journalist reportage *Te la do io Brasilia* (*Here Comes Brasilia*) by Mario La Ferla, in which the reconstruction is narrated as a game of political businesses not exempt from criminal interests.
- 19 “Catastrophe limns the investigation, but companionship propels its trajectory. I speak therefore of the ‘inhuman’ to emphasize both difference (‘in-’ as a negative prefix) and intimacy (‘in-’ as an indicator of estranged interiority)” (Cohen 2015a: 10).
- 20 See the website of the Fondazione Orestiadi at <http://www.fondazioneorestiadi.it/it/> (accessed October 27, 2014).
- 21 See Clément 2014 and Picon 2000.
- 22 On L’Aquila’s seism see, among others, Erbani 2010.
- 23 The journal *Nature* dedicated a long article to the case, which is so summarized: “At the end of a 13-month trial, six scientists and one government official have been found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to six years in prison. The verdict was based on how they assessed and communicated risk before the earthquake that hit the city of L’Aquila on 6 April 2009, killing 309 people” (Nosengo 2012: n.p.). As clearly emerged from the trial, the point was not that the seismologists had not been able to “predict” the earthquake—which would be technically impossible—but that they, along with the Civil Protection Department, repeatedly communicated misleading messages to the population,

systematically undermining a concrete risk, instead of implementing effective plans to prevent loss of life. However, at the end of 2014, the Appeal sentence reversed the first verdict. A very accurate discussion about this case, including an analysis of earthquake communication practices in Italy, is provided by Amato et al. 2015.

- 24 On the biopolitical issues related to L'Aquila's seism, see Castorina and Roccheggiani 2015. On the "New Towns" and L'Aquila's "urban metamorphoses," see Musmeci 2015 and Zizzari 2015.
- 25 On this, see Salvatore and Mastromarini 2015.