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Session 40 : [Understanding Policy Narratives](#)

## Shortcomings and Difficulties in Transcoding Public Policy in Metropolitan Areas

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**Abstract.** How does the symbolic violence of political language find expression in the process of metropolization and what dominant rhetorical forms does it take? We have drawn on the results of recent studies of public policy in the urban regions of Naples, Toronto, Montreal, Lyon, Strasburg and Grenoble to call into question the nature of the political narratives used in the metropolitan development of these major urban regions. We draw the conclusion from these studies that the political élites involved (elected representatives, administrative officials and associated experts) are experiencing trouble in finding a credible and legitimate form of discourse at the inter-communal level when they try to formulate and justify their priorities for public action at this governmental level in matters concerning territorial planning and development and the promotion of social cohesion. In their different ways of promoting the metropolitan area, one observes a serious failure to convey meaning in their use of political rhetoric devoid of emotion, as also in their professional explanations which fail to galvanize and captivate the public because of their lack of expressive eloquence. To understand how these failings in political narrative illustrate but also explain the ineffective, uncertain and tentative governability of urban institutions, this paper sets out to integrate into a cognitive approach to public policy the effects of context and of territoriality, by calling upon different analytical traditions (including *Cultural Studies* and *Narrative Policy Analysis*). This combinative approach leads us to emphasize in conclusion that the transcoding processes of conveying the local common good can seriously hinder the emergence of a working political order at the metropolitan level.

## Introduction: Language as a variable in ungovernability

What is the place of language in the political construction of Metropolitan Areas? This question found its way onto our research agenda when considering a series of studies, recently carried out in France, Italy and Canada, of public policy initiatives at the metropolitan urban level, concerning different fields of intervention (environmental issues, local development and planning, etc.). These studies showed that the *discourse of power* (that used by the top-level decision-makers in metropolitan areas) were not having the desired effects and seemed to be delegitimized or masked by other representations of the common good. In this paper, our aim is to analyse why such metropolitan narratives end up by conveying a political imaginary that is hardly believable, plausible or acceptable.

Any such questioning of the efficacy of narrative means that one must first look at the intellectual controversies surrounding the place and role of language in the exercise of power. In the growing political science literature on the political construction of metropolitan areas (Négrier, 2005a, Faure, 2010), the specific role of discourse has made significant advances on both the empirical and the theoretical level.

On the empirical side, just looking at recent French work on the institutionalization of conurbations, one can identify, for example, a very stimulating series of six recent theses which propose three different diagnoses:

- The *sceptics* (Desage, Guéranger, 2011) undertake a constructivist reading based on deciphering and uncovering of the languages of intercommunal power ;
- The *optimists* (Ben Mabrouk, 2006, Mévellec, 2008) adopt a more inductive position based on the detection and understanding of the new referentials of metropolitan public action ;
- And then between the two are the *perplexed* (Pinson, 2009, Idt, 2009) who list and dissect the effects of language in the metropolization processes of public action.

It should be stressed that none of these works is situated in the specialized analytical tradition of the study of political discourse: rather is it the abundance and the complexity of discursive data which clearly led these young researchers to adopt a more conceptual (and not premeditated) approach to the emerging language variables and issues.

On the conceptual side, an approach through language has of course been an established feature in classical political-science theory concerning domination and power, but it should be stressed that this intellectual tradition has hardly been the subject of discussion or renewal in a cross-disciplinary sense during the last forty years. But things are now beginning to move, partly through fragmented developments (in France, for example on the languages of politics (Bacot, 2010)) or through adjacent disciplines (translation sociology, political economy, socio-history, political philosophy, political semiology, critical geography, political anthropology ...), and also partly as an offshoot of the controversies on the role of ideas initiated by the proponents of the cognitive approach to public policy. These debates have led to stimulating exchange with specialists of urban sociology, of neo-institutionalism, of policy instruments (Lascoumes & Simard) as well as the recent trend towards *Narrative Policy Analysis* (of which more below).

In this paper, we shall attempt to mobilize these different approaches in order to analyse the links between the ungovernability of metropolitan areas and the discursive product used to promote them. In methodological terms, our endeavour is inspired by the quasi-clinical reading of social facts adopted by Michel Foucault, with the aim of proposing abrupt diagnoses (as if for the long-sighted) for what is situated right under our own nose, so to speak, thus piercing through the invisibility of what is only too visible, and thus “making us see what we see”(Foucault, 1971). On a more conceptual level, our aim is to give a practical demonstration of that splendid intuition of Pierre Lascoumes, when he explained that governance poses a new problem of governability, in the sense that it is the *transcoding* of problems (and not their *translating*) that we should study (collective action in this case being institutionally structured outside the classic pattern centred on the State and thereby requiring a mode of reasoning specific to and targeted on its sector. » (Lascoumes, 1996) Our intention is to study not *who governs* (Genieys, Hassentyeufel, 2012) but the narrative problems which might explain the *ungovernability* of urban regions.

## **1. Feedback from research projects: how the metropolitan regions “tell their story”**

The collected data come from our involvement in four research projects in public policy application at the level of metropolitan urban areas.

Half of them concern studies carried out in collaboration with other researchers working on pluri-disciplinary and comparative projects financed under contract in the period 2009-2012. The results were presented in reports submitted respectively to the MEEDM (French Ministry of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and the Sea)(Ollivier-Trigalo et al., 2012) and to the DATAR (French interministerial delegation for territorial planning and industrial attractivity) (Aveline et al., 2012).

The other half concerns research on local political élites, undertaken as part of work for the PACTE laboratory of the University of Grenoble, including a 12-month project in Naples (Campania, Italy) and a 4-month project in the Grenoble urban metropolitan area (Rhône-Alpes, France) in the spring of 2011. These two studies resulted in a chapter of a book (Faure, 2011) and an article (Faure, 2012) which detailed the methodology and principal results obtained.

These studies concern inter-connected fields (environment, transport, planning and development) and have the common objective of questioning the quality and efficacy of public regulation at the level of the large regional urban areas. The narrative data obtained relate to four types of material: individual interviews, documents issued by local authorities, press articles and personal accounts given in public meetings. We concentrated our attention on information throwing light on one particular broad question: what are the ways in which speeches generate a ‘narrative’ of the metropolitan area concerned, its *raison d’être* and its activities? The intention was not to be comparative, for the urban areas concerned were demographically dissimilar (ranging from 400,000 inhabitants in Grenoble up to 3 million in Toronto) and institutionally heterogeneous (ranging from one city, to inter-communal structures or one metropolitan institution) and the leading figures studied in each inquiry differed very much in status (technical directors, other experts, civil servants, elected representatives at the communal or the inter-communal level, press officers, etc. ). The number one

objective, or connecting thread, was that of assessing the degree of incapacity of political élites to formulate doctrines or narratives concerning the metropolitan concept. To misuse a phrase of Pierre Bourdieu on the power of the word (Bourdieu, 1982), our intention is to study “meaning that ‘speaking’ struggles to convey”, that is, the limitations of speech in its classic functions of political domination and eliciting satisfaction.

## The Neapolitan political scene: prisoner of its own passions

The Naples study undertaken in 2008 has a special place to the extent that it was this experience that prompted the subsequent interest in the role of language in the exercise of local power. It was during this total immersion in a local political system (municipal, provincial and region) that we were first confronted with an enigma which was one both of discourse and narration. A whole series of interviews which we carried out over a year, as well as careful reading of the local press, enabled us simultaneously to collect stories of the first collective emotions (of those entering politics), of the job of the elected councillor (the daily political routine) and the specific challenges in the public management of the urban area (particularly when faced with the crisis of city waste disposal). These three narratives revealed three very contrasting positions :

- The initial political socialization (in adolescence or through participation in the first collective combat situations) is distinguished by a high and militant commitment to an ideology (communism, feminism, pacifism, the fight against corruption, etc.) and reflects the strong influence of one or two strong personal influences (a parent, a friend, a mentor) without a direct link with the surrounding environment ;
- The activity of a local elected representative is strongly linked to networks of sociability and of spatial proximity, with its own a-political logic of loyalty, social commitment and above all availability and willingness to help in a personalized way with resolving individual micro-problems ;
- Judgements made about public policy at the metropolitan or regional level (such as the waste disposal crisis in Naples) reflect disillusionment on a triple front: a sense of powerlessness (intractable problems), of resignation (too many intermediary levels to deal with) and a historically-rooted sense of inevitability (an unreformable city with a curse on it).

One wonders why these local leaders can present an image of the common good without being able to give a coherent and positive assessment of public regulation. The values of conviction, of passion, and of fatalism are present, visibly and physically, in their testimonies, signifying both the grandeur and the impotence of the role of elected representatives. And our own investigation into a particular corruption scandal that made the front page of the newspapers for three months, demonstrated clearly that the local media, in a commendably critical and dynamic way, could get across all of these three narratives listed above. And the outcome of this particular scandal (the Romeo affair) – with the court closing the case without a verdict – was particularly disconcerting, precisely because the media had had a field day in exposing the dangerous links between the world of economics and the world of politics, making full use of the well-worn theatrical scenario (the corrupter, the corrupted, the white knight, the boss, and the inevitable host of backup roles: victims, witnesses, accomplices,

turncoats, etc.). In this scenario, the Naples elected official can only come across as a legitimate spokesperson when addressing the two extremes – the micro-local scene or the national scene. The representation of the intermediary levels (the main city, the metropolitan area, the surrounding areas, the province, the region) all seem to be part of the indefinable or problematic zones which cannot be talked about with any clarity or conviction. The metropolitan area, in particular, does not make sense, meaning that it does not stimulate any discursive rhetoric about political responsibilities or values at this level.

It might be thought, and it is sometimes insinuated, that, because of the historical environment, the average Neapolitan political official is deficient in training or in reactivity, and yet we registered no significant difference in the competence or qualification level of those officials whose trajectory we followed, compared with those of other European metropolitan areas. Similarly, the inference that the weight of corruption and of the *Camorra* might explain deficiencies is completely invalidated by our findings which revealed that the generation of elected officials we followed had entered into politics precisely in order to fight against organized crime. While it is no doubt the case that the *camorra* control and organize whole slices of the local economy in Campania through flouting and circumventing local administrative regulations, there exists little judicial evidence to point to organized crime weighing directly on the managing and running of public policy in the Naples metropolitan area.

To bring to a close this too rapid focus on our investigation of Naples political officialdom and the media treatment of a corruption case, the one result on which we wish to insist concerns the paradoxically undifferentiated form of language used to describe what is considered to be at stake in public policy. All the officials involved use a fairly stereotypical form of rhetoric in which the city seems always to be prisoner of its own historical narrative. This form of collective fatalism takes various forms (the elected official deplores, the intellectual denounces, the militant attacks, the journalist compiles and relates) but it is apparently based on a shared belief in the impossibility of imagining a political solution to problems in the foreseeable future in the metropolitan area. All the conflicts of interest in evidence (between different neighbourhoods in the city centre, between the city and the suburbs, between the communes and the province, between the province and the region, between the region and the other regions) remained linguistically mute, as being simply insurmountable.

## The ambiguous consensus of Smart Growth in Toronto and Montreal

Our second area focus concerns a whole body of data on the doctrines of “intelligent growth” and of “new urbanism” as promulgated by urban development experts in Canada’s two largest metropolitan urban areas. With the active assistance of the political scientist, Anne Mévellec, and the development specialist, Mario Gauthier, we sought to identify and delineate the arguments over planning which have structured the metropolitan policies in the Provinces of Quebec and Ontario in the areas of sustainable development and city planning. Historically, Toronto and Montreal have built up their urban infrastructure through the dynamic of demographic growth linked to immigration and more than half of Canadians now live in these urban regions. The first decade of the

new century marked a turning point with the adoption of important political/administrative reforms conferring new responsibilities at the municipal level (with new planning powers) but above all with the institutionalization of metropolitan urban areas, with the fusion of administrative subdivisions, the creation of new towns and a proliferation of inter-territorial cooperation agreements. In terms of city planning, the municipal systems, which are now codified in each province, have been transformed through the implementation of the grand plans drawn up by the professionals in urban development. These latter experts are much sought after to formulate new priorities, enforceable in law, whether it be the promotion of sustainable development in Quebec or the fight against 'urban sprawl' in Ontario.

In the course of our investigations, it soon became evident that there was an underlying discursive pattern, common to both urban areas, a common intellectual imprint, the main tenor of which is reflected in the urbanist doctrines of *Smart Growth* and *New Urbanism*. These currents emerge from the critique made of the formerly dominant *Rational Comprehensive Planning*, going beyond it by adopting new strategies for attaining sustainable urban development. Taking our inspiration from the 'Empire of Signs' proposed by Roland Barthes as the way of understanding Japanese society (Barthes, 1970), it is possible to characterize this Canadian planning specificity by highlighting three key phrases. First, *land (or property) owners* (omnipresent in the 'management ideology' prevalent in Canadian local policy action, reflecting rights and duties which were first codified by those who built and took possession of the nascent cities); second, *pedestrian* (as both a noun and a ubiquitous adjective - suddenly acquiring a new 'cachet' in the world recently ruled by the automobile - a word constantly recurring in the obsessive furtherance of urban well-being and environmental quality); and, thirdly, *the green belt* (placed round the metropolitan area to protect nature, acting as a sort of echo of Canada's nature parks, with their famous interpretation centres, giving idyllic mental images of pure air, gentle recreational activity and nearby agriculture).

When this study was completed, it became clear that, in Toronto as well as in Montreal, the smart growth doctrines were hiding a certain ambiguity behind the harmonious façade of consensus: it is true that the urban development professionals give a virtuous priority to pedestrians and green spaces in the city, but these so-called priorities seem to have had little effect on the underlying exigencies concerning mass consumption and the basic strategies for space occupation. It is not that the planner's diagnoses are wrong but simply that they figure low in the municipal pecking order (or scale of priorities). As for the metropolitan level, it is perceived as existing mainly for its administrative function of producing statistics and coordinating technical cooperation. Thus, in spite of the reforms which took place in each province a decade ago, the idea that the metropolitan area should be a governmental force in its own right has hardly caught on at all. Metropolitan policies are at best a form of cosmetics, having virtually no impact on the underlying assumption that big decisions are first taken in business and economic circles and that, in any case, citizens will have the final say through arbitration "at the grass roots". A long way, in fact, from the new metropolitan narratives on urban well-being and the primacy of environmental considerations.

## The lexicon of the logistics of sustainable mobility in Alsace and in Rhône-Alpes

The third field of inquiry concerns a series of metropolitan measures taken to improve the coordination and efficacy of public transport in the French regions of Alsace and Rhône-Alpes. Our comparative research focussed on three technical innovations (roadside traffic detector devices; magnetic passenger transfer cards; and renovation of riverside port facilities) all of which imply the exercise of new inter-communal powers at the metropolitan level (to impose an automatic eco-tax on heavy-goods vehicles (trucks); to facilitate inter-modal (train, bus, tram) commuting passenger transfers; and to re-zone and develop derelict riverside areas) and involve new partnerships in both the public and private sectors. Marianne Ollivier-Trigalo, Jean Debrie, Guillaume Gourgues and Laetitia Rouvière have carried out case studies which gave full details of the introduction and effective implementation of these three facilitators (Ollivier-Trigalo et al., 2012). Concerning the discourse used in their metropolitan promotion, we have detected three main narrative strategies: a tactical emphasis on *sustainable mobility* with its ecological and 'balance-of-power' message; also a rhetoric centring on pragmatism (aimed at emphasizing the practicalities of scale and dealing with *real* problems); and emphasis on the really *local* cooperation involved (so that each citizen can relate to their own local interests). These narrative texts are performance-related in the sense that they explicitly state the decision-making process and that they use precise logistic terminology of how the process is applied (referring of a certain 'sedimentation' of opinion in Alsace, of 'experimentation' in Lyon, and of 'consultation' in Strasbourg).

These discourse patterns do not necessarily succeed in crystallizing a certain set of priorities for defining metropolitan public policy, but they do succeed in linking social dialogue to an appreciation of a partnership ethos:

- In negotiations for the introduction of the truck eco-tax in Alsace, attempts have been made to convey the image of the palimpsest in arriving slowly at decisions – a parchment superimposing new writing on top of previous forms, without entirely eliminating all trace of what went before. In other words, bitterly fought controversies can lead to new decisions in a process of constantly bringing regulations up to date - like a form of gradual sedimentation;
- With the gradual introduction of a new ticketing system for the Lyon region, it is the image conveyed by the French word '*plateforme*' which has received prominence (implying the horizontal image of a joint enterprise, bringing together operators, users and transport activities, without an implied hierarchy, and with the emphasis on practical functionality.
- In the port development project in Strasbourg, it is the overall image of a "charter" which has been promoted, involving workshops, progress reports, meetings of eco-citizens to stress public involvement.

The three figures of the palimpsest, the platform and the charter, constitute a form of logistical lexicon which provide a framework, both in time and in space, for coupling social dialogue with technical advance, each one possessing its specific grammar (involving texts, agreements, commitments) and working methods (sedimentation, experimentation, consultation).



## The classical Cornelian dilemma of the mayors in the Grenoble region

The fourth field study concerns the new French law for the reorganization of the territorial divisions of local government which aims to redraw the boundaries of cantons to achieve bigger inter-communal units in the metropolitan area. When the law came into effect in the spring of 2011, it soon became apparent that local representatives were divided about its application, including those who had initially promoted the change. Our study is based on the follow-up to ten public meetings and working groups which discussed the effects on the Grenoble area, together with a number of interviews of local elected representatives as well as the local authority officials who will have to implement the changes. We can distinguish two main lines of argument made by those resisting the changes. One is that in moving to a larger metropolitan authority, away from the existing organization into separate 'cantons', local politicians would 'lose face' in local political tussles; and secondly, they feared that by moving to a larger strategic unit for creating public policy – away from the existing system of mutualization of technical services – their own individual commune would lose its 'soul' and sense of collective identity.

In fact, it is clear that local politicians are facing a sort of classical dilemma – worthy of Corneille - recognizing that a regrouping of local government units is necessary (and the departmental Prefecture is increasingly pressing for the law to be implemented) and yet they see what will potentially be lost by creating larger units of government and political representation. The defensive reaction against the change is expressed in three notional ways: metropolitan hegemony versus rural authenticity; local democracy needing to be close to the people; and the need for fairness and justice of public service on the local level. These concerns have been clearly expressed in the public debates and have been taken up and amplified in local media. And yet, on the other hand, there is a clear recognition by the majority that more effective inter-communal governance is necessary to tackle societal problems in a more integrated way, with more solidarity and equitable distribution of resources only achievable by treating the conurbation as a whole. Local politicians thus find themselves on the horns of a dilemma, recognizing the need for more effective management of resources, and yet inevitably pulled the other way by emotive historical and symbolic references to local democracy, village communities and the dangers of urban hegemony, reducing small communities to mere "suburbs".

The ensuing "war of words" has tended to smother the reforming discourse of the 'modernists' who are more and more on the defensive, faced with the surge of rhetoric of conservative and traditional values, purveyed by most of the local interests, making it impossible for the reformers to develop new symbolic terms for developing a new form of social cohesion.

## **2. Public Policies: lost for words – and lost for eloquence**

The results of the research projects presented above have one thing in common: they all point to a failure of language in its classic functions of conveying the politics of domination and of invoking public re-enchantment. In his essay on *Ce que parler veut*

*dire* (op.cit.):(*what speaking means*), Pierre Bourdieu has analysed the symbolic violence of language in showing that the holders of political power constantly instrumentalize speech in order to impose and justify their domination, to establish what he nicely describes as a *relationship of tacitly agreed complicity* in the symbolic construction of reality. And yet our four research projects point here to the opposite, to the failure and impotence of political speech, in the sense that the metropolitan leaders' discourse in these cases is a positive hindrance to imposing their vision of the rules of play at the metropolitan level of government.

This failure of the metropolitan narrative story, which is both indecipherable and inaudible, calls for explanations in two directions: one, on the reasons why metropolitan institutions fail to arouse political enthusiasm; and the other, on the reasons why the professional leaders at the metropolitan level struggle to formulate priorities for public action.

### The localized expression of political emotions

In our four studies, the metropolitan institutions fail to elicit and arouse a dynamic of confidence for different reasons: in the case of Naples, the weight of its traumatic past; in Montreal and Toronto, the primacy of business considerations and social introspection; the technical nature of the debate in Strasbourg; and the rural nostalgia and local loyalties in the Grenoble area. To analyse these blockages, it would perhaps be profitable to make a detour and consider the striking demonstration of the importance of civic traditions in explaining differences in the institutional performance of Italian regions in the 1990s (Putnam, 1993) and also a similar *Cultural Studies* approach (Almond, Verba, 1963), both of which could well provide enlightening clues to the meaning which political participants attach to their own activities and behaviour. In both cases, it is a question of identifying sociocultural variables which structure political sentiments of confidence and of lack of confidence in each territorial context. We can also learn from the American sociological approach in opening up new paths in the application of Freudian psychoanalysis and then of social psychology in general, notably theorized around the phenomenon of the *condensation* of emotions considered apart from all normative conditions (Jasper, 2012). Also relevant is the insight afforded by the study of the place of feelings and emotions in democratic politics and citizen's choices (Marcus, 2008). Philippe Braud and his team has also studied the emotional dimensions of politics, widening the inquiry to cover not only the exercise of power but also identity issues and conflicts, as well as the role of the media (Sommier Crettiez, 2012). All these cross-disciplinary insights help us to analyse and understand the 'stalling' of the metropolitan-area movement and why local elites have lost all sense of initiative and confidence in promoting it.

### The technical problematic of public policy.

Parallel to this, we must also study the way in which professional élites translate metropolitan technical arrangements into priorities of public policy. In the four case studies examined, we have observed that the doctrines formulated by the specialists in urban planning and development were more logistical and procedural than strategic and

substantialist. This leads us to diagnose that the discourse is totally devoid of natural eloquence, in the sense that the professional's narrative message entirely fails to persuade, to enchant, or to galvanize support. The experts are ignored and receive no media support in Naples; the trendily 'correct' virtues of *Smart Growth* fall totally flat in Montreal and Toronto; the clever innovative devices introduced in Lyon and Strasbourg are simply seen as money-saving and technically complex mechanisms, and the ambitious planning for social cohesion in Grenoble simply fails to overcome localist feelings.

In each case, it is a question of preaching to a small band of the converted. The professionals only share their expertise with a limited circle of initiates and fail to communicate at a wider level, a dilemma of human interaction with its surrounding structures analysed by Pierre Muller (Muller, 2005). The necessary mediation implies a context in which the meaning is sparked by tension between the global and the sectorial, and the *metropolitan moment* is not conducive to the crystallization of ideas, interests and institutions and is certainly not producing a *cognitive matrix* (Radaelli, 2000). In the four studies undertaken, we are forced to admit the impotence of language as a way of translating *policies* and *problem streams* into real issues in the arena of *politics* (Lowi, 2009). The discourse of experts fails to give real sense to the instruments in place, both at the sectorial level of the professional corporations as at the territorial level of metropolitan institutions.

At this stage in our reflection, it is worth following in the tracks of political scientists who orient their analysis to the *political fabrication of public policy* and to *discourse in action* (Zittoun, 2011). In paraphrasing the title of a founding work in the cognitive approach of the French school (Jobert, Luller, 1989), Philippe Zittoun cleverly links up with the work done on *Narrative Policy Analysis* (Roe, 1994, Schmidt, 2000) by stressing the need to pay attention to the discursive delineation of a problematic (*énoncé*) in making sense of the real, and this particularly by bringing together different discourses (Hajer, 2006).

Our attention is here drawn to two points in particular: one is the way in which the stated *énoncés* can lead to solving problems (when they define instruments and link them to solutions); the other is the process of locating strategic narratives which legitimize power (that is to say which argue the asymmetry of a decision and which persuade the public concerned). In our specific fields of study, these two focuses show that neither the *énoncés* operating on the instruments (to resolve problems), nor the locating and bringing together of different discourses (to legitimize power) succeed with the desired effect of achieving public re-enchantment with metropolitan politics. We should add that it would be wrong simply to conclude that the metropolitan failure was simply due to problems of *Storytelling* (Salmon, 2007). There is no lack of lack of talented people to *tell the story* of the paradoxes of globalization (in Naples), of *smart growth* (in Montreal and Toronto), of *sustainable mobility* (in Lyon and Strasbourg) or of *town-country balance* (in Grenoble). The *stories* are constructed around scenarios which are often sophisticated. The problem is rather that the story-tellers are "at a loss to find words" because they are "at a loss to find eloquence" through an incapacity in these instances to draw persuasively on the secret workings of the human imagination. To borrow from a classic classification of the *discourses of communication* (Schmidt, 2000), one could say that the metropolitan technical arrangements cannot be communicated

through the register of conviction (for a universal audience) or through the register of persuasion (for a specific audience).

## **Conclusion: The face of discourse turned back to front**

To conclude this incursion into metropolitan discourse, we can put forward as a prime result that the localized expression of political emotions and the technical statement of metropolitan public arrangements are two processes which are working against the “metropolitan moment”, rather than helping to construct or to stabilize it. The diagnosis of this double failure, both in sense and in eloquence, suggests a reversal of the normal classical process of conveying meaning in public policy. For whilst political science concentrates particularly on the observation of the interests, the ideas, institutions and instruments, which crystallize the issues of government and of governance, in this case at the level of metropolitan urban areas, it is the shortcomings in the dramatic art and the subsequent fragmentation of symbols, rituals and myths, which are the determining factors.

Staying with the Foucauldian perspective of words doing “violence to things”, one might wonder why the discourse, rather than simply transmitting power, works to undermine that power and render it fragile in its metropolitan context. Here the democratic process seems to be operating in reverse: for the elected representatives, the emotive charge is giving off negative vibrations (metropolization being perceived, at least in the subconscious, as a dangerous or alarming process possibly leading to a loss of autonomy and legitimacy); for the professional officials (the experts), the discourse aims at rationalizing the whole subject, which implies using a technical language which can come across as one of indifference (a discourse which implies the banality of the politicizing process, steering clear of political emotivity).

These results prompt us to draw particular attention to the circumscribed world of a political culture anchored as it is in a specific time and place (Cefai, 2001). By taking seriously the narratives and specific representations of local identities, approaching politics *at the ground level* will lead to an appreciation of the particular locally-perceived delineation of the problem (perhaps delineating the problem as a case of ‘politics’ being purloined by ‘others’ who live elsewhere and therefore ‘think differently’, or viewing the problem as one which does not directly concern us and which is therefore best left to ‘others’ – both of which can militate against any form of collective action). Similar perspectives have been explored, in a suitably pragmatic fashion, by the sociologist Bernard Poche in his work on the ‘*fragmented space*’ created in rural societies where a ‘group sovereignty’ is in permanent transaction with the political sovereignty of the State (Poche, 1996). His research opened up fruitful leads for further research on language as the fundamental element of group identity and on the group as a phenomenon to be studied contextually.

In political science, one can find evidence of this sensitivity to narrative and contextualism in certain recent theses on local power or on the territorialized formation of opinion. In the thesis of Chemsas Tortchinski dealing with the plurality of regional political systems which characterize post-communist Russia (Tortchinski, 2011), the researcher captures the effects of territoriality not only as simple pointers to the

changes which have taken place, but also as localized social worlds, themselves in process of further change. Using a linguistic analysis to decipher political reactions to the underlying fatalistic and cultural pessimism, this latter mood can provide linguistic evidence to point to different codes of enchantment and disenchantment expressed by the public authorities and the ordinary citizens. One can also refer to the analysis of Mariona Tomàs of the much contested invention of the *Greater Montreal*, that political laboratory of integration within fragmentation (Faure, 2003) which has for the last decade unleashed a veritable 'political battle' around 'thinking metropolitan' (Tomàs, 2012). The author shows with talent how all those actively involved politically, together with the experts and the observers, at first disagree with each other in their normative (and differentiated) fashion of theorizing their ideal of the common good, instrumentalizing a whole core of legitimate values (equity, democracy, efficiency and competitiveness) to try and impose their own conception of the 'good' model and of the 'good' values to promote.

As a third example, in a very different political space (*Greater Marseille*), Nicolas Maisetti puts forward a converging diagnosis in pointing to the broad Mediterranean narrative of this city, a narrative which is of vital importance but which does not thereby diminish the significance of the extreme political fragmentation of the territory (Maisetti, 2012). The writer describes the central role of discourse in the structuring of all political issues whilst at the same time defending very cogently the idea that the '*façade of territory*' (in the Goffmanian sense of the term) is not produced by a dominant group but that this '*native savvy*' is used by experts as a resource which is both supple and elastic and therefore of great importance at the local level. And, finally, there is the wealth of different discursive processes in the recent doctoral thesis of Jessica Sainty on the territorial construction of political reasoning during the French presidential elections of 2007 (Sainty, 2012). For example, taking four sample (yet varied) sites in the department of the Isère, she shows very convincingly that electors proceed from their representation of politics on the local level and this means that their notions of the meaning of *globalization* and of *Europe* differ considerably from one micro territory to another.

In all these four cases of accomplished doctoral research, the young researchers are explicitly linking together the uncertain process of constructing a social and political order with the decoding of the often contradictory and inchoate language used for expressing political issues within each historically-formed territory. The metropolitan areas are going through sedimentation and are far from fully-formed, if not at the moment at a complete standstill: their socio-political complexity and socio-historical density are impediments in drastically slowing down the emergence of a clear narrative of their progress towards existing as a fully-fledged political unit. If one refers to the benchmark work of Paul Pierson on the national centre of gravity of *institutional path dependence* (Pierson, 2000), it is clear that there are powerful moves to create at the metropolitan level a more dense and structured set of beliefs but this has not played in favour of establishing a metropolitan global political order.

This unaccomplished and amorphous nature of the 'metropolitan moment' seems to echo what we called the *mysteries* surrounding Neapolitan identity. In this turbulent space with its contradictory concentration of urban chaos and community vitality, language is assuredly a moulding factor of primordial importance. But to what ends?

One needs to refer back to the logbook kept by Lucien Sfez during his long stay in Naples, and particularly the passages in which the author of *Critique de la décision* describes with a mixture of admiration and horror the political disorders in a country where everything is in code (*un surcodage généralisé*) and where there is a 'mythological State' (Sfez, 1980). The sociologist even likens the 'democratic atmosphere' of Naples to a group catharsis in which cultures and rituals are stacked one on top of each other and function like "a sensorial envelope stuffed not only with things of the mind but with all the senses". Our own foray into the political and technical narratives in France, Italy and Canada prompts us to conclude that it is this very stacking up of the senses – so linguistically inexpressible – which explains, at least in part, the contemporary ungovernability of metropolitan institutions.

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