

Versión del texto
en INGLÉS



Françoise Choay and Italy: urbanism, architecture and restoration from Alberti to Giovannoni

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Abstract

The article investigates the development of Françoise Choay's thoughts on urbanism, architecture and restoration through the lens of cross-fertilization between Italian and French cultures, beginning with her own training, and from the early attention devoted to her first writings in Italy, starting from the famous *L'urbanisme. Utopie et réalités* (1965). Key figures on this path are Leon Battista Alberti—whose work, studied in depth by Choay, was disseminated in France—and Gustavo Giovannoni, discovered by the scholar in the 1980s and identified by her as the forerunner of the notion of “urban heritage.” No less important is the analysis of Choay's most recent contribution, which addresses the themes of heritage and globalization, analyzed from the perspective of her intense relationship with Italy.¹

Keywords: Françoise Choay, Italy, urbanism, architecture, restoration.

There is no doubt that Françoise Choay has decisively contributed to defining the semantics and contradictions of cultural heritage, through a substantial body of writings published between the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Heritage—analyzed within “*allégorie*” and “*questions*,” to cite the titles of two of her famous volumes—is, however, only one of the many fields to which the great French scholar has dedicated her vast work. We could, in fact, simplify it by saying that the interests of Choay—a philosopher by training, with particular attention paid to the ideas of Martin Heidegger—have ranged in all areas of Heidegger's *Building, dwelling, thinking*.² Indeed, her interests move from the field of visual arts to architecture, the city and the territory, and dwelling, in her more mature years, on the theme of cultural heritage, with a particular predilection for urban heritage.

Choay has been famous in Italy since the early 1970s thanks to the success of *L'urbanisme. Utopie et réalités*, published for the first time in France in 1965 and translated in Italy in 1973 under the title *La città. Utopie e realtà*, published by Einaudi. She has constituted, above all, an essential reference point for Italian urban culture for at least thirty years, from the

¹ This text constitutes a synthetic reworking of what has already been published by the undersigned in Pane (2020: 52-108). The research work made use of numerous direct interviews with Françoise Choay, carried out between Paris and Naples over a long chronological span, from 2002 to 2018. For the retrieval of some texts and the revision of some bibliographic indications, I am pleased to thank Laurence Bassières of the École Nationale Supérieure de Paris La Villette. I am also very grateful to Thierry Paquot, who kindly made available the French version of one of his texts on Choay published in German in 2019.

² We refer to the famous lecture *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken*, held on August 5, 1951 by Martin Heidegger at the Darmstadt colloquium *Man and Space* and published the following year in its proceedings, which was then translated into Italian as *Costruire, abitare, pensare* (Heidegger, 1976). It is very significant that this text, translated by Choay in French, closes her anthology of foundational texts of urbanism (Choay, 1965).

beginning of the 1970s to the end of the century. Since the beginning of the 1990s her name has rightfully joined those of the most authoritative scholars of historical and theoretical issues related to cultural heritage. This is significantly due to *L'Allégorie du patrimoine*, which was first published in French in 1992, and shortly thereafter translated into Italian (Choay, 1995a).

Parallel to the dissemination of her work in Italy, this French scholar oriented her interests toward Italian architectural and urban culture, to the point that her own research topics benefited from a progressive influence of the work of past and present scholars on urban phenomena. Standing out among these, are two figures, apparently quite distant from each other, and not only chronologically: Leon Battista Alberti and Gustavo Giovannoni, to whom the scholar has dedicated important in-depth studies. If, in the first case, Choay has considerably favored the knowledge and the dissemination in France of Alberti's work –even managing to edit, with Pierre Caye, in 2004, a translation and a critical edition of *De re aedificatoria*– in the second case, her contribution can be considered veritably decisive in the rediscovery of the figure of Giovannoni, with reflections in our country. Obscured in Italy by a decade-long *damnatio memoriae*, which started in the years following his death,³ the figure of the Roman engineer was in fact completely rehabilitated thanks in part to the contribution of Choay, who attributed to him a fundamental role in the definition of the concept of “urban heritage.” Along this path, the contacts and exchanges between the French scholar and the Italian architectural culture gradually intensified to the point that, since the 1990s, her presence in Italy has become increasingly frequent, often traveling as a visiting professor at various universities.

After all, Choay –who grew up at the school of André Chastel in the cult of the Italian Renaissance– has never hidden her “Italianness” and her marked predilection for the culture of the *Bel Paese*, so much so that in November 2001 she entitled her *lectio* for the conferral of an honorary degree at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Genoa, *Partire per l'Italia*. With this expression she meant the inescapable necessity of every self-respecting French scholar, to immerse him or herself deeply in Italian culture, in search of the conscious and unconscious roots of his or her own cultural identity (Choay: 2008c). It is therefore clear that the figure of Choay is an emblematic case of cross-fertilization between Italian and French culture –meaning the circulation of ideas between the intellectuals of the two countries– in the field of urbanism, architecture, and restoration, which deserves to be investigated more thoroughly, as we will try to do in the text below.

Education and first experiences between philosophy, visual arts and architecture, 1954-1964

Descended from an old Protestant family of Alsatian origin, Françoise Choay (b. Weiss) was born on March 25, 1925;⁴ she grew up in a high cultural and social milieu, in which, as Thierry Paquot has observed, “Alsatian Protestantism and Republican Judaism mingle and are open to social progress”⁵ (Paquot, 2019: 275). At a very young age, she participated in the French Resistance, following her mother to the department of Corrèze, where she performed duties as a message-carrying relay girl as part of a Stalinist-inspired resistance group, while studying philosophy by correspondence at the University of Toulouse. After 1945 the family moved

³ See Pane (2005).

⁴ Detailed biographical information can be found in Paquot (2019).

⁵ Original quotation: “Ein laizistisch geprägtes Milieu, in dem sich elsässischer Protestantismus und republikanisches Judentum vermischten und das sozialen Fortschritt offen gegenüberstand”.

to the department of Hérault following her father who had been appointed prefect. There Françoise obtained a degree in Philosophy at the University of Montpellier. In the meantime, having acquired considerable familiarity with English and German, she found work in Brussels in an international association aimed at compensating war victims (Paquot, 2019: 275-276). However, she decided to continue her studies at the Sorbonne, where she followed the courses of Jean Hyppolite and Gaston Bachelard, but also of Claude Lévi-Strauss, to whom she would remain strongly attached.

As she herself recalled on several occasions, Italy did not seem to play a major role in the years of her youth and her first experiences as a scholar. On the contrary, Choay showed a marked familiarity with the Anglo-Saxon world and especially with the Germanic one, of which she appreciated not only the philosophic tradition, but also the figurative arts.⁶ Choay's approach to architecture began in the fertile field of contemporary art, of which she has been a militant critic for various French publications such as *France-Observateur*, *L'Œil* and *La Quinzaine Littéraire* since 1954. It was particularly through the French-Swiss art magazine *L'Œil*, founded in 1955 and intended for the general public, that Choay gradually became interested in art criticism without, however, showing any particular inclination towards the Italian milieu. With the exception of the long reviews dedicated to the 29th and 30th Venice Biennales (Choay, 1958a; 1960a), the cultural context of the peninsula is not the object of specific attention.

Instead, it is to her personal encounter with Jean Prouvé that we owe the scholar's first contact with the field of architectural production, matured in relation to the theme of the contemporary project of living. In the mid-1950s, Prouvé had distinguished himself for creating the "Maison des jours meilleurs", an emergency building project in which the social activist Abbé Pierre had also been involved. Following the harsh winter of 1954, which had cost the lives of many homeless, it was destined to house the most unfortunate. Visiting the site gave rise to Choay's first article addressing architecture, which appeared in *France-Observateur* in March 1956;⁷ two years later the scholar produced a further article dedicated to the work of Prouvé for *L'Œil*, which was published in 1958 (Choay, 1958d). In the same year, moreover, Choay exalted the plastic virtues of reinforced concrete by signing an enthusiastic introduction to the volume *Le siège de l'Unesco à Paris*,⁸ dedicated to the illustration of the new Parisian seat of UNESCO, based on a project developed by Marcel Breuer, Pier Luigi Nervi and Bernard Zehruss, and inaugurated on November 3, 1958. From this moment on, the articles dedicated to architecture multiplied considerably and the scholar soon became quite famous: Choay first dwelled on the Brazilian pavilion built by Le Corbusier for the Cité Universitaire in Paris (Choay, 1959b), always on *L'Œil*, and then enlarged her horizons toward the city and its surroundings, questioning the theme of urban expansion. This led to the creation of in-depth studies on foundation cities, both on a large scale (Brasilia) (Choay, 1959d) and on a small scale (the *ville nouvelle* of Bagnols-sur-Cèze and its relationship with the historical city) (Choay, 1959a), but also early reflections on the theme of garden-cities (Choay, 1959c).

⁶ Referring to her "viaggio in Italia", Choay declared, "Truth be told, it took me a while to get going. Equipped with a solid Anglo-Saxon culture, trained in German philosophy and fascinated by German painting, from 15th century Konrad Witz to Max Ernst, among others, I remained for a long time a 'resident', so to speak, of the Germanic continent." ("A dire la verità, mi ci volle un po' per mettermi in marcia. Dotata di una solida cultura anglosassone, formata dalla filosofia tedesca e affascinata dalla pittura tedesca, dal XV secolo di Konrad Witz fino a Max Ernst, fra gli altri, sono rimasta a lungo 'residente', per così dire, del continente germanico") (Choay, 2008c: 22).

⁷ See Choay (1956). The story of this article is narrated by Choay herself in a long interview with Thierry Paquot in 1994, which we will also quote below (Choay, 1994a: 2). There is also a slightly different version of this text, published in *Urbanisme*, no. 278-279, November-December 1994, pp. 5-11, which is, however, to be considered as not approved by Choay, since it lacked her revision, as specified by the editors on the cover of the following supplement.

⁸ See Choay (1958b); a later version of this text was published under the significant title of *Un nouvel art de bâtir* (Choay, 1958c).

Basically, already at the beginning of the 1960s, Choay proved to have easily mastered the vast art of architectural criticism, also engaging in comments on the most topical issues involving the debate on urban transformations in Paris, such as the competition for the Gare d'Orsay and, a few years later, the burning problem of the Halles (Choay, 1962).⁹ Her articles on architectural and urban themes also appeared with increasing intensity in other journals, such as *Connaissance des arts*, *Art de France*, *Revue d'esthétique*, where they ranged from industrial design to the *grands ensembles* of Paris, up to an overview of twenty years of architecture since the post-war period (Choay, 1964a; 1964b; 1967a). In this context, her position regarding the rationalist architecture and urbanism advocated by the CIAM was not yet clear-cut, and this was demonstrated by her openness toward Le Corbusier, to whom Choay dedicated her first monograph written directly in English, which stemmed from her encounter with the photographer Lucien Hervé, mediated once again by Jean Prouvé (Choay, 1994a: 3).

Published in 1960 in New York by the publisher George Braziller and simultaneously translated into Italian for Il Saggiatore (Choay, 1960b; 1960c), the book in question also marks –precisely through this very early Italian edition– the first direct contact between the writings of Choay and the public in our country, which surpassed even France: it is significant, in this sense, that there is still no French edition of this work.¹⁰ The text arrived in our country at a particularly significant time for studies on Le Corbusier, which have already reached a considerable extension and appear to be concentrated on the stylistic turning point that marked the production of the master after World War II and in particular on the chapel of Ronchamp.¹¹

Choay confronted Le Corbusier, who was still fully active at the time, without indulging either in an unconditional exaltation of his talent or in a systematic questioning of his ideas and achievements, something that would happen with increasing intensity in her writings during the following years.¹² In this synthetic but effective text of 1960, the scholar, in fact, retraced the entire activity of the Swiss architect, highlighting his polemical temperament and placing his architectural production in close relationship with his essays, understood “as two expressions of a single conception,” aiming in this sense “at the search for the meaning and the spirit of the work of Le Corbusier–”¹³ The most interesting aspect of the volume consisted in the refutation of the exclusively functionalist vision that the critics liked to attribute to Le Corbusier, in which Choay identified an Italian responsibility, due in particular to the work of

⁹ See Choay (1968: 53), where she expressed her support for the preservation and reuse of 19th century structures condemned to demolition.

¹⁰ On the other hand, already in 1961, the book was simultaneously translated into Spanish, German and Japanese.

¹¹ See Belfiore (2018: 22-23).

¹² See in particular Choay (2006a; 1994b: 3).

¹³ “Durante tutta la sua carriera, dall’età di 30 anni, Le Corbusier non ha mai cessato di pubblicare libri e articoli, per difendersi e polemizzare [...]. Ma i suoi scritti sono molti e astrusi; sotto una veste di semplicità, nascondono una notevole complessità e un contenuto essenzialmente dialettico. Perciò il fine di questo studio è appunto di fornire una guida che consideri nella produzione di Le Corbusier l’opera scritta e quella costruttiva come due espressioni di un’unica concezione. La nostra impresa vuol essere insomma un tentativo di sintesi. Questo saggio infatti non è né un esame cronologico, né un’analisi descrittiva, bensì una ricerca del significato e dello spirito dell’opera di Le Corbusier” (“Throughout his career, from the age of 30, Le Corbusier never ceased to publish books and articles, to defend himself and polemize [...]. But his writings are many and abstruse; under a guise of simplicity, they hide a considerable complexity and an essentially dialectical content. Therefore, the aim of this study is precisely to provide a guide that considers Le Corbusier’s written and constructive work as two expressions of a single conception. In short, our undertaking is an attempt at synthesis. In fact, this essay is neither a chronological examination, nor a descriptive analysis, but a search for the meaning and the spirit of Le Corbusier’s work”) (Choay, 1960c: 9).

Bruno Zevi, whom she showed she knew personally.¹⁴ For Choay, on the contrary, Le Corbusier was an architect who always put man at the center of his projects, from the dimensional scale to the use of materials. For him, “building is essentially a social activity directed toward man and the solution of his problems. Le Corbusier’s work bears the imprint of both rationalism and the image of man. But this image plays a complex role”¹⁵ (Choay, 1960c: 18).



FIGURE 1. PRESENTATION OF THE VOLUME BY FRANÇOISE CHOAY “PATRIMONIO E GLOBALIZZAZIONE”. Department of Architecture of the University of Naples Federico II, May 2013. From left to right: Francesco Starace, Françoise Choay, Stella Casiello. *Image: Andrea Pane.*

¹⁴ “Il suo razionalismo è l’aspetto attraverso cui Le Corbusier è stato più spesso presentato al pubblico. Per molti critici, favorevoli o non, è il teorico che ha elaborato un rigoroso sistema e le cui opere sono soggette ad una fredda logica sistematica e ad un funzionamento immune da ogni compromesso. Questa visione corrisponde parzialmente al vero” (“His rationalism is the aspect through which Le Corbusier has most often been presented to the public. For many critics, favorable or not, he is the theorist who has worked out a rigorous system and whose works are subject to a cold systematic logic and a functioning immune to compromise. This view corresponds partially to the truth”) (Choay, 1960c: 9). In a footnote Choay adds, “Vedi per esempio l’interpretazione del critico italiano Bruno Zevi” (“See for example the interpretation of the Italian critic Bruno Zevi”), referring to his *Storia dell’architettura moderna* (1950). In addition to this text, among the Italian bibliographical references cited by Choay also appears E. Persico (1935: 42-43).

¹⁵ Original quotation: “costruire è essenzialmente un’attività sociale diretta all’uomo e alla soluzione dei suoi problemi. L’opera di Le Corbusier reca l’impronta sia del razionalismo sia dell’immagine dell’uomo. Ma questa immagine svolge un ruolo complesso”.

The city between utopias and reality, 1965-1973

From the beginning of the 1960s Choay progressively approached the theme of the city. A first testimony, in this sense, was constituted by the already mentioned article on “Grands ensembles et petites constructions,” published in 1964, in which the scholar harshly criticized the first phase of the great Parisian decentralization –started in 1955– glimpsing some hope in the new course of French urbanism. Her condemnation of these first experiments of *grands ensembles* –devoid of “expressive signs and symbols,” dreamed of “by a miserabilist De Chirico,” oppressed by the “tyranny of the street,” where “human presence is evoked only by benches and television antennas”¹⁶– marked the moment of break with the confidence in the urbanism of the CIAM.

It is in this context of reflection that Choay began to work on what would certainly become her seminal book, destined to give her an extraordinary international reputation, that would reach several generations of scholars: *L'Urbanisme. Utopies et réalités*, published for the first time in Paris in 1965. The book was published by Éditions du Seuil –the publishing house to which Choay would later entrust almost all of her works– which just one year earlier had tackled the theme of the city by translating a volume fundamental for the urban culture of the second half of the 20th century, *The city in history* by Lewis Mumford (1961; 1964).¹⁷

As she herself mentioned later, *L'Urbanisme. Utopies et réalités* is a work that starts with an unavoidable and nagging question of the times in which the book was written: regarding how to trace alleged scientific foundations of urbanism and demonstrate its ambiguities and contradictions, in light of the crisis of the industrial city and of the recognized inability of its actors to govern its processes (Choay, 1996a: 15-16). The answer was sought in the founding texts of the discipline, selected from the early 19th century, which are presented in an anthological form to seal the thesis of a substantial absence of scientific status of urbanism, denouncing “the imposture of a discipline that, in a period of feverish construction, imposed its authority unconditionally”¹⁸ (Choay, 1996a: 16).

Accustomed by training to the study of primary sources and strongly inclined to didactics, Choay, therefore, offers throughout the volume a varied assortment of texts on the city and urban planning, many of which, until then, were little known to the French public due to the absence of translations.¹⁹ The set of texts is subdivided into categories that the scholar justified

¹⁶ “Résumons schématiquement leurs caractères. Du point de vue de la perception [...], c'étaient des espaces élémentaires non différenciés: des unités d'habitation identiques (l'expédient habituel consistant simplement à rompre la continuité des barres par des tours) étaient intégrées dans des géométries (patterns) gratuites et simplistes où l'orthogonalisme était la règle. [...] Signes et symboles expressifs étaient quasi absents de ces univers de façades qu'on eut dit rêvés par un Chirico misérabiliste, et où la présence humaine est évoquée seulement par des bancs et des antennes de télévision” (“Let us summarize their characteristics schematically. From the point of view of perception [...], they were undifferentiated elementary spaces: identical housing units (the usual expedient consisting simply in breaking the continuity of the bars with towers) were integrated into free and simplistic geometries (patterns) where orthogonalism was the rule. [...] Signs and expressive symbols were almost absent from these universes of facades that seemed to have been dreamed up by a miserabilist Chirico, and where the human presence is evoked only by benches and television antennas”) (Choay, 1964a: 386). It is interesting to note that in the article Choay mentions, even if only incidentally, as positive the experiences of Luigi Piccinato and Ignazio Gardella (Choay, 1964a: 390).

¹⁷ See Paquot (2019: 278).

¹⁸ Original quotation: “L'enjeu de ma démonstration était alors polémique: dénoncer l'imposture d'une discipline qui, dans une période de construction fiévreuse, imposait son autorité sans conditions”.

¹⁹ “J'ai toujours eu le goût des textes. La réflexion peut s'engager plus facilement à partir de la lecture commentée d'un ou de plusieurs textes. Dans mon enseignement, je pars de textes que mes étudiants et moi lisons; puis commence le long, périlleux et stimulant travail de l'interprétation et de la critique. Pour cette anthologie, il s'agissait d'asseoir mon propos sur des évidences écrites. Il fallait commencer par voir clair dans la diversité apparente des théories de l'urbanisme, par en établir une typologie et en rassembler les textes qui illustraient le mieux les grandes catégories ainsi découvertes et qui apporteraient la preuve – lisible – de mes thèses” (“I have always had a taste for texts. Reflection can be initiated more easily from the commented reading of one or several texts. In my teaching, I start with texts that my students and I read; then begins the long, perilous and stimulating work of interpretation and criticism. For this anthology, it was a matter of basing my argument on written evidence. I had to start by seeing clearly in the apparent diversity of the theories of urbanism, by establishing a typology and by gathering the texts that best illustrated the main categories thus discovered and that would bring the proof - readable - of my theses”) (Choay, 1994a: 2).

and motivated in her long introductory essay, even though she was aware of the provisional nature and fallacy of any distinction that is too clear-cut.²⁰ Therefore, she first of all grouped the writings that precede the birth of the discipline on a technical level, ascribable to a phase of “pre-urbanism”, that is those of theorists, historians, and economists who understood the crisis of the city in close dependence with that of society. In the face of social and urban disorder, the latter took refuge in utopia, heading toward two opposing models according to the time vector: the “progressive” one, which optimistically believed in the future, including, among others, Owen, Fourier, Proudhon, Richardson, and the “culturalist” one, which looked nostalgically to the past through the eyes of Pugin, Ruskin, Morris. But there are also pre-urbanists “without a model” and among them Choay placed two thinkers of the caliber of Engels and Marx, along with Kropotkin.

Even in the second group of writings –those corresponding to the phase of real “urbanism,” almost all coming from a technical horizon– it was possible, according to Choay, to identify the two models mentioned above, the progressive and the culturalist, but not only these, as we shall see. To the first model she ascribed, first of all, the elaborations of Tony Garnier, but especially those of Le Corbusier, soon merged in the activity of the CIAM, regarding which the scholar expressed more criticism than she did in the 1960 monograph. Choay in fact attributed the indifference to topography and context typical of the plans of Le Corbusier and his followers to the preaching of the *Charter of Athens*: “Thus was born ‘the architecture of the bulldozer,’ which levels mountains and fills valleys.”²¹ The contributions of Camillo Sitte, Ebenezer Howard, and Raymond Unwin can be referred to the second model, the culturalist one, which Choay united by the subtle presence of a “nostalgic model.” In addition to the two previous groups, and parallel with the American anti-urbanist tendencies already highlighted in the pre-urbanist phase, the scholar identified the birth of a new “naturalist” model in the first half of the 20th century, embodied by the figure of Frank Lloyd Wright and his *Broadacre City*, the true antithesis of the coercive urbanism of the CIAM.²²

“The answer to the urban problems posed by industrial society,” Choay added, however, “is not exhausted either in the models of urbanism or in the concrete achievements they inspired”: there was in fact “a second degree critique” (Choay, 1973: 51) that developed during the 20th century and that must be carefully considered. In this context, Choay attributed a fundamental role to the work of Patrick Geddes and that of his most faithful disciple Lewis Mumford, both proponents of an “urbanism of continuity.” The latter must aim at the reintegration “of the concrete and complete man into the process of urban planning”

²⁰ “J’ai donc pu mettre en évidence les trois types d’approche – et auxquels j’ai donné les noms qui leur sont restés. Ces noms – arbitraires – sont des instruments d’analyse, des opérateurs de recherche. Il ne faut surtout pas les “chosifier”. Je pense que les deux premières catégories ont gardé leur pertinence et leur utilité – à condition de s’en servir dans le champ pour lequel elles ont été forgées. En revanche, je juge aujourd’hui peu opératoire la troisième qui visait l’attitude anti-urbain, naturiste (terme préférable à celui de naturaliste) du courant américain illustré par Wright” (“I was thus able to highlight the three types of approach - and to which I gave the names that remained for them. These names – arbitrary – are instruments of analysis, operators of research. They should not be “cherry-picked”. I think that the first two categories have kept their relevance and their usefulness - provided that they are used in the field for which they were coined. On the other hand, I judge today not very operative the third one which aimed at the anti-urban, naturist (term preferable to the one of naturalist) attitude of the American current illustrated by Wright”) (Choay, 1994a: 2-3).

²¹ “Purché assolve le sue funzioni e sia efficace, gli urbanisti adotteranno lo stesso piano urbano sia in Francia, che in Giappone, negli Stati Uniti e nell’Africa del Nord. Le Corbusier arriverà a proporre praticamente lo stesso schema per Rio e per Algeri, e il piano per la ricostruzione di Saint-Dié riproduce, in piccola scala, il piano Voisin di Parigi degli anni ‘20” (“Provided it fulfills its functions and is effective, urban planners will adopt the same urban plan in France, Japan, the United States and North Africa. Le Corbusier went so far as to propose practically the same scheme for Rio and Algiers, and the plan for the reconstruction of Saint-Dié reproduces, on a small scale, the Plan Voisin for Paris in the 1920s”) (Choay, 1973: 31).

²² “Broadacre diventa così, per quanto ne sappiamo, la sola proposta urbanistica che rifiuti completamente la coercizione” (“Broadacre thus becomes, as far as we know, the only urban planning proposal that completely rejects coercion”) (Choay, 1973: 46).

(Choay, 1973: 57), through a system of “inquiries” encompassing the widest range of expertise, from sociology to history. To the contributions of Geddes and Mumford, the scholar concluded, we owe the formation of a critical consciousness that has strongly influenced the environment of Anglo-Saxon countries, giving rise to the birth of urban studies (Choay, 1973: 60). Finally, still in the field of second degree criticism, Choay identified two more current strands, that of “mental hygiene” –understood as a further approach aimed at highlighting the limits of progressive urbanism, coming from psychiatrists, sociologists, activists, as in the case of Jane Jacobs and her famous book *The death and life of great American cities* (1961)– and that of “urban perception,” as evidenced by the studies of Kevin Lynch. From these reflections Choay drew the conclusion that “the macro-language of urban planning is imperative and coercive,” leaving the citizen outside of any decision-making process: “the urban planner monologues or harangues and the inhabitant is forced to listen, sometimes without understanding”²³ (Choay, 1973: 78).

As the reader will have already noticed, in this articulated examination of the theoretical horizon of urbanism, Italy is completely absent, although some bibliographical references to the studies of Zevi and Argan do appear. This confirms what has already been observed in the introduction, that is to say, Choay’s real approach to Italian culture is to be referred to later years. It is true that, even with a better knowledge of the Italian context, there would not have been many Italian theorists cited in the anthology, but it is certain that a figure such as Gustavo Giovannoni, later so appreciated by Choay, would have deserved a place in it. As we know, however, in the mid-1960s the Roman engineer was still suffering from a radical ostracism in his own country, which made it rather difficult for his work to be known beyond Italy’s borders. This substantial distance of Choay from the cultural context of the peninsula would continue until the early 1970s, as evidenced by the subsequent writings of the scholar dedicated to the city.

In 1967, only two years after the publication of *L’urbanisme. Utopies et réalités*, Choay tackled the theme of the relationship between semiology and urbanism, entering the very fervent debate that revolved around the possibility of applying the results of structural linguistics to architecture and the city. With an article destined to have considerable success –first published in *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui* (Choay, 1967b: 8-10) and then translated into English under the significant title of *Meaning in architecture*, which included contributions from other authoritative scholars, already quite famous at that time²⁴ (then published in France in 1972 under the title *Le sens de la ville*) (Jencks and Baird, 1969; Choay *et al.*, 1972)– Choay demonstrated the applicability of semiology to urban phenomena. Her thesis was developed through the significant example of the Bororo village, studied by her teacher Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes tropiques* (1955) and even more extensively in *Anthropologie structurale* (1958), to which she herself would return several times in her later writings. In fact, the village plan shows a rigid and explicit spatial organization, mirroring multiple meanings that influence the rituals and the life of its inhabitants: it therefore attests to its semiological dimension. From the confirmation of the possibility of applying semiology to urban planning, followed by the observation of the impoverishment of meanings in the modern city, which appears “hypo-significant” (Choay, 1972: 18) compared to that of the past, also because of the rapid obsolescence of its physical space in relation to technological progress. It is a passage that took place throughout the centuries, in which the Italian Renaissance city also played

²³ Original quotation: “il macrolinguaggio dell’urbanistica è imperativo e coercitivo [...] l’urbanista monologa o arringa, l’abitante è costretto ad ascoltare, talvolta senza capire”.

²⁴ In addition to Choay, the volume brings together contributions by Reyner Banham, George Baird, Aldo van Eyck, Kenneth Frampton, Joseph Rykwert, Nathan Silver.

an important role, the first stage of a process of representation of urban space that would lead to a playful dimension of the city, a phenomenon, however, at that time still limited to social elites. Citing briefly Leon Battista Alberti and Francesco di Giorgio Martini as “the first ancestors of our urbanists”²⁵ (Choay, 1972: 11), Choay showed a first approach to the Italian story, which, however, still appeared rather limited compared to what would take place in the following years.

As proof of this, we can cite the later volume *The modern city: planning in the 19th century* (Braziller, New York 1969), which appeared in the *Planning and cities* series directed by George R. Collins. Collins traced a profile of the urban planning of the 19th century in which Choay devoted only a few words to Italy, mentioning the regulatory plans of Alessandro Viviani for Rome (1873 and 1883) and the achievements of Corso Vittorio Emanuele and Via Nazionale (the latter, as we know, started before 1870) as examples only partly inspired by Haussmann’s regulation plans (Choay, 1969: 21).

Choay’s research on urban space continued with a particular focus on the French context, as evidenced by the beautiful photographic volume *Espacements*, a title that would also give rise to a homonymous series directed for many years by the scholar for the Éditions du Seuil. The book was edited for a private company in 1969 and was not commercialized; it was only published many years later in Italy.²⁶ The book was divided into four chapters, by means of which the scholar introduced many “distinctive figures” of urban space from the Middle Ages to the present day and would have considerable success in subsequent literature: *Espace de contact*, for the Middle Ages; *Espace de spectacle*, for the classical era; *Espace de circulation* for the 19th and 20th centuries; *Espace de connexion* for current times.²⁷ This work also coincided in time with the beginning of Choay’s university career: involved as early as 1966 by historian and art critic Robert Louis Delevoy in some courses in Brussels at the École nationale supérieure des arts visuels de La Cambre, the scholar was in fact called in 1971 by Pierre Merlin to teach at the Département d’urbanisme du Centre universitaire expérimental de Vincennes, founded by Merlin himself with sociologist Hubert Tonka in 1968-1969; it would later become the Institut Français d’Urbanisme of the Université de Paris VIII, where Choay would be appointed full professorship and eventually emeritus (Paquot, 2019: 279-280).

The Italian translation of *L’urbanisme. Utopies et réalités* was published by Einaudi in two volumes with the title *La città. Utopie e realtà* in 1973. The arrival of this volume in the cultural context of the peninsula can certainly be considered the first significant stage of the fruitful relationship of cross-fertilization that would bind Choay to Italy in the decades to come. Even the genesis of this translation bears witness to this: the success of this translation was in fact due to the direct interest of Italo Calvino,²⁸ who for over twenty years had held progressively influential roles at Einaudi, having published, among other things, only a year earlier, his highly successful *Le città invisibili* (1972). The coincidence does not seem accidental: even

²⁵ Original quotation: “Les premiers ancêtres de nos urbanistes”.

²⁶ As the author recalls in the preface to the Italian edition, published by Skira in 2003, the volume was the brainchild of the banker and real estate entrepreneur Claude Alphandéry (Choay, 2003: 7-8). The original edition of the volume was entitled *Espacements: essai sur l’évolution de l’espace urbain en France*, texte de Françoise Choay, photographies de Jean-Louis Bloch-Lainé, Groupe de l’Immobilier-constructions de Paris, 1969. The original volume was 32 cm high and characterized by an excellent print quality. The Italian edition, however, will be reduced in size, so as to leave very unsatisfied the author, who does not hesitate to call it “bâclée et fautive”, also for not having been able to adequately correct (Choay, 2011: 18).

²⁷ The French text, with a limited selection of images, will be republished in its entirety in 2011 in the paperback volume *La terre qui meurt* mentioned in the previous footnote (Choay, 2011).

²⁸ This detail was recalled by Choay herself during one of the many stimulating conversations she had with the writer in Paris.

if there was no explicit allusion to Choay's text in Calvino's volume, it seems more than probable that he –already a frequent visitor of the Parisian environment, where he resided since 1967– could have found partial inspiration in the work of the French scholar.

Moreover, although very different in their genesis, structure and outcomes, both texts started from the observation of a deep crisis of the industrial city. One, Choay's, scientifically traced the genesis of the ideas and theoretical foundations that have produced the current situation. The other, that of Calvino, moved along the thread of a poetic imagery in search of "the secret reasons that have led men to live in cities"²⁹ (Calvino, 1993). Both, however, fear the failure of urban life.

In fact, Choay wrote in her introductory essay:

*From the quadras of Brasilia to the quadrilaterals of Sarcelles, from the forum of Chandigarh to the new forum of Boston, from the highways that are destroying San Francisco to the highways that are eviscerating Brussels, the same dissatisfaction, the same disquiet is born everywhere. [...] This book does not intend to make an additional contribution to the critique of the facts: it is not a question of denouncing once again the architectural monotony of the new cities or the social segregation that reigns there. We wanted to search for the meaning of the facts themselves, to highlight the reasons for the errors committed, the origin of the uncertainties and doubts that every new proposal for urban planning raises today*³⁰ (Choay, 1973: 3-4).

And Calvino, commenting on his own text shortly after publication: "I think I have written something like a last love poem to cities, at a time when it is becoming increasingly difficult to live them as cities. Perhaps we are approaching a moment of crisis in urban life, and *The Invisible Cities* is a dream born from the heart of unlivable cities"³¹ (Calvino, 1993: IX).

In presenting the Italian edition of her work, the scholar also took stock of the eight years that had passed since its publication, clarifying the maturation of her thinking and her intention to consider it by now an introduction to forthcoming research aimed at tracing the most remote origins of the discourse of the 19th century. It was the announcement, still in embryonic form, of the work that would result in *La règle et le modèle*, mainly dedicated to Leon Battista Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, which would be published in 1980. However, the preface to the Italian edition was also an opportunity to dwell on other figures, not treated in *La città. Utopie e realtà*, "who, without aiming to 'change the world'" have "contributed to forming a new relationship with urbanism"³² (Choay, 1973: X). Among these, Choay placed Baron Haussmann and Ildefonso Cerdà. To the first one, in particular, she would dedicate important studies in the following years; she already felt the need to "underline the originality of his contribution and observe the differences in relation to the path followed by his contemporaries, in particular

²⁹ Original quotation: "delle ragioni segrete che hanno portato gli uomini a vivere nelle città".

³⁰ Original quotation: "Dalle quadras di Brasilia ai quadrilateri di Sarcelles, dal foro di Chandigarh al nuovo foro di Boston, dalle highways che sfasciano San Francisco alle autostrade che sventrano Bruxelles, ovunque nasce la stessa scontentezza, la stessa inquietudine. [...] Questo libro non si propone di apportare un contributo addizionale alla critica dei fatti: non si tratta di denunciare una volta di più la monotonia architettonica delle nuove città o la segregazione sociale che vi regna. Abbiamo voluto ricercare il significato stesso dei fatti, mettere in evidenza le ragioni degli errori commessi, l'origine delle incertezze e dei dubbi che oggi suscita ogni nuova proposizione di ordinamento urbano".

³¹ Original quotation: "Penso d'aver scritto qualcosa come un ultimo poema d'amore alle città, nel momento in cui diventa sempre più difficile viverle come città. Forse stiamo avvicinandoci a un momento di crisi della vita urbana, e *Le città invisibili* sono un sogno che nasce dal cuore delle città invisibili."

³² Original quotation: "che, senza mirare a 'cambiare il mondo'" hanno "contribuito a formare un nuovo rapporto con l'urbanistica".

the utopians,” in the face of the persistence of strong prejudices towards his figure, still inclined to reduce “lightly his work to the dimensions of a police operation,”³³ as in the strongly ideological reading of Henri Lefebvre (Choay, 1973: XI)³⁴.

Journey through the Italian Renaissance: *La règle et le modèle* and the work on Leon Battista Alberti

We can certainly say that the central figure in the relationship between Choay and Italy has been Leon Battista Alberti,³⁵ to whom she has dedicated intense research since the early 1970s, originating from the debate at the time on the *villes nouvelles*.³⁶ This initial interest resulted in her doctoral thesis, developed under the direction of André Chastel and defended in March 1978. The result of this extended effort was the volume *La règle et le modèle*, published in Paris by Editions du Seuil in 1980. The Italian edition edited by Ernesto d’Alfonso would appear six years later (Choay, 1980; 1986). This text was explicitly in continuity with the first work of Choay, *L’urbanisme. Utopies et réalités*, whose objective was to investigate the origins of the theory of urbanism beyond the conventional 19th-century texts, on which the scholar focused her first years of research.

The fundamental thesis of the book, contained in the title, was that the theories of architecture and urbanism have oscillated over the centuries starting from two archetypes, “rule” and “model,” symbolized by two “inaugural” texts: in the first case, Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria* and in the second, Thomas More’s *Utopia*. But if in the first one it is still possible to recognize a “ludic” character, that puts together rules and creative freedom, the second one appears coercive and constrictive. Thus the approaches of the “rule” and the “model” prove antithetical, leading to a “frightening” choice between two conceptions: “one hedonistic, egotistical, permissive, the other corrective, disciplinary, medical”³⁷ (Choay, 1980: 334), the latter embodied by the failure of the contemporary city. In this sense, the two figures of Alberti and More, with their respective texts, constitute the primary framework of the book, so much so that the author dedicated two substantial chapters to them, without hiding her declared preference for Alberti’s work. Choay placed Alberti’s work in the double valence of continuity and rupture with respect to the Italian Quattrocento, a period she recognized as playing a crucial role, “without previous equivalents in any other culture”³⁸ (Choay, 1980: 14), in the definition of an autonomous discourse on built space.

The author’s interest in Alberti developed further precisely on the occasion of the Italian edition of the volume, which appeared in 1986 and for which Choay entirely rewrote the second chapter, dedicated precisely to the analysis of *De re aedificatoria*. It is a reflection that passed through a further maturation of the scholar’s³⁹ thought between 1981 and 1982, dedicated to

³³ Original quotation: “sottolineare l’originalità del suo contributo e osservarne le differenze in rapporto alla via seguita dai suoi contemporanei, in particolare gli utopisti [...] alla leggera la sua opera alle dimensioni di una operazione poliziesca”

³⁴ See Lefebvre (1968; 1970: 34-35).

³⁵ Choay herself stated this on the occasion of the conferral of her honorary degree in Genoa in 2001: “È Leon Battista Alberti che mi ha fatto venire in Italia” (Choay, 2008c: 22).

³⁶ She remembered it herself in F. Choay, O. Mongin, T. Paquot, *Les ressorts de l’urbanisme européen: d’Alberti et Thomas More à Giovanni et Magnaghi. Entretien avec Françoise Choay* (2005: 78). See also Choay (2008c: 22).

³⁷ Original quotation: “Essentiellement les deux procédures antithétiques de la règle et du modèle, qui acculent à un choix redoutable entre deux conceptions de l’édification, l’une hédoniste, égotique, permissive, l’autre corrective, disciplinaire, médicale”.

³⁸ Original quotation: “Ils demeurent cependant circonscrits et définis dans le cadre d’une même approche, née au *Quattrocento*, sans équivalent antérieur dans aucune autre culture, et qui consiste à assigner à l’organisation de l’espace édifié une formation discursive autonome”.

³⁹ Choay herself testifies to this in her preface to the second French edition of the work, which appeared in 1996, justifying her choice to have left the text intact, except for the chapter on Alberti (Choay, 1996a: 12-13).

the “operators”⁴⁰ of Alberti’s text and to the relationship of the latter with Vitruvius’ treatise, with respect to which Choay considered Alberti’s work decidedly original.⁴¹ Already in this passage, Choay recognized in Alberti’s work the character of an “instauration text, which aims to found construction as a specific and autonomous discipline,”⁴² (Choay, 1988b: 83) as opposed to other types of treatises that, in all cultures, veer more towards commentary or prescription. This process of refinement of her reading of Alberti also benefitted from a further direct approach to the culture of our country, developed precisely between 1980-1986, that is, between the first French edition of the volume and the Italian translation. It was at this time, in fact, that Choay’s relationship with the Politecnico di Milano was structured, mediated by Ernesto d’Alfonso; he invited the scholar to a seminar, held in November 1983, dedicated precisely to a comparison between the different perspectives on the theme of history and the project, originating from an early reading of the French edition of *La règle et le modèle*. The results of this meeting, collected two years later in the volume *Ragioni della storia e ragioni del progetto* (d’Alfonso, 1985), testify to the rapid reception of Choay’s volume in Italy and the stimulus to debate that it produced. We find there, in fact, reflections on the role of history, theory, and project, developed by scholars of different disciplines, from Cesare Stevan to Maria Luisa Scalvini, from Giancarlo Consonni to Bianca Bottero, from Augusto Rossari to Antonio Monestiroli, just to mention a few.⁴³ These reflections originated –even more significant for the process of cultural hybridization– from an unpublished text of Choay distributed in advance to the participants and then published as an appendix to the volume: “Il *De re aedificatoria* quale testo inaugurale.” This had been presented by the scholar at a conference in Tours in 1981 and was published in France only in 1988, although it was preceded by the Italian publication of 1985 (d’Alfonso, 1985: 130-143).⁴⁴

This intense exchange of the early 1980s was the basis of the Italian translation of *La règle et le modèle*, which was finalized in 1986. It is therefore significant that the arrival of the volume on Italian soil led the author to develop and deepen her reading of Alberti, presenting to the Italian public a perspective that was decidedly richer than the first French edition. The comparison between the two chapters on Alberti’s treatise in the two editions of 1980 and 1986 reveals, in fact, a greater extension of the treatment, even only in the description of the contents of the ten books, which also avails itself of a greater number of examples and citations. But the most relevant aspect of the analysis proposed by Choay in *De re aedificatoria* consisted in having gradually recognized a real “anthropological project” at the base of Alberti’s treatise, a theme on which her research would continue during the 1990s.⁴⁵ Thus, in the Italian edition of 1986, the scholar highlighted the instauration character of the treatise and proposed a careful decomposition through tables aimed at revealing its latent structure that were absent in the French edition.⁴⁶ The latter, according to Choay, is

⁴⁰ In clarifying the meaning of “operators” Choay referred to the concept of “transformation indicator” as introduced by mathematicians Nelson Dunford and Jacob T. Schwartz in their treatise *Linear operators* (1958-1971).

⁴¹ See Choay (1988b: 83-90).

⁴² Original quotation: “Texte *instaureur*, qui se propose de fonder l’édification en tant que discipline spécifique et autonome”.

⁴³ Besides Choay and Ernesto d’Alfonso, the contributors to this volume are Bianca Bottero, Maria Bottero, Giancarlo Consonni, Sergio Crotti, Antonio Monestiroli, Augusto Rossari, Danilo Samsa, Maria Luisa Scalvini, Cesare Stevan and Fabrizio Zanni. Choay presented a report with the significant title *L’edificazione come autocoscienza storica* (d’Alfonso, 1985: 11-18).

⁴⁴ See above note 40.

⁴⁵ Continuing her explanation of the need to rewrite the crucial chapter on Alberti (See above note 38), Choay adds: “D’autre part, ce chapitre constitue le pivot du livre et la figure d’Alberti m’apparaît plus fondamentale encore qu’à l’époque – où je n’avais pas pleinement compris son rapport avec le passé ni le projet anthropologique dont je suis arrivée à penser qu’il sous-tend le *De re aedificatoria*” (Choay, 1996 : 13). This further development of his reflections is contained in Choay (2000b).

⁴⁶ In addition to the inverted pyramid structure, already proposed in the first French edition (see below note 47), the tables in question, present only in the Italian edition, concern the use of the mentioned “operators”, putting together, through three columns, the genesis of the rules of composition of the text, the theoretical operators and the genesis of the rules of “aedificatio” (Choay, 1986: tables 2-4), while a last one schematizes the structure of the Vitruvian *De architectura* (Choay, 1986: table 5).

revealed in spite of the erratic character of many passages, which disorientate the hurried reader, as when Alberti “puts the same zeal in enunciating universal rules of construction as in useful rules to prevent the plasters from cracking”⁴⁷ (Choay, 1986: 94). On the contrary, the solidity of the treatise appears clear if one proceeds from book I to book IX, in an inverted pyramid structure⁴⁸ where one goes from the level of “necessity” to that of “comfort”, up to the “pleasure” of architecture, while book X—considered by the author spurious with respect to the rest of the treatise (Choay, 1986: 140)—is assigned a level of “correction”.

However, in spite of this passionate and in many ways innovative reading proposed by Choay, the Italian environment reaction was controversial. The “Roman school” of architectural history, in particular, immediately marked its distance: in a long review published in 1987 in *Architettura. Storia e documenti*, Renato Bonelli stigmatized the “failure” of the book, which he argued was “disappointing and specious, written in a confused, disorderly style, at times convoluted and obscure, loaded with many gratuitously added parts, and which, to make matters worse, reaches the reader through a poor translation”⁴⁹ (Bonelli, 1987: 188).

Bonelli’s critique moved first of all from the refutation of the semiological reading proposed by Choay with regard to the two treatises by Alberti and More, which, according to the author, was also lacking in knowledge of the coeval critical developments of the relationship between semiology and architecture, with the exception of Umberto Eco’s work (Bonelli, 1987: 186). Moreover, the interpretation of *De re aedificatoria* “leads the author to distort Alberti’s text in order to find in it what is not there, to reduce an eminently historical product to an abstract and crystallized entity”⁵⁰ (Bonelli, 1987: 187). For Bonelli, this led to the misunderstanding of being able to “juxtapose Cerdà, Le Corbusier, or the CIAM with Alberti and T. More”, an operation “destined from the beginning to failure”⁵¹ (Bonelli, 1987: 188), also due to the lack of conceptual distinction between architecture and urbanism—as well as between architecture and building—which lead Choay to attribute an excessive weight to the discursive role in the concrete production of space.⁵² Although I agree with some of the criticisms Bonelli made of *La regola e il modello*, it is easy to recognize, today, in his harsh judgment, the results of his rigidly idealistic approach, contrary to any analysis that is too conditioning of creative freedom. This was even more evident in the conclusion, where he resolutely opposed Choay’s invitation to rethink urban space in light of Alberti’s and More’s readings: “The process of renewal of architectural language certainly does not obey prescriptions dictated from the outside, like those proclaimed in the last pages of the book, but depends exclusively on man’s creativity, which always manifests itself according to unexpected solutions and unpredictable forms”⁵³ (Bonelli, 1987: 189).

⁴⁷ Original quotation: “mette lo stesso zelo nell’enunciare regole universali della costruzione e quelle utili ed evitare che gli intonaci si spacchino”.

⁴⁸ Already published in the first edition of 1980, this table remains in the two subsequent editions, but undergoes a progressive refinement, presenting already in the Italian edition of 1986 the addition of the operators and finally in the French edition of 1996 a further specification of the contents of the prologue of the treaty. Cf. Choay (1980: 92; 1986: 100; 1996: 351).

⁴⁹ Original quotation: “deludente e pretestuoso, scritto in modo confuso, disordinato, a tratti involuto e oscuro, carico di molte parti gratuitamente aggiunte, che ci perviene attraverso una scadente traduzione”.

⁵⁰ Original quotation: “porta l’autrice a stravolgere il testo albertiano per ritrovarvi a forza quello che non c’è, per ridurre a entità storica e cristallizzata un prodotto eminentemente storico”.

⁵¹ Original quotation: “accostare Cerdà, Le Corbusier, o i CIAM all’Alberti e a Th. More [...] destinata fin dall’inizio al fallimento”

⁵² “And at the same time it shows a naive belief in the direct and decisive influence of treaties and utopias on the processes of building activity, on the developments of architectural language, on the assumed forms of artistic creation, as if the practice of building could be considered as the immediate application of the dictate established in the written norm” (Bonelli, 1987: 186).

⁵³ Original quotation: “Il processo di rinnovamento del linguaggio architettonico non obbedisce di certo a prescrizioni dettate dall’esterno, come quelle proclamate nelle ultime pagine del libro, ma dipende esclusivamente dalla creatività dell’uomo, che si manifesta sempre secondo soluzioni inattese e forme imprevedibili”.

Unperturbed by these objections, Choay continued her work on Alberti with several publications in the following years. However, when, in 1996, she introduced the second French edition of *La règle et le modèle*—which was published sixteen years after the first one—the scholar did not hesitate to declare many conceptions of her book to be outdated, specifying that in light of present-day developments she would no longer have written it in that way. Conversely, Choay confirmed the heuristic and hermeneutic validity of the epistemological tools adopted in her analysis, particularly for the texts of Alberti and More (Choay, 1996: 12). A few years later, the scholar even managed, with Pierre Caye, to edit a new French translation of *De re aedificatoria* (the second, after the only existing one by Jean Martin in 1553), which resulted in a critical edition of the treatise in 2004. In this “hand to hand” with Alberti’s text (Choay, 2008e: 52), Choay recognized a fundamental step in the maturation of her thinking on heritage. In fact, she would admit: “Without the violence with which Alberti, initiator of a new architecture, condemns the unjustified destruction of medieval buildings that continue to respond to their functions, I would probably never have dedicated myself to the questions of the built heritage nor been interested in the sense that its preservation assumes today”⁵⁴ (Choay, 2008c: 24).

Continuing her research on Alberti through a volume edited in 2006 with Michel Paoli—which in itself represented, in the rich *parterre* of French and Italian scholars involved,⁵⁵ a significant piece of that process of cross-fertilization already mentioned—the scholar would come to observe that the value of Alberti’s treatise consisted precisely in having placed the “question of building” at the most remote origins of the very history of the human race (Choay, 2006b; 2006c). This is an interpretation that was confirmed in Italy, even in the reading already proposed a few decades earlier by Giulio Carlo Argan,⁵⁶ and that was welcomed by Marco Dezzi Bardeschi on the occasion of the publication of the French text mentioned above.⁵⁷

Ultimately, all these exchanges clearly demonstrate the circularity of thought between Italy and France in the sphere of Albertian studies, to which Choay has contributed in a decisive way. It is not surprising, in fact, that Choay was one of the founding members of the prestigious journal *Albertiana*, still active today and published since 1998 by the Société Internationale Leon Battista Alberti, which in turn was established in 1995 in close collaboration between the two countries, under the patronage of the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici. Also, through this journal, where in the first issue Choay published an article dedicated to “L’architecture d’aujourd’hui au miroir du *De re aedificatoria*” (Choay, 1998b), the scholar has carried out a significant process of cross-culturization between Italy and France, shared in the steering committee with other authoritative Alberti scholars, among whom Italians and French have always prevailed, not by chance.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Original quotation: “Senza la violenza con cui Alberti, iniziatore di una nuova architettura, condanna la distruzione ingiustificata degli edifici medioevali che continuano a rispondere alle loro funzioni, non mi sarei probabilmente mai dedicata alle questioni del patrimonio costruito né interessata al senso che assume attualmente la sua conservazione”.

⁵⁵ It is sufficient to mention among the French authors, besides Choay and Paoli, the names of Pierre Laurens and Jean-Marc Mandosio, and, among the Italians, Luca Boschetto, Lucia Bertolini, Francesco Paolo Di Teodoro, Riccardo Pacciani and Livio Volpi Ghirardini, to whom we can add the British Robert Tavernor.

⁵⁶ Argan had already observed how “Alberti argued much less about architecture than about its preliminary conditions, its genesis, the ways in which it organizes and realizes that will to build that is inherent in the human being”. (“Alberti disputasse molto meno dell’architettura che delle sue condizioni preliminari, della sua genesi, dei modi con cui si organizza e realizza quella volontà di costruire che è propria, connaturata, all’essere umano”) (Argan, 1974: 44).

⁵⁷ See Dezzi Bardeschi (2006).

⁵⁸ Suffice it to mention the names of Maurice Aymard, Maurice Brock, Arturo Calzona, Mario Carpo, Pierre Caye, Françoise Choay, Marcello Ciccuto, Francesco P. Di Teodoro, Riccardo Fubini, Francesco Furlan, Pierre Gros, Yves Hersant, Peter Hicks, Charles Hope, Jill Kraye, Pierre Laurens, Martin McLaughlin, Anna Modigliani, Nuccio Ordine, Francisco Rico, Joseph Rykwert, Francesco Tateo. Tra i *past members* si ritrovano inoltre Christian Bec, Vittore Branca, Eugenio Garin, Guglielmo Gorni, Cecil Grayson, Pierre Jodogne, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Hans-K. Lücke, Nicholas Mann, Mario Martelli, Massimo Miglio, Werner Echslin, Emilio Pasquini, Giovanni Ponte, Alain-Philippe Segonds, Pierre Souffrin, Cesare Vasoli, Catherine Wilkinson-Zerner.

Towards heritage: from Giovannoni's "discovery" to the developments of the *Allégorie*, 1981-1998

At the beginning of the 1980s, and more precisely in 1981, Choay came into contact with the work of Gustavo Giovannoni,⁵⁹ to whom she would devote increasing attention, to the point of including him in the small elite of figures who would animate *L'Allégorie du patrimoine*, one of the most famous and successful texts of her maturity that was translated into many languages. This approach to Giovannoni's work culminated in 1998, when Choay promoted and edited the partial translation of *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova* of 1931, published in France under the title *L'urbanisme face aux villes anciennes*. In the course of this twenty-year period, between the conclusion of her work on Alberti and the above-mentioned translation, the presence of the scholar as a visiting professor at various Italian universities would become more and more frequent.

To better understand the meaning of the "discovery" of Giovannoni's contribution by Choay at the beginning of the 1980s, it is necessary to relate it to contemporary French architectural and urban planning culture. Since the 1970s –and to a certain extent even before– the French culture has seen a consistent irruption of the Italian bibliography in the field of urban studies, through translations that have not always been faithful, leading, as Jean-Louis Cohen wrote, to a real process of "Italianization" of French culture.⁶⁰ In this context, it is interesting to observe first of all the position that Choay took with respect to the rampant success of urban morphology types studies of Italian derivation. The opportunity to discuss this came around the middle of the decade, when Aldo Rossi's work arrived in France through the exhibition *Aldo Rossi. Théâtre, Ville, Architecture*, held in 1985 in Nantes and introduced by a symposium attended by Bernard Huet and Hubert Damisch, among others.⁶¹ In the same year, Choay participated, with Pierre Merlin and Ernesto d'Alfonso, in the organization of a seminar entitled *Morphologie urbaine et parcellaire*, dedicated to the deepening of the urban morphology types analysis and its current legacy, as part of a research on the same theme initiated by the same Choay and Merlin at the Institut français d'urbanisme, whose outcomes would later be accused of "Italophobia" by Cohen (2015: 13).

After a series of lectures that deepened the development and the results,⁶² it was the turn of the French scholar to draw the conclusions of the aforementioned meeting. Her position on the validity of morphology types studies was very doubtful: in fact, they testified to a general weakness of methodological structure and often appeared to lack historical foundation.⁶³ Denouncing the superficial interpretation of the origins of the term "type" –traced back to the studies of Giulio Carlo Argan and his reinterpretation of the contribution of Quatremère de Quincy– the French scholar underlined how Italy had exercised a veritable "verbal hegemony

⁵⁹ She declares it herself by quoting " *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova* by Giovannoni that I only read in 1981" (" *le Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova* de Giovannoni que j'ai lu seulement en 1981") (Choay, 1996b: 13).

⁶⁰ In his famous study on "Italophilia" of 1984, Jean-Louis Cohen underlined how it was around the 1970s that the greatest wave of this phenomenon was concentrated in France, even though the prodromes can already be traced back ten years earlier with the first conferences by Ponti, Zevi and Rogers in Paris (Cohen, 1984; 2015: 69). On the transition from the technocratic model to the more participatory one that took place in French urban planning during the 1980s, with the grafting of Italian culture and experience, see Ingallina (2004: 13-ff).

⁶¹ At the origin of the event there had been, in 1981, the arrival of two of Rossi's students, Marino Narpozzi and Aldo de Poli, as teachers at the school of architecture of Nantes. See Roze (2014: 211). The catalog of the exhibition was published under the title *Aldo Rossi, théâtre, ville, architecture*, as an attachment to number 5 of the journal *303 Recherches et Créations* in 1984.

⁶² See in particular the reports by Ernesto d'Alfonso (1988: 67-74) and Ilaria Valente (1988: 75-80).

⁶³ "Derrière beaucoup de rhétorique, le terme savant de morphologie abrite les angoisses et/ou la volonté de puissance des architectes et groupes d'architectes qui ont fait sa fortune" ("Behind a lot of rhetoric, the learned term of morphology shelters the anxieties and/or the will of power of the architects and groups of architects who made its fortune") (Choay, 1988a: 145).

(sometimes in a terrorist manner)⁶⁴ in this field (Choay, 1988a: 147). This was evident, for example, in the extension of the term “project” to languages other than Italian, in which it acquired a completely different meaning (Choay, 1988a: 147-148). Instead, Choay wrote, it was necessary to relate correctly to the terminology and to improve the quality of the translations from Italian, “which convey a real claptrap”⁶⁵ (Choay, 1988a: 148).

With these premises, the French scholar entered into the heart of morphological analysis applied to the city, unmasking its many aporias, among which the main one consisted in the very purpose of the analysis: to provide a simple “operational tool” for architects (Choay, 1988a: 150), lacking the necessary rigor for any historical investigation (Choay, 1988a: 151-153). The city, in this approach, was presented as a self-referential object that could be investigated without any regard for the economic, legal, and social factors that produced and transformed it. In the face of a growing interest in urban space, manifested by the city's historians, including André Chastel,⁶⁶ in the years 1960-1970s, the morphological analysis advocated by Italian scholars of urban morphology appeared to Choay hasty and superficial, often based on second-hand sources and strongly ideological (Choay, 1988a: 152). She placed in this vein some works by Carlo Aymonino, Leonardo Benevolo and even the group of students of Manfredo Tafuri, all published in the early 1970s.⁶⁷

But it is evident that the most ambiguous and misleading volume in this indictment was precisely Aldo Rossi's *L'architettura della città*, which for Choay manifested “a florilegium of absurdities”⁶⁸ (Choay, 1988a: 156). Rivers of ink have been spilled so far on this volume, but we find the synthetic judgment that Alberto Ferlenga has recently given it to be very valid, tracing it mainly to the beginning of a research, partly autobiographical, which ended in a success perhaps unforeseen by the author himself (Ferlenga, 2014: 16). It is known, after all, that the ambitions and limits of *L'architettura della città* had been well identified by Rossi himself, when he dwelt on it, some years later, in *A scientific autobiography*, published in 1981 in the United States and only in 1990 in Italy (Rossi, 1981; 1990). Here Rossi emphasized how his work aimed more at the discovery of “his own” architecture than at the roots of the urban phenomenon, and even ended up revealing his deepest intention, that is, to get rid of the city (Rossi, 1990: 21-22). It is not surprising, then, that Choay herself concluded her pungent remarks with a page of the autobiography in which Rossi had made his *redde rationem*, recognizing in his words the clear evidence of the manifestation of a downward parabola of the studies of urban morphology already in the mid-1980s.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Original quotation: “Dans le cas de la morphologie, c'est l'Italie qui a exercé son hégémonie (parfois terroriste) verbale”.

⁶⁵ Original quotation: “D'abord, il serait urgent d'entreprendre des travaux comparatifs systématiques sur la terminologie de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme, et parallèlement des mesures devraient être prises pour améliorer la qualité des traductions, en particulier les traductions de l'italien qui véhiculent un véritable galimatias”.

⁶⁶ Choay points in particular to Chastel's studies on Les Halles, aimed at defining the cadastral parcel as a minimum significant unit of urban space, but the result of a complex interaction of economic, legal and social factors (Choay, 1988a: 151).

⁶⁷ Choay refers to the volume of C. Aymonino, G. Fabbri, A. Villa, *Le città capitali del XIX secolo* (1975), but she does not spare from the same criticism also the *Storia della città* of Leonardo Benevolo (1975) and the collective volume of G. Ciucci, F. Dal Co, M. Manieri Elia, M. Tafuri, *La città americana dalla guerra civile al New Deal* (1973) (Choay, 1988a: 153).

⁶⁸ Original quotation: “Les absurdités dont le livre de jeunesse d'A. Rossi fournit un florilège”.

⁶⁹ “Les médias spécialisés semblent bien, en effet, indiquer que la morphologie soit aujourd'hui, après quelque vingt ans d'existence, passée de mode chez les architectes [...]. Il suffit, pour s'en convaincre, de lire l'*Autobiographie scientifique* d'une des principales vedettes de la littérature architecturale en général et morphologique en particulier: Aldo Rossi a le mérite de la lucidité et de l'honnêteté” (“The specialized media seem, in fact, to indicate that morphology is today, after some twenty years of existence, out of fashion among architects [...]. To be convinced of this, it is enough to read the scientific autobiography of one of the main stars of architectural literature in general and morphology in particular: Aldo Rossi has the merit of lucidity and honesty”) (Choay, 1988a: 160-161).

This, then, is the context in which Choay's unexpected "discovery" of Giovannoni's contribution took place at the beginning of the 1980s. To the scepticism shown towards the inheritance of the morphological type studies, the scholar opposed her enthusiasm for the thought of a *sui generis* urbanist like Giovannoni, at that time still very neglected in Italy because of ideological prejudices and object of a first timid reevaluation only in the fields of history of architecture and restoration (Curuni, 1979; Del Bufalo, 1982). It is precisely from this last disciplinary front that the scholar drew the cue for her knowledge of Giovannoni's work, declaring her debt of gratitude towards a "classic" among the disciplinary texts on restoration, written by a direct student of the Roman engineer, namely the volume *Teoria e storia del restauro* by Carlo Ceschi (1970).⁷⁰

Choay's reading of Giovannoni immediately focused on the most innovative features of his work, namely the territorial dimension, the multi-scale approach and the early anticipation of a true post-urban era. Thus, already in 1991, writing about *Urbanistica disorientata* in a collective volume published in Italy by Jean Gottmann and Calogero Muscarà, the scholar underlined the anticipatory contribution of Giovannoni, identified as a forerunner of the post-urban era, theorized in more recent years by Melvin Webber.⁷¹ The Roman scholar was also remembered for his contribution to the problem of the conservation of urban heritage, in which Choay highlighted the importance of the

*concept of scale: the territorial dimension of the networks had to be flanked by other scales of intervention, particularly in places intended for housing [...]. The fabric of the historical centres offered, at the same time, the scale commensurate with this use and examples of how to dimension diffuse, non-urban, modes of unification to be invented*⁷² (Choay, 1991: 159).

However, it was with the aforementioned *L'Allégorie du patrimoine*, published in its first French edition in 1992,⁷³ that the figure of Giovannoni took on a leading role in the construction of a "history" of architectural and urban heritage in Europe, destined, as mentioned earlier, to be a considerable international success. However, it should be emphasized that the origins of this volume are not so much to be found in Choay's historical curiosity as in a social concern: as the scholar later clarified, the writing of the text stemmed from the observation of a "deep malaise" in society, evidenced by the cult of heritage.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ See Choay (1995b: VIII).

⁷¹ "Fu soprattutto Gustavo Giovannoni a pronosticare la fine delle grandi città, l'*anti-urbanizzazione* e l'emergere, in parallelo con lo sviluppo delle reti tecniche, di nuove forme consone al soggiorno dell'uomo" ("It was above all Gustavo Giovannoni who predicted the end of large cities, anti-urbanization and the emergence, in parallel with the development of technical networks, of new forms suited to man's stay.") (Choay, 1991: 158).

⁷² Original quotation: "concetto di scala: alla dimensione territoriale delle reti dovevano affiancarsi altre scale d'intervento, in particolare nei luoghi destinati all'addensamento abitativo [...]. Il tessuto dei centri storici offriva a un tempo la scala commisurata a tale uso ed esempi di come dimensionare modi di accorpamento diffusi, non urbani, da inventare."

⁷³ Translated into Italian in 1995. The original version in Italian of this article, unless otherwise indicated, quotes from the French editions of 1992 and 1999, since the Italian translation presents considerable inaccuracies. In this version, the English edition was used.

⁷⁴ "Mon intérêt pour le patrimoine n'est en aucune façon le fait d'une curiosité historique. Il relève pour moi d'un problème de société. Le "culte" actuel du patrimoine, et sa diffusion planétaire, sous des formes parfois absurdes et trop souvent exploitées par l'industrie de la culture, est pour moi, avant tout, l'indice d'un malaise profond. Il répond [...] à un besoin de sécurisation. Vouloir conserver tout – et souvent n'importe quoi – doit être interprété comme un syndrome" ("My interest in heritage is in no way the result of a historical curiosity. For me, it is a problem of society. The current "cult" of the heritage, and its planetary diffusion, under forms sometimes absurd and too often exploited by the industry of the culture, is for me, above all, the index of a deep malaise. It responds [...] to a need for security. To want to preserve everything –and often anything– must be interpreted as a syndrome") (Choay, 1994a: 5-6).

In the economy of a general treatment of the story from its origins to the present day, Choay dedicated considerable space to the Roman scholar, assigning him a fundamental role of synthesis in the definition of the concept of “urban heritage.”⁷⁵ From the very first lines, the French scholar noted the surprising oblivion that characterized Giovannoni’s work in the post-war period, “[p]olitical and ideological passions have long obscured Giovannoni’s significance” (Choay, 2001: 132),⁷⁶ due both to his involvement with the regime and to his positions towards modern architecture, which are now a further reason for him to “be restored to his legitimate place on the historical stage” (Choay, 2001: 132). The scholar is therefore placed by Choay at the end of a path started with John Ruskin and continued through the different elaborations of Camillo Sitte and Charles Buls, in which Giovannoni assumes the role of “historicizing” (*historiale*)⁷⁷ figure towards the urban heritage, opening perspectives that are still relevant for the analysis and intervention in the old city (Choay, 1995a: 129). In particular, the French scholar acknowledged Giovannoni’s merit of having identified the way for a possible integration between art values and the use value of ancient urban fabrics, through a fully urban vision of the problems that does not disdain the use of the best products of industrial civilization (such as modern transportation networks, which Giovannoni considered fundamental for the definition of new relationships between old and new cities).⁷⁸ In this direction then, the Roman scholar –thanks also to his “three-fold training” as architect, engineer, and restorer⁷⁹– “surpasses the unidimensional urbanism within which Le Corbusier confined himself without having understood that his ‘radial city was a non-city’” (Choay, 2001: 133), defining instead “a sophisticated doctrine of the conservation of the urban heritage” (Choay, 2001: 133).

This doctrine is summarized by Choay in three principles:

First, any ancient urban fragment should be integrated into a local, regional, and territorial development plan that symbolizes its relationship with present-day life [...] Next, the concept of historic monument should not be applied to a single monument independent of the built context [...] Finally, once these two conditions have been fulfilled, the ancient urban ensembles call for preservation and restoration procedures similar to those that Boito defined for monuments (Choay, 2001: 134-135).

Thus, we arrive at *diradamento*, a term that Choay considered particularly felicitous, translating it as *éclaircissage*,⁸⁰ in which “[r]econstitution –provided that it not be deceptive– and, above all, certain acts of destruction become licit, advisable, and even necessary”

⁷⁵ Choay emphasizes the scholar’s importance right from the very notion of “urban heritage,” “which Giovannoni is no doubt the first to so designate” (Choay, 2001: 132).

⁷⁶ See also Choay (1999: 240, note 45).

⁷⁷ We quote again from the new French edition of 1999.

⁷⁸ “Un recul de quelques décennies lui permet de penser désormais en termes de “réseaux” (*rete*) et d’infrastructures la mutation des échelles urbaines dont Viollet-le-Duc et Sitte avaient fait le pivot de leur réflexion” (“A step back a few decades allows him to think from now on in terms of “networks” (*rete*) and infrastructures the mutation of the urban scales of which Viollet-le-Duc and Sitte had made the pivot of their reflection”) (Choay, 1999: 146).

⁷⁹ “Giovannoni n’est pas seulement un architecte et un restaurateur, disciple et continuateur de Boito, il n’est pas seulement un historien de l’art dont Rome fut un des objets d’étude favoris, mais comme Boito il est aussi ingénieur et, à la différence de ce dernier, urbaniste” (“Giovannoni is not only an architect and restorer, disciple and continuator of Boito, he is not only an art historian of which Rome was one of the favorite objects of study, but like Boito he is also an engineer and, unlike the latter, an urban planner”) (Choay, 1999: 148).

⁸⁰ “Giovannoni utilise la belle métaphore du *diradamento*, qui évoque l’éclaircissage d’une forêt ou d’un semis trop denses, pour désigner les opérations servant à éliminer toutes les constructions parasites, adventives, superfétatoires” (“Giovannoni uses the beautiful metaphor of *diradamento*, which evokes the thinning of a forest or a seedling that is too dense, to designate the operations used to eliminate all the parasitic, adventitious, superfluous constructions”) (Choay, 1999: 149). In the Italian version, the passage is particularly distorted; for example, the term *éclaircissage* - a correct transposition of *diradamento* - is improperly translated as “illuminamento” (illumination).

(Choay, 2001: 135). This is followed by some considerations on the operational outcomes of Giovannoni's theories, in which the French scholar noted first of all the frequent clashes "with resistance, due as much to their premonitory character as to the challenge they posed to the ideology of a regime avid for grand and spectacular works" (Choay, 2001: 135), and then observes that—in the face of the involvement with Fascism—"one must add to Giovannoni's credit his work as an governmental antagonist—the tally of all the acts of destruction that he succeeded in preventing throughout Italy" (Choay, 2001: 135). According to Choay, "[n]early alone among the twentieth-century theoreticians of urbanism," Giovannoni has the merit of having "placed the aesthetic dimension of human settlement at the very core of his concerns" (Choay, 2001: 136), anticipating "with more flexibility and complexity, the various politics of 'protected sectors' that have been finalized and applied in Europe since 1960," although his theory contains "as well seeds of future paradoxes and difficulties" (Choay, 2001: 137).

These observations are all fully acceptable, apart from some inaccuracies due to errors already present in the Italian bibliography or some exaggerations of the merits of the scholar, which overlook the decisive contribution of many other figures of the protagonists. But Choay's approach is clearly free from philological concerns: already in her preface, she made it clear that the aim of the book was the search for "origins, but not a history" of the cult of heritage, for which she will use "concrete figures and points of reference, but without attempting to provide a complete inventory" (Choay, 2001: 6). With this cut, in essence, the scholar choose to highlight only a few prominent personalities, selected from those who more than others have marked some evolutionary stages in the path of protection.

The latter, in fact, were not long in coming: already in 1992 the most significant part of *L'Allégorie*—or rather the chapter "L'invention du patrimoine urbain," in which the figure of Giovannoni was treated—received its first Italian translation, as an autonomous essay in the anthology of writings *L'orizzonte del posturbano*, edited by Ernesto d'Alfonso and published by Officina (Choay, 1992a).⁸¹ As a whole, this last volume can be considered another important piece in the process of dissemination of Choay's work in Italy. It contains essays, both published and unpublished, on the city and the monument (Choay, 1987; 1992c), on Haussmann (Choay, 1992b),⁸² on Riegl and Freud (Choay, 1989; 1992e),⁸³ on historical heritage and revolutions (Choay, 1992d),⁸⁴ which effectively convey the multiform contribution of the scholar, but above all her warning, emphasized by d'Alfonso in the afterword, against the loss of competence in building in Western cultures.⁸⁵ Moreover, the success of the volume cited is still demonstrated by the fact that it has been out of print for many years.⁸⁶

Shortly thereafter, the reflection of Choay's studies on Giovannoni produced another very significant result in Italy: the anastatic reprinting of *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova* of 1931, edited by Francesco Ventura in 1995 with a preface by Choay herself (Giovannoni, 1995). In her brief preface, Choay compared the long concealment of the volume to the similar fate

⁸¹ The volume in question was published just a few months after the release of *L'Allégorie du patrimoine* in France, whose first edition dates back to January 1992, while *L'orizzonte del posturbano* appeared in September of the same year.

⁸² Based on a reworked version by Choay (1975).

⁸³ This essay will later be republished, with the title *Riegl, Freud e i monumenti storici. Per un approccio "sociale" alla conservazione* (Choay, 1995c).

⁸⁴ Taken from an unpublished lecture given at Cornell University in 1990.

⁸⁵ "Il disagio è dalla Choay connesso ad una contrazione delle facoltà di 'costruire' se stessi il quale chiama in causa il rapporto, fondamentale per le culture occidentali, tra costruire e costruirsi i cui travagli ricorrono nella cultura contemporanea, da Valery a Rogers" ("Discomfort is by Choay connected to a contraction of the faculties of 'building' oneself which calls into question the relationship, fundamental to Western cultures, between building and building oneself whose travails recur in contemporary culture, from Valery to Rogers") (d'Alfonso, 1992: 131).

⁸⁶ It is now unobtainable even in the market of used books.

suffered by the better-known book by Ildelfonso Cerdà, *Teoría general de la urbanización*, published in Spain in 1867 and “left in hell for more than a century”⁸⁷ (Cerdà, 1867; 1995). Unlike the latter, however, the decades of silence surrounding Giovannoni’s volume appeared to the French scholar to be “far harsher”: his work, in fact, was not only “kept hidden for political reasons and thus condemned to be ignored outside Italy,” but even “falsified and defamed”⁸⁸ (Choay, 1995b: VII). It is for these reasons, then, that Choay did not hesitate to welcome “the new edition of *Vecchie città* as a work of ‘public health’”⁸⁹ (Choay, 1995b: VII). There are two “essential caveats” that Choay glimpsed in the scholar’s work: “the serene recognition, without nostalgic passeism or technocratic triumphalism, of the influence of technology on our environment,” and “the existence, I would say indeed the presence, of traditional urban fabrics,” for which “Giovannoni’s book takes a stand, ahead of its time, against the cultural industry, the extremist historicization [...] and the false memory with which they are loaded”⁹⁰ (Choay, 1995b: VIII).

Choay’s enthusiasm for the reprinting of the volume was met by a few dissenting voices, such as Alberto Maria Racheli, who in an articulated review disputed the judgments on the presumed concealment of Giovannoni’s work. For Racheli, in fact, the unexpected discovery of *Vecchie città* by the French scholar “appears all too candid, since, among those who are interested in restoration, the direct reading of Giovannoni’s book in question has represented in Italy an uninterrupted application of study, from the moment it was published until our days”⁹¹ (Racheli, 1996: 99). In essence, “there is no doubt that the oblivion about the knowledge of this book, starting from the fall of Fascism, which Choay mentions, represents a markedly extra-Italian phenomenon”⁹² (Racheli, 1996: 99).

Beyond this significant exception, however, 1995 marked a very important year for the relationship between the scholar and the cultural context of the peninsula, not only due to the reprinting of Giovannoni’s volume, but especially for the contemporary Italian edition of *L’Allégorie du patrimoine*, which was published once again in our country by Officina and edited by Ernesto d’Alfonso, and who was joined by Ilaria Valente (Choay, 1995a). In spite of an unfortunate translation,⁹³ the book was a great success in Italy, obtaining increasing quotations from scholars not strictly connected to the heritage field.

A few years later, as already mentioned, Choay’s in-depth study of Giovannoni’s work reached its conclusion with the publication of the French translation of *Vecchie città*, announced by the same scholar in the preface to the Italian reprint of the volume mentioned above. The work was based on a doctoral thesis by Claire Tandille in 1994, under the direction of Choay herself.

⁸⁷ Original quotation: “La *Teoría general de la urbanización* di Cerdà, questo libro formidabile, che instaura l’urbanistica come disciplina autonoma, è rimasto all’inferno per più di un secolo” (Choay, 1995b: VII).

⁸⁸ Original quotation: “di gran lunga più duri [...] tenuta nascosta per ragioni politiche e quindi condannata a essere ignorata fuori d’Italia [...] falsificata e diffamata.”

⁸⁹ Original quotation: “la riedizione di *Vecchie città* come un’opera di ‘salute pubblica’.”

⁹⁰ Original quotation: “il riconoscimento sereno, senza passatismo nostalgico né trionfalismo tecnicista, dell’influenza della tecnica sul nostro ambiente [...] l’esistenza, direi anzi la presenza, dei tessuti urbani tradizionali [...] il libro di Giovannoni prende partito, *ante litteram*, contro l’industria culturale, la storicizzazione oltranzista [...] e la falsa memoria di cui li si carica.”

⁹¹ Original quotation: “appare fin troppo candida, in quanto, fra coloro che invece si interessano di restauro, la lettura diretta del libro di Giovannoni di cui si tratta ha rappresentato in Italia una ininterrotta applicazione di studio, dal momento in cui è stato edito fino ai nostri giorni.”

⁹² Original quotation: “è indubbio che l’oblio circa la conoscenza di questo libro, a partire dalla caduta del fascismo, cui accenna la Choay, rappresenti un fenomeno marcatamente extraitaliano.”

⁹³ The systematic comparison with the French edition clearly reveals how the Italian translation remains decidedly below the level of the original text, of which it rarely succeeds in restoring the effectiveness and linguistic richness. See also above, note 79.

As stated in the introduction, however, the final text was the result of a careful reworking of the research of the latter, aimed at selecting the most significant parts of the volume of Giovannoni, in order to create a pocket edition to be addressed to an audience not only formed by specialists.⁹⁴ Therefore, in addition to some passages considered excessively repetitive and redundant, all the parts more directly linked to the Italian context are missing, such as the comments on the existing legislation and the relative proposals made by the scholar, the numerous examples of Italian cities and most of the images. On the other hand, Choay's introductory essay constitutes a testimony of notable interest, in which the scholar, in addition to developing and deepening some considerations already anticipated a few years earlier in *L'Allégorie du patrimoine*, makes a careful commentary on the 1931 volume, dwelling also on Giovannoni's biography and on his unfortunate critical vicissitude, to the point of mentioning the recent reawakening of interest around his figure.

After a brief introduction, which partly retraced the considerations already made by Choay in the preface to the Italian reprint of *Vecchie città* of 1995, the scholar articulated the interesting introductory essay in five chapters. In the first one, Choay analyzed the essential contents of Giovannoni's volume, suggesting some interpretative keys for understanding the text. For the scholar, the entire treatment of *Vecchie città* was based on a dialectical relationship between two apparently opposite worlds, which Giovannoni tried to reconcile while preserving their respective differences; his work could therefore be defined "as an exercise in bringing contradictory needs into compatibility and complementarity"⁹⁵ (Choay, 1998a: 9). This dialectical relationship was also articulated on a fundamental aspect, which Choay placed among the characterizing elements of the volume, namely the "notion of scale," through which Giovannoni read both the ancient urban fabric and the modern urban organisms, analyzing the latter for the first time "in terms of infrastructural networks: he already takes into account the telecommunications networks, but also all the transport networks"⁹⁶ (Choay, 1998a: 10). Thus, the solution to the irreconcilability between the two opposing universes "is summed up for Giovannoni in the combination of two terms (splitting + grafting), which could be developed into a formula: separating by uniting. In other words, to separate the two formations reserving to each their specific character, but at the same time making them communicate, connecting them"⁹⁷ (Choay, 1998a: 10-11). For Choay, in essence, "the full awareness of technological modernity places Giovannoni at the opposite those with nostalgia for the ancient city like Ruskin," but, at the same time, it also distinguishes him from the approach of the CIAM: "with good reason," the scholar "accuses Le Corbusier of backward simplism: in his conception of future life, the latter only takes into account the road network and a single planning scale that excludes any relationship with the context"⁹⁸ (Choay, 1998a: 12). On the contrary, the scholar's reflection on transportation and communication networks, opened "the horizon of deurbanization."⁹⁹

⁹⁴ The choices made in the work of translation are specified in a specific final paragraph of the introduction (Choay, 1998a: 30-32). In addition to Claire Tandille, the work of translation and critical selection was edited by Choay herself (under the pseudonym of Amélie Petita), with the help of Jean-Marc Mandosio and Marc Desportes.

⁹⁵ Original quotation: "*Vecchie città* pourrait être défini comme un exercice de mise en compatibilité et en complémentarité d'exigences contradictoires".

⁹⁶ Original quotation: "C'est que, d'emblée, Giovannoni pense la modernité urbaine en termes de réseaux techniques: il prend déjà en compte les réseaux de télécommunications, mais aussi tous les réseaux de transport".

⁹⁷ Original quotation: "Leur compatibilité se résume pour Giovannoni dans la combinaison de deux termes (*sdoppiamento + innesto*) qu'on pourrait développer dans une formule: dissocier en unissant. Autrement dit séparer (*sdoppiare*) les deux formations en conservant à chacune son caractère spécifique, mais dans le même temps les faire communiquer, les raccorder (*innestare*)".

⁹⁸ Original quotation: "Sa pleine connaissance de la modernité technique situe donc Giovannoni à l'opposé des nostalgiques de la ville ancienne, tel Ruskin. Mais il se démarque tout autant du mouvement des CIAM. En effet, non seulement il conserve un rôle vivant à la ville ancienne: mais il taxe à bon droit Le Corbusier de simplisme retardataire: dans sa conception de la vie à venir, celui-ci ne prend en compte que le seul réseau routier et une échelle d'aménagement unique qui exclut toute contextualité".

⁹⁹ The desurbanization proposed by Giovannoni is not understood, according to Choay, as "généralisation du mitage territorial, ni ruralisation du territoire, au sens du retour à la terre préconisé par le gouvernement de Vichy [...]. La désurbanisation dont il est question dans *Vecchie città* est une hypothèse de travail, synonyme de déconcentration des grands centres urbains en même temps que de modernisation des villages et petites villes et création d'agglomérations de types nouveaux" (Choay, 1998a: 12).

It was, however, in the notion of “urban heritage,” an expression he himself coined, that the French scholar found Giovannoni’s most interesting contribution. Considering “the city or the historical quarter as an autonomous work of art, a historical monument in itself” –characterized not only by the major works, but also “by an articulated fabric of minor buildings (of which Giovannoni strongly emphasized the historical interest, often superior to that of the major buildings)”¹⁰⁰– the scholar arrived in fact at a complex vision of conservation, which “will not concern so much the single buildings as the environmental relationships that generate the urban work of art”¹⁰¹ (Choay, 1998a: 13). However, and this is the point Choay was particularly keen to emphasize, her approach to heritage conservation did not stop at aesthetic and historical values, but also contemplated “a social use value, in accordance with the living conditions of our time,” which banishes “a paralyzing, archaeological and museum-like protection”¹⁰² for ancient urban fabric (Choay, 1998a: 13). Here, then, “Giovannoni proposes a dynamic, freer, more interventionist approach that allows ancient textiles to be adapted to contemporary life, while respecting their style and environment”¹⁰³ (Choay, 1998a: 14). Thus we arrive at the “botanical metaphor” of *diradamento* (thinning), appropriately translated by Choay with the term *éclaircissage*,¹⁰⁴ which however does not represent a set of absolute rules, whose definition is only possible “case by case, according to the historical, geographical, topographical, morphological, economic conditions [...] specific to each circumstance”¹⁰⁵ (Choay, 1998a: 14).

In the second chapter, she briefly discussed the scholar’s biography, dwelling in particular on his youthful training, in which she traced that “integral” approach that Giovannoni himself would later indicate as the foundation of the new figure of the architect. Particularly interesting, in this context, was a paragraph specifically dedicated to the European references of the scholar, in which Choay underlined Giovannoni’s wide culture, founded on “a practice of foreign languages that allows him to have direct access to the reading of English, German, and French texts: his thought is thus enriched by the diversity of these European traditions, of which he will be able to assimilate the divergences”¹⁰⁶ (Choay, 1998a: 18). In addition to the

¹⁰⁰ “En effet, l’expression par lui forgée de patrimoine urbain désigne l’ensemble tissulaire global comme entité *sui generis* [...] le premier, il considère la ville ou le quartier historique comme une œuvre d’art autonome, un monument historique en soi, dont les bâtiments individuels ne sont que de simples composants, divisibles en deux catégories: les œuvres prestigieuses de l’architecture savante, qualifié par lui de *majeure* [...] (et) le tissu articulé des édifices mineurs (dont Giovannoni ne laisse pas de souligner l’intérêt historique, souvent supérieur à celui des édifices majeurs)” (“In fact, the expression forged by him of urban heritage designates the overall tissue ensemble as a *sui generis* entity [...] the first, he considers the city or the historic district as an autonomous work of art, a historic monument in itself, of which the individual buildings are mere components, divisible into two categories: the prestigious works of scholarly architecture, qualified by him as major [...] (and) the articulated fabric of minor buildings (whose historical interest Giovannoni does not fail to emphasize, often superior to that of the major buildings).” (Choay, 1998a: 13).

¹⁰¹ Original quotation: “Pour Giovannoni, la protection du patrimoine urbain ne visera donc pas tant des édifices singuliers que les relations contextuelles génératrices de l’œuvre d’art urbaine”.

¹⁰² Original quotation: “Cependant, dans la mesure où ce patrimoine n’est pas doté seulement d’une valeur esthétique et historique, mais aussi d’une valeur d’usage social, accordée aux conditions de vie de notre époque, il ne peut être question de lui faire subir une protection figée, de type archéologique et muséal”.

¹⁰³ Original quotation: “Giovannoni propose donc une démarche dynamique, plus libre et interventionniste, qui permet d’adapter les tissus anciens à la vie contemporaine, tout en respectant leur style et leur contextualité”.

¹⁰⁴ As she had already done in *L’Allégorie du patrimoine*, Choay translated the term “*diradamento*” (thinning) with the expression *éclaircissage*, of botanical origin, which best renders the sense of the intervention proposed by Giovannoni. The expression appears decidedly more convincing than that of *élagage* –literally “pruning”– used a few years earlier by the translator Cécile Gaudin, in the article by Zucconi (1989: 185-194).

¹⁰⁵ Original quotation: “Quel que soit le milieu, bâti ou végétal, sur quoi porte l’intervention, les modalités de celle-ci ne seront pas axiomatisables, mais définissables seulement cas par cas, au gré des conditions historiques, géographiques, topographiques, morphologiques, économiques [...] à chaque fois particulières”.

¹⁰⁶ Original quotation: “Pour pallier la rareté et la lenteur des traductions, Giovannoni s’est imposé une pratique des langues étrangères qui lui permet d’aborder directement la lecture des textes anglais, allemands ou français: sa pensée se nourrit de la diversité de ces traditions européennes dont il saura assimiler les divergences”.

best-known references of the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon area, the scholar dwelled on the French environment, citing her knowledge of the works of historians and geographers such as Poëte, Müntz, Vidal de la Blache, and highlighting, in particular, the obvious influence exerted by the two different figures of Auguste Choisy and Pierre Lavedan. For Choay, the set of these references, “through Giovannoni’s books and teachings [...] will henceforth be part of Italian architectural culture, as evidenced, for example, by the type-morphological studies of Carlo Aymonino and the works of Aldo Rossi” (Choay, 1998a: 19).¹⁰⁷

The third chapter of the introduction was dedicated to the relationship between Giovannoni and the Italian context, in which the biography of the scholar was divided into three fundamental periods, linked to the political events of our country.¹⁰⁸ Here, Choay availed herself, much more than in the reading carried out in 1992 in *L’Allégorie du patrimoine*, of an updated Italian bibliography on the scholar’s work, which in the course of the 1990s was progressively enriched. In addition to the old texts by Ceschi and Del Bufalo, Choay’s readings included those by Vanna Fraticelli, Giorgio Ciucci, Paolo Marconi, Attilio Belli and Guido Zucconi.¹⁰⁹ In particular, it was to Belli’s volume *Immagini e concetti nel piano*—published in 1996 and aimed at deepening the Italian urban culture of the first decades of the 20th century in the light of the current disciplinary reflection— that the scholar attributed the merit of having highlighted Giovannoni’s leading role in the establishment of a theoretical statute of urbanism in Italy and in the creation of “a disciplinary field,” especially in comparison with the ambiguities of Piacentini and Piccinato (Choay, 1998a: 21, n. 17).¹¹⁰ Along these lines, Choay then specified that Giovannoni “is not an isolated figure”: there are many personalities “who have contributed to the elaboration of Giovannoni’s principles or concepts, and who have sometimes been able to give happier formulations than his in journal articles or in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* [...]. None of them, however, possesses his capacity for synthesis nor his stature as a theorist,” Giovannoni can therefore “be considered as the creator of this discipline in Italy and of its Italian specificity”¹¹¹ (Choay, 1998a: 21).

The paragraph expressly dedicated to the relationship between Giovannoni and Fascism is very interesting; in it, Choay—starting from the frequent compliments addressed by the scholar to Mussolini in the text of *Vecchie città*—clarified some aspects of his political involvement. For the scholar, Giovannoni was not even remotely comparable to a figure like Albert Speer: in this regard, it was enough to observe that in the former “the expression of

¹⁰⁷ “Par l’entremise des livres et de l’enseignement de Giovannoni, toutes ces références feront désormais partie de la culture architecturale italienne, comme en témoignent, par exemple, les études typomorphologiques de Carlo Aymonino ou les ouvrages d’Aldo Rossi”. (“Through Giovannoni’s books and teaching, all these references would become part of Italian architectural culture, as evidenced, for example, by the typomorphological studies of Carlo Aymonino or the works of Aldo Rossi.”). To the correct observation of Choay, it can be added that the debt to Giovannoni, noted by the scholar in the writings of Aymonino and Rossi, is in general totally concealed by the latter.

¹⁰⁸ “Indissociable de son contexte italien et romain, l’œuvre de Giovannoni se déploie avec continuité sur trois périodes historiques cependant bien distinctes. C’est d’abord, jusqu’à la marche sur Rome de Mussolini en 1922, la période libérale. Vient ensuite la période fasciste, puis, après la défaite, celle, très brève pour Giovannoni qui meurt en 1947, de la reconstruction” (“Indissociable from its Italian and Roman context, Giovannoni’s work unfolds with continuity over three distinct historical periods. First, until Mussolini’s march on Rome in 1922, the liberal period. Then comes the Fascist period, then, after the defeat, the one, very brief for Giovannoni who dies in 1947, of the reconstruction”) (Choay, 1998a: 20).

¹⁰⁹ Particularly cited are the texts by Fraticelli (1982), Ciucci (1989), Marconi (1993), Belli (1996) and Zucconi (1997).

¹¹⁰ We can also add that Belli’s text develops interesting reflections on the theme of thinning, which reveal strong analogies with those carried out by Choay between 1992 and 1998, confirming the process of cross-fertilization.

¹¹¹ Original quotation: “Giovannoni n’est pas un isolé. Il n’entre pas dans le cadre de cette brève introduction d’évoquer, parmi les protagonistes italiens dont les noms émaillent les pages de *Vecchie città*, ceux, tels Cesare Chiodi, Marcello Piacentini, Luigi Piccinato qui, avec aussi le groupe des *Cultori dell’arte* (AacaR), ont contribué à l’élaboration des principes ou des concepts giovannoniens et qui ont pu en donner des formulations parfois plus heureuses que les siennes dans les articles de revues ou dans l’*Enciclopedia italiana*. Aucun d’entre eux, toutefois, ne possède sa puissance de synthèse, sa carrure de théoricien [...]. Giovannoni peut être considéré comme le créateur tout à la fois de cette discipline en Italie et de sa spécificité italienne”.

the hopes brought by Fascism is associated with the ruthless and permanent criticism of an administration that, in fact, is that of the Mussolini regime"¹¹² (Choay, 1998a: 24). His nationalism –grounded in the hope “that Italy can catch up and reclaim its place among the nations of Europe” (Choay, 1998a: 24)– could perhaps approach that of a d’Annunzio; however, for Choay, Giovannoni appeared decidedly more like a technician than a political figure. Therefore, “Mussolini’s seizure of power represents a chance for him to have his vision of urban development understood and realized; nothing more”¹¹³ (Choay, 1998a: 25). “Already by the end of the 1920s,” in fact, “it becomes clear that Giovannoni is not part of the technicians in the service of the regime, such as Alberto Calza Bini, Marcello Piacentini, or Luigi Piccinato. He is not involved in any of the institutions created and managed by Calza Bini [...] nor will he participate in any of the regime’s monumental glorification enterprises”¹¹⁴ (Choay, 1998a: 25).

The fourth chapter dealt, finally, with the interesting subject of the critical misfortune of the scholar, mentioning also the recent reawakening of interest in his work. For Choay, the silence that suddenly enveloped the figure of Giovannoni immediately after 1947, appeared both “paradoxical and surprising”:

*paradoxical if one imagines that in post-World War II Italy, the teaching of architecture, urban planning legislation, and the debate on restoration bear the imprint of his thought [...], surprising if one imagines that in matters of architecture and urban planning, whether it be historiography, theory or practice, almost all the protagonists of the Italian scene came directly or indirectly from his school*¹¹⁵ (Choay, 1998a: 26).

For the scholar, the reasons for this exclusion were all of an ideological nature: “post-World War II Italy tried to erase everything that was, in some way, linked to Fascism. The new values are represented by America and Marxism. In matters of architecture and urbanism, the Modern Movement becomes synonymous with democracy”¹¹⁶ (Choay, 1998a: 27). Giovannoni, on the other hand, “never adhered to the official avant-garde [...] his international culture never scratched his nationalism and his relations with philosophy pass through Hegel through Croce’s aesthetics, but ignore Marx, in spite of a never denied interest in economics”¹¹⁷ (Choay, 1998a: 27). In other words, the scholar did not have “any of the alibis that Piacentini

¹¹² Original quotation: “*Vecchie città* n’économise pas les apostrophes flatteuses à Son Excellence Benito Mussolini et au gouvernement fasciste. Mais ces coups de chapeau demandent à être interprétés correctement. En aucun cas l’amalgame ne doit être fait avec Albert Speer, qui fut sous Hitler le thuriféraire inconditionnel de l’idéologie nazie: il suffirait d’observer que chez Giovannoni l’expression des espoirs que porte le fascisme est assortie de la critique impitoyable et permanente d’une administration qui est, en fait, celle du régime mussolinien”.

¹¹³ Original quotation: “La prise de pouvoir par Mussolini représente pour lui une possibilité de faire comprendre et de réaliser sa vision du développement urbain; rien de plus”.

¹¹⁴ Original quotation: “Dès la fin des années 1920, il devient clair que Giovannoni ne fait pas partie des praticiens au service du régime, tels Alberto Calza Bini, Marcello Piacentini ou Luigi Piccinato. Il n’est impliqué dans aucune des institutions créées et gérées par Calza Bini [...] (ni) participera à aucune des entreprises de glorification monumentale du régime”.

¹¹⁵ Original quotation: “Giovannoni meurt en 1947. Et le silence s’abat sur son œuvre. Silence paradoxal, si l’on songe que dans l’Italie d’après la Seconde Guerre mondiale l’enseignement de l’architecture, la législation de l’urbanisme, le débat sur la restauration portent la marque de sa pensée. Silence surtout surprenant, si l’on songe qu’en matière d’architecture et d’urbanisme, qu’il s’agisse d’historiographie, de théorie ou de pratique, presque tous les protagonistes de la scène italienne sont directement ou indirectement issus de son école”.

¹¹⁶ Original quotation: “L’Italie du deuxième après-guerre cherche à gommer tout ce qui, de quelque façon, a été lié au fascisme. Les valeurs de l’ère nouvelle sont symbolisées par l’Amérique et le marxisme. En matière d’architecture et d’urbanisme, le Mouvement moderne devient synonyme de démocratie”.

¹¹⁷ Original quotation: “Giovannoni n’a jamais appartenu aux avant-gardes officielles [...] sa culture internationale n’a jamais entamé son nationalisme et ses rapports avec la dialectique passent par Hegel à travers l’esthétique de Croce, mais ignorent Marx, en dépit d’un intérêt jamais démenti pour l’économie”.

or Piccinato, for example, were able to use"¹¹⁸ (Choay, 1998a: 27), and ends up being soon forgotten. It is only in the 1980s, in fact, that Choay traced back the first break in this "heavy ideological silence," attributable on the one hand "to the time, which had dampened the discomfort and the complexes of Italian intellectuals"¹¹⁹ (Choay, 1998a: 27), and on the other hand to the disenchantment that by then crossed both the dogmas of Marxist orthodoxy and the certainties of the Modern Movement. If, however, today we are witnessing a tangible reawakening of interest in his figure, for the scholar "the great book of synthesis on Giovannoni has yet to be written": excluding, in fact, "the contributions that have appeared in the field of restoration, all the works published to date in Italian have been, each in its own way, very reductive"¹²⁰ (Choay, 1998a: 27-28).

While sharing the risks of "summary beatification" of the character, already feared by Guido Zucconi in 1997 (Choay, 1998a: 28),¹²¹ Choay ultimately confirmed the great relevance of Giovannoni's work, focused "on a problem that is at the center of our questions about the city today: that of the relationship between a millennial urban tradition and the changes in our environment, our behaviors, and our mentalities, generated by the accelerated development of a set of new technologies"¹²² (Choay, 1998a: 28-29). In this sense, for the scholar, the landing of Giovannoni's work in France seems particularly appropriate: "*Vecchie città* is addressed in particular to us, the French, who have not, in the long run, benefited from an urban culture comparable to that of some of our neighbors, whether it be Italy or the ancient Hanseatic territories"¹²³ (Choay, 1998a: 29).

In this conclusion we can clearly see the effect of the cross-fertilization mentioned above. Compared to the perplexities manifested by Choay towards the Italian architectural culture still in the 1980s—as highlighted at the beginning of the paragraph in relation to the morphological type studies—the scholar now fully recognized the value of the urban culture of our country, although perhaps concentrating a little too exclusively on the symbolic figure of Giovannoni.

The latter aspect is also revealed by scrolling through one of the other important works carried out by Choay since the mid-1980s, namely the *Dictionnaire de l'urbanisme et de l'aménagement*, edited with Pierre Merlin in 1988 and which reached in 2015 its seventh completely revised edition. Arising from a specific interest in linguistics and terminology—which the scholar progressively cultivated in her mature years—the *Dictionnaire* should be seen in close continuity with the work begun with *L'urbanisme. Utopie et réalités* in 1965. Choay was assigned the task of writing the historical and theoretical entries—among which there are two fundamental headwords such as *Architecture* and *Urbanisme*—while Merlin

¹¹⁸ Original quotation: "Autrement dit, il ne disposait d'aucun des alibis dont pouvaient se prévaloir Piacentini ou Piccinato, par exemple".

¹¹⁹ Original quotation: "Ce lourd silence idéologique a commencé d'être rompu au cours des années 1980. D'une part, le temps avait estompé le malaise et les complexes des intellectuels italiens. D'autre part, désenchantement et démythification travaillaient les dogmes de l'orthodoxie marxiste comme les certitudes du Mouvement moderne, et rendaient son actualité à l'aura de Giovannoni".

¹²⁰ Original quotation: "Le grand livre de synthèse sur Giovannoni reste cependant à écrire. Il est remarquable que, sauf dans le domaine du patrimoine et de la restauration, tous les travaux publiés à ce jour en italien aient été, chacun à sa manière, assez réducteurs".

¹²¹ See Zucconi (1997).

¹²² Original quotation: "Il n'en demeure pas moins que l'œuvre entière de Giovannoni est focalisée sur un problème aujourd'hui au cœur de nos interrogations sur la ville: le problème des rapports entre une tradition urbaine millénaire et les mutations de notre environnement, de nos comportements et de nos mentalités, engendrées par le développement accéléré d'un ensemble de nouvelles techniques".

¹²³ Original quotation: "*Vecchie città* s'adresse, en particulier, à nous, Français, qui n'avons pas, dans la longue durée, bénéficié d'une culture urbaine comparable à celle de certains de nos voisins, qu'il s'agisse notamment de l'Italie ou des anciens territoires hanséatiques".

and other collaborators were responsible for the more technical entries. In this work, too, the presence of Italy clearly emerged, embodied in the figure of Giovannoni, together with that of the less famous Milanese superintendent Giorgio Nicodemi (1891-1967), whom Choay had the opportunity to get to know by studying in detail the proceedings of the *Conférence internationale sur la conservation artistique et historique des monuments*, organized by the Office international des musées in Athens in October 1931.¹²⁴

To Giovannoni, in fact, the scholar attributed both the invention of the concept of urban heritage (see entry *Patrimoine*) (Choay, 2015b), as well as the anticipation of that of “posturban”, a term coined by the same Choay from that of *post-city age* by Melvin Webber (see entry *Posturbain*) (Choay, 2015c). On the other hand, Nicodemi –whose contribution should be re-dimensioned as a simple interpreter of positions shared by a multitude of Italian scholars of the time, in which Giovannoni himself was one of the protagonists– she acknowledged the merit of having expanded the scope of protection to the context of monuments and the environment, thanks to his report presented in Athens in 1931. So the figure of Nicodemi, and consequently the Italian contribution, assumed a relevant part in the development of several entries of the *Dictionnaire*, starting from *Abords* (literally “surroundings,” but translatable just as the context of the monument), a concept already present in embryonic form in the first French Act of Protection of December 31, 1913 and then expanded with the Act of February 25, 1943 (Choay et Preschez, 2015).¹²⁵ The same can be said for the entries *Conservation intégrée* and *Ensemble historique ou traditionnel*, in the last of which the scholar emphasized the precursor character of the Italian protection pieces of legislation of 1939 (Choay, 2015a).

Heritage and its globalized dimension at the dawn of the third millennium

As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, since the end of the 1990s Choay’s Italian references have widened and multiplied, both in terms of her relationships with scholars of different generations, and in terms of her presence as a speaker or lecturer in several Italian universities. In addition to the contact with Ernesto d’Alfonso, the first curator and translator of Choay’s works in Italy since the 1980s, there are now those with Francesco Paolo Di Teodoro and Mario Carpo for her interests on the Renaissance, with Attilio Belli, Paola Di Biagi, Bruno Gabrielli, Alberto Magnaghi, Claudia Mattogno, Francesco Ventura for urban planning and, finally, with Marco Dezzi Bardeschi and myself for the field of restoration, to mention only the main ones.¹²⁶

It would be impossible to reconstruct the innumerable invitations that the scholar has received from Italian universities –culminating in the honorary degree, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, at the University of Genoa in 2001¹²⁷– but among these it is certainly worth mentioning, *in primis*, her decades-long relationship with the Politecnico di Milano, already mentioned above. And it would be in Milan that the relationship with Dezzi Bardeschi would develop,

¹²⁴ See *La Conférence d’Athènes sur la conservation artistique et historique des monuments (1931)* (Choay, 2012a) and Turco (2019).

¹²⁵ For further discussion of the relevant French law see Cornu et Négri (2018: 100-115). For an overview of wealth policies in France written in Italian, see Catoni (2007).

¹²⁶ A trace of this extensive network of contacts is provided by Choay herself, who lists the names of her historic Italian “best friends” on the occasion of her honorary degree in Genoa in 2001, and also mentions more recent encounters (Choay, 2008c: 25-26).

¹²⁷ Awarded on November 9, 2001, with laudation by Bruno Gabrielli, with the following motivation: “M.me Françoise Choay, professor at the University of Paris-VIII, has given a fundamental contribution to the deepening of a discipline that she herself has contributed to create and that could be called Morphology of urban theory”. (“M.me Françoise Choay, professoressa all’Università di Parigi-VIII, ha dato un apporto fondamentale all’approfondimento di una disciplina che ella stessa ha contribuito a creare e che potrebbe venire denominata *Morfologia della teoria urbanistica*”) (Choay, 2008c: 21).

starting from the early 1990s, at the same time of the birth of *Ananke* (journal founded and directed by the latter from 1993 until his recent death in November 2018), as it is testified by a flattering letter of Choay published in number 6 of June 1994 (Choay, 1994b).¹²⁸ In the span of twenty-five years, the journal would host both articles by Choay (1998c; 2013), as well as specific reports on the writings of the scholar appeared in France, through editorials or reviews almost always signed by Dezzi Bardeschi himself, starting from a long and positive comment on the anthology *Pour une anthropologie de l'espace*, published in 2006 and awarded the Prix du livre d'Architecture in 2007, which will make him observe: "For Françoise it seems to me that what is opening is the happy mature season of synthesis, as if all the compelling problematic knots that she has faced with so much reason and passion are now finding, under her skillful light hands and through her clear pen their unitary composition" (Dezzi Bardeschi, 2006: 2).¹²⁹

In the same 1990s, meanwhile, her presence in Italy as a lecturer invited to hold courses, seminars and conferences was not limited to the Politecnico di Milano, ranging from the University of Rome La Sapienza to the IUAV in Venice, almost always leaving traces of her passage in significant publications.¹³⁰ Among these stands out an essay dedicated to an embarrassing and "uncomfortable" subject to deal with, such as demolition, to which Choay dedicated a particularly interesting essay; recalling Sigmund Freud's famous metaphor on Rome, contained in the opening of his *Il disagio nella civiltà* (1929), she emphasized her opposition to any fetishistic, museum-type conservation incapable of reinserting heritage into the vital circuit of the present and the future, but also against any practice of "disguised demolition" that restoration based on the sole objective of valorization entails (Choay, 2008f: 92).

At the beginning of the 21st century, Choay's research interests began to run along two main lines, partly intertwined, both marked by multifaceted interconnections in the culture of our country: on the one hand, they will deepen the themes of heritage, through anthological readings and translations of various texts of the "founding fathers" of protection and conservation; on the other hand, they will touch upon the themes of globalization in relation to the local scale of human settlements.

In the first context was the French translation of some of Camillo Boito's writings, edited by Choay with Jean-Marc Mandosio and resulting in a small volume entitled *Conserver ou restaurer* published in 2000. Borrowing the title of a famous dialogue by Boito, the book in question represented the first testimony of the dissemination of the work of the Italian architect and theorist in France. After a brief introduction by Choay, in which the texts by Maria Antonietta Crippa, Alberto Grimoldi, Paolo Marconi and Guido Zucconi are cited as references, as well as the ever-present Carlo Ceschi –already used by Choay as a primary source of knowledge for Giovannoni– the translations of "I restauri in architettura" and "La basilica d'oro" were proposed, both in the versions published by Boito in *Questioni pratiche di belle arti* in 1893 and in their turn reissued in the anthology edited by Maria Antonietta Crippa in 1989. To these were added two "variations" that Choay considered particularly significant in highlighting the relationship between France and Italy through Boito: a letter by Prosper Mérimée on the restorations of the Strasbourg cathedral in 1836, which is useful to testify the latter's commitment to the French medieval heritage, which Boito praised several

¹²⁸ Even later, the scholar would remark several times, in various conversations with the author, that "Ananke is unparalleled in the world."

¹²⁹ See also Dezzi Bardeschi (2009; 2010; 2013; 2016: 94).

¹³⁰ See Choay (1998d), partially republished with the title *Sulla demolizione* (Choay, 2008f), the result of a seminar held at the University of Rome la Sapienza (June 23-24, 1995) on the theme of "The project of subtraction"; and Choay (2002: 3-16), the result of a conference held in a cycle organized by Di Biagi herself at the IUAV between 1996 and 1998.

times, and an article by Viollet-le-Duc from 1872 dedicated to the restoration of buildings in Italy, in which the great French restorer indicated the care that Italians showed towards their monuments as a model (Mérimée, 2000; Viollet-le-Duc, 2000).

Still in the field of heritage studies was Choay's anthology volume entitled *Le patrimoine en questions*, published in its first edition in 2009 and the result, as she pointed out in the introduction, of her long experience as a lecturer at the École de Chaillot, responsible for the highest level of training of architects specialized in the care of heritage (Choay, 2009a: 10-11). Here Choay gathered a rich set of texts, apparently heterogeneous but useful to define the ambiguous status of heritage in the light of the challenges of the third millennium, inviting action for its defense. In this sense, the work can be directly related to the more remote *L'urbanisme. Utopies et réalités*, not only for the anthological choice, but also for the close criticism of the present time. The choice of the passages leads Choay to range from Abbot Suger to André Malraux, up to the texts of the 1964 *Venice Charter* and UNESCO, in a path that also included various figures of Italian culture of all times, from Poggio Bracciolini, to Pius II Piccolomini, to Raffaello and Baldassarre Castiglione, up to Giovannoni, of whom excerpts were translated from two articles only partially present in the volume *L'urbanisme face aux villes anciennes* of 1998.¹³¹ All of this was preceded by a long and profound critical introduction, which investigated the development of the concepts of monument and heritage—making use of more extensive Italian bibliographic references than in her previous works¹³²—and emphasized the current crisis in the frame of globalization (Choay, 2009a: III-XXIX). In this context, the pages that the scholar dedicated to the electro-telematic revolution and to the museification and commodification of heritage are particularly relevant and enlightening.¹³³

This last step leads us back to the second strand of studies carried out by Choay at the dawn of the 21st century, consisting in a progressive attention to the issues of local land management in the context of globalization, already announced in some of his previous writings, but that would come to occupy much of her reflection of the last two decades. Also in this case the contacts with the Italian environment appear very significant, concentrated in particular on the figure of Alberto Magnaghi, who became known in 1998¹³⁴ and who, in the following years, became one of her main references among Italian scholars. In the context of this relationship there are two books in some ways symmetrical, evidence of a mutual exchange: the French edition of the most famous work of Magnaghi, *Il progetto locale* (2000, 2010a), translated by Choay and published with a preface by Mardaga Editions in Liege (Belgium) in 2003,¹³⁵ and the collection of writings of Choay entitled *Del destino della città*, published by Alinea in 2008 edited by Magnaghi himself (Choay, 2008a).

This last volume—to be placed in close relation with the already mentioned anthology *Pour une anthropologie de l'espace*, published only two years before in France, from which almost all the passages are taken¹³⁶—also contained the *lectio*, already mentioned several

¹³¹ In particular Giovannoni (1913; 1925). See Choay (2009a: 172-176). In identifying the local historical context of this second article, Choay also cites in the text the exchange she had with the writer.

¹³² It is significant, in this sense, to note the citation of the volume of S. Casiello (2008), published only a year earlier, which also testifies to the contemporary consolidation of relations with the University of Naples Federico II. See below.

¹³³ See in particular the two paragraphs *La révolution électro-télématique: mondialisation et patrimoine* and *Muséification et marchandisation du patrimoine* (Choay, 2009a: XXVI-XXXVI, XXXVI-XLIII).

¹³⁴ Choay herself recounts her almost fortuitous encounter with Magnaghi (Choay, 2008a: 203).

¹³⁵ The text was translated by Amélie Petita, a pseudonym used by Choay also in other translation works, including the one by Giovannoni cited in the previous notes.

¹³⁶ Indeed, except for the opening text, the aforementioned "Prologo: Partire per l'Italia", and two additional chapters, entitled respectively "L'utopia e lo statuto antropologico dello spazio edificato" (Choay, 2008d) and "Introduzione a: Baron Haussmann, *Mémoires*" (Choay, 2008g), the latter the first partial translation of the introduction to Baron Haussmann, *Mémoires* (Choay, 2000a), all other texts that make up the volume are excerpts from the anthology *Pour une anthropologie de l'espace* (Choay, 2006d).

times, pronounced by Choay in Genoa in 2001 for the conferment of the honorary degree in Architecture, where the scholar clarified, for the first time in a more extensive way, her debt to Italy (Choay, 2008c).¹³⁷ The tripartite structure of the summary of *Del destino della città*¹³⁸ reflected the reading that Magnaghi proposed of the recent contribution of the scholar, in which he identified the leitmotif of a bitter awareness of the death of the city, deprived of its founding elements by the results of globalization and cyberspace, an expression –the latter– used by Choay herself in antithesis to the urban heritage in one of the passages of the anthology. This *pars destruens*, writes Magnaghi, is however opposed to a vital *pars construens*, in which Choay invited architects and urban planners “to ‘touch the ground’ from the telematic squares to the material squares,” returning “to work for the small worlds of life of living among the large meshes of the dizzying organization of the global movement” (Magnaghi, 2008: 9). It was, in essence, an invitation to place in inter-scalar relation the inescapable system of cyberspace networks with the local dimension of the real territory, based on participation, or on “a great choral, social act of reconstruction of memory, of a heuristic-pedagogical nature, in which artists, inhabitants, designers and users participate together” (Magnaghi, 2008: 9).

In this reading we can perfectly recognize the process of mutual influence between the two scholars: Choay attributed to Magnaghi the ability to have developed in concrete experiences a part of his utopias, while the latter found in the historical-theoretical reflections of Choay the deep roots of his own research. It is not surprising, therefore, that Choay quoted Magnaghi in the conclusion of *Le patrimoine en questions*, using one of his beautiful phrases to shed a light of hope on the future of cities and heritage.¹³⁹ But her enthusiasm for the work of the Italian urban planner did not stop there: in fact, the scholar came to place Magnaghi’s work at the end of an ideal path, initiated by Renaissance treatise writers such as Alberti, continued with Thomas More and Giovannoni, and finally arriving today at the awareness of the need to plan the territory through a careful process of listening to local communities (Choay, Mongin et Paquot, 2005: 91).

Accordingly, Magnaghi mentioned Choay several times in the preface to the second, expanded edition of *Il progetto locale*, attributing the exchange with the scholar to the further development of his research (Magnaghi, 2010: 9-14). As an additional consequence, Choay’s name can be found in the activities of the Società dei Territorialisti, founded in 2011 by Magnaghi, of which she is a member of the scientific committee and co-signer of its “Manifesto,” drafted by several hands between 2010 and 2011.¹⁴⁰

Choay’s relationship with the Università degli Studi di Federico II, embodied in her relations with Attilio Belli, Stella Casiello and myself, is also situated along the paths just mentioned, with a specific focus on Giovannoni. Proceeding in order of time, we should recall the contacts with Belli, initiated in the 1990s, as evidenced by a careful reading by the latter of *L’Allégorie du patrimoine*, for the part relating to Giovannoni, which he discussed in his *Immagini e concetti nel piano* (Belli, 1996: 36-38, 44, 100), which is matched by a

¹³⁷ See notes 125 and 126 above.

¹³⁸ Divided into three parts entitled: 1) *On the anthropological status of the built space*; 2) *On heritage*; 3) *On the destiny of the city*; the title of the volume was taken from this latter.

¹³⁹ “Sous les coulées de lave de l’urbanisation contemporaine, survit un patrimoine territorial d’une extrême richesse, prêt à une nouvelle fécondation, par des nouveaux acteurs sociaux capables d’en prendre soin. Ce processus est en voie d’émergence, surtout là où l’écart entre la qualité de vie et la croissance économique est le plus flagrant” (“Under the lava flows of contemporary urbanization, a territorial heritage of extreme richness survives, ready for a new fertilization, by new social actors capable of taking care of it. This process is emerging, especially where the gap between quality of life and economic growth is most glaring”) (Choay, 2009a:209-210). The quote is taken from Magnaghi (2000: 10).

¹⁴⁰ [<http://www.societadeiterritorialisti.it/>] (accessed in October 2019). A paper by Choay, entitled “Utopia e patrimonio nel progetto del territorio”, also appears in the monographic issue dedicated to *Il progetto territorialista*, edited by Daniela Poli (2010).



FIGURE 2. PRESENTATION OF THE VOLUME BY FRANÇOISE CHOAY "PATRIMONIO E GLOBALIZZAZIONE". Department of Architecture, University of Naples Federico II, May 2013. Front row, from left to right: Amedeo Bellini, Valentina Russo, Renata Picone, Aldo Aveta, Françoise Choay, Francesco Starace, Giulio Pane, Elio Piroddi, Claudia Mattogno. *Image: Andrea Pane.*

very flattering opinion of the scholar on the volume cited.¹⁴¹ We also owe to the relationship with Belli the first official invitation of the scholar to Naples, on the occasion of the seminar held on October 10, 1998 at Castel Nuovo, dedicated to the comparison between the already mentioned volume of Belli *Immagini e concetti nel piano* (1996) and the French translation of Giovannoni, just published, *L'urbanisme face aux villes anciennes*.

My first contact with Choay dates back to the dawn of the 21st century, originated by the research I was doing for my doctoral thesis on the critical fortune of Giovannoni.¹⁴² From the fruitful exchange that originated, a specific reflection on the themes of globalization developed, around which Choay held, at the invitation of some professors of the Università degli Studi di Federico II, including Stella Casiello and myself, some seminars in Naples in November 2009, returning after ten years in a city that she has often declared to love deeply for the authenticity of its urban life. The outcome of her passage in Naples has given rise to a small book, edited by Stella Casiello and myself, entitled *Patrimonio e globalizzazione*, published by Alinea in 2012 (Choay, 2012b)¹⁴³ and presented in Naples, in the presence of Choay, in May

¹⁴¹ See Choay (1998a: 21).

¹⁴² Received with great courtesy for the first time in her beautiful and welcoming Parisian home, in March 2002, I had the honor of entertaining a friendship with the great scholar, now almost twenty years old, which has ranged from the themes of urban heritage to the most burning issues of globalization.

¹⁴³ As specified in the introduction to the volume, the 2009 seminars were coordinated by the undersigned with the support of Luigi Fusco Girard, then coordinator of the School of Doctorate in Architecture at the University of Naples Federico II, and promoted jointly by the two doctorates in Conservation of Architectural Heritage and in History and Criticism of Architecture, then coordinated, respectively, by Stella Casiello and Francesco Starace. The volume collected an unpublished lecture, entitled *Globalizzazione e terminologia* (Choay, 2012b: 15-27), and two texts already published, namely *Lévi-Strauss e la pianificazione del territorio* (Choay, 2012b: 31-44) and *I rapporti fra Ruskin e Viollet-le-Duc, o la lunga vita dei preconetti* (Choay, 2012b: 47-78) respectively previously published as *Lévi-Strauss et l'aménagement des territoires* (Choay, 2009b) and *Les rapports de Ruskin et Viollet-le-Duc, ou la longue durée des idées reçues* (Choay, 2008b).

2013.¹⁴⁴ On that occasion, the scholar also gave a lecture on *Il barone Haussmann conservatore del patrimonio urbano*, a testimony to the volume, then freshly printed, she wrote on the same topic with Vincent Sainte Marie Gauthier (2013).¹⁴⁵

Conclusions

In over fifty years, the biunivocal relationship between Choay and Italy has been one of the cornerstones of the process of cross-fertilization of architectural, urban planning, and heritage culture between Italy and France. As demonstrated so far, the scholar has influenced her own ideas through a continuous contact, carried out over the centuries, with the great thinkers of our country, from Leon Battista Alberti to Gustavo Giovannoni, up to the many scholars of her age or younger, with whom the exchange has been so fruitful and intense as to give rise to numerous publications in both countries. It would be enough, in this sense, to cite only the ten-year work on Alberti to verify its consistency.

Among the many merits of Choay's work on Italy there is also the constant commitment to overcome that tendency to *hexagonalisme* (from the hexagonal shape of the country) that has always characterized France, little inclined to open up to other European cultures in comparison, for example, to what Germany has always done (Choay, 2008c: 22). In fact, it is absolutely due to her contribution that fundamental figures such as Alberti, Giovannoni, Boito today are better known in France, and elsewhere. Choay's extraordinary international fame has in fact certainly contributed to spreading their work elsewhere: the numerous translations of *L'Allégorie du patrimoine* –a volume published so far in Italian, German, Romanian, Portuguese, English, Spanish, and Chinese,¹⁴⁶ read by generations of scholars– have in fact allowed figures like Giovannoni to become known even in contexts that are absolutely remote from our culture. The work of the great scholar on Italy has, therefore, constituted not only a bridge toward France, but more generally toward Western and, to some extent, even Eastern architectural and urban planning culture.

At the same time, the Italian translation of many of Choay's works has spread in our country a greater awareness of many burning issues for the city and the heritage, giving the great scholar the status of a true guardian of the authenticity of culture, in the face of the overflowing dehumanization of the electro-telematic civilization. In this sense, Choay can truly claim to be the heir of the same mythical predecessors she studied and spread in the culture of the present: like her beloved Alberti, she has fought and still fights to place humanity at the center of all things, in order to give mankind back the role of arbiter of his or her own destiny, which modern technologies seem to want to fatally take away. And in this process she is sure that our country has played a fundamental role: as she herself admits, in fact, "leaving for Italy has changed not only my idea of building, architecture, and the city, but also the perception of my own identity. And this is not the least valuable thing" (Choay, 2008c: 25).

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¹⁴⁴ The presentation, held on May 8, 2013, was coordinated by Stella Casiello and had among its speakers Aldo Aveta, Amedeo Bellini, Benedetto Gravagnuolo and Claudia Mattogno.

¹⁴⁵ Also reviewed by M. Dezzi Bardeschi (2013).

¹⁴⁶ Reviewing its translations gives a sense of the extent of its international diffusion, which touches the first stage in Italy: after the already mentioned translation of 1995, the book was published in German (Vieweg, Braunschweig 1997), Romanian (Editura Simetria, București 1998), Portuguese (Edições 70, Lisboa 2000), English (Cambridge University Press, New York 2001), Brazilian Portuguese (Estação Liberdade/Ed. UNESP, São Paulo 2001), Spanish (Editorial Gustavo Gili, Barcelona 2007), Chinese (Tsinghua University Press, Beijing 2013).

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