

**Mediapolis-Europa Sede centrale di Roma**

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To think of the story of a lifetime is to suppose that life is a story.

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## **Autobiography: thought and action**

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**Digital Dialogues**

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The contents of the handbook are organised in the following order:

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## a) Archiving autobiographies for the community radios

Community radios deal mainly with daily news. *Live* events, political commentary, debates, real-time exchanges are their main basis for communication.

*Changing* is, for community radios, an ideological “given”. That is why they tend to put more stress on the present or the future, rather than keeping track of the past and recording data.

Never the less, it appears more and more important that community radios should keep archives, and that those archives that already exist should be valued, in as much as they provide some record of minor cultures and of non-dominant social contexts. Archiving can help create memories, and may prove a useful tool to reduce uprootedness.

The idea of creating an autobiographical archive for community radios, as a means of contributing to the protection of memory, might be an objective worthwhile pursuing.

To build up a data base is not a neutral choice, it is not a merely objective fact. The act of recording and classifying data is the first step toward a cultural project, and actively managing its wealth is not like opening a tap. Safeguarding data and making it available implies an idea of what to look for, how to find it, how to classify it, how to make it available, and how to offer examples of how it works, so that others may use it and make it come alive.

The Italian section that I am responsible for (of the project *Digital Dialogues* directed by Traudel Günnel, of the Pedagogical University Freiburg, DE), has built a vocal archive from recordings made in a small village in the south of Italy: Panni (Foggia), 800 inhabitants.

There, the Italian section took care of the theoretical aspects, as well as the recording of personal evidence that forms the basis of this vocal archive.

## b) Autobiographies and diaries: theoretical and pragmatic thoughts

### 1) Autobiographical records

In various parts of the world, one can find archives that store autobiographies, with the aim of preserving them from oblivion, of studying them, and of creating cultural activities linked to *lifelong learning* – such as collective readings, prizes, publications, etc. Among the major organisations: *l'association pour l'autobiographie* (france)

<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/apa/>, *L'association pour l'autobiographie* ( belgium), *L'archivio Diaristico Nazionale di Pieve Santo Stefano* <http://www.archiviodiari.it/>, *L'archivio di scrittura popolare/università di Genova*, the *Departemento de Historia I* dell'Universitat de Alcalà de Henares, The *Arxiu dela Memoria Popular de la Roca del Vallès* <http://www.la-roca.org/aj/arxiumentoria.htm>, *L'archivio de la Escritura Popular di Zamora* (Spain), *L'achivio della scrittura popolare di Trento* <http://www.museostorico.tn.it/asp/>, the *Deutches Tagebucharchiv e.V.* (Germany); *The Mass-Observation Archive* <http://www.tagebucharchive.de/> <http://www.massobservation.com/>, *The European life Story Archive* *Kårsàmàki Life Story Academy* [hppt/www.valt.helsinki.fi/staff/jproos/lifestoryarchive.htm](http://www.valt.helsinki.fi/staff/jproos/lifestoryarchive.htm)

On the French APA web site, these few lines define the autobiographical act:

*To write one's life is not reserved to writers, or to famous people. It virtually concerns all. Keeping a diary in order to fight oblivion and find guidance in life; to govern the crisis one is going through; to witness the events one takes part in; to revive ones childhood; to lay down an evaluation of ones life; to pass on to ones children a past that escapes them even though it conditions them...to open a dialogue and hope to survive.*

Many activities revolve around archives: it has been a recurring act throughout many moments of history to write autobiographies, diaries, epistles, and to evoke personal memories. This phenomenon often regards the weaker members of society – like women confined in cloisters, or women in general – who often choose a poetic register in order to allow themselves linguistic licence, and to escape cultural censorship.

Writing can also mean literally pouring out on paper the tension and difficulty of bearing certain situations. As \*\*\*\* from Bruxelles says: "I write to materialise my worries, that, on paper become a mineral that I cast off, somehow destroying my uneasiness".

"How is one's personal existential puzzle composed in an autobiography? " researchers ask themselves. There are no objective facts, and it is believed that it is often during adolescence that the mosaic of childhood memories is composed, and that memories of the past are given a shape. It is therefore often an intentional image, linked to the desire to create one's own portrait.

Fellini's famous saying, "I invented a life and a childhood for myself, so that I could tell people about them", gives a good idea of how this "creation" underlies many autobiographical works.

There are a thousand reasons for writing an autobiography.

Storytelling in the first person can be a therapeutic act, a psychological way out in difficult moments. Many immigrants write their life story as soon as they reach their host country, an act intended to heal the wound suffered upon leaving the homeland. It is also recurrent that those who learn to write at a grown-up age then apply their new talent to narrating their life story.

Telling one's life story corresponds in its different forms to an ancient, though still current, necessity: it serves to give an intentional image of one's self, to give one's version of the truth and to convey one's self to others. This desire has nothing to do with social class, or writing abilities. One might even resort to the public scribe (a disappearing figure that is now regaining ground) for this purpose.

## 2) transcribing autobiographies

*Le monde*, in an article entitled *Nègre<sup>1</sup> pour inconnus*, issued 19 October 1998, published the story of a journalist, who, finding himself without a job, put his abilities as a writer of autobiographies at the disposal of his fellow citizens, in a small village in Normandy. In the course of a series of appointments, he recorded the "commissioners'" stories, then transcribed them, and edited them, and finally gave them the form of a book. Some of these works were published and offered by the elder members of families as gifts to the members of the younger generation, to help forge the family identity. The *nègre pour inconnus* is a figure well known in the past, especially in areas where illiteracy was widespread. Pierre Bourdieu has underlined that writing, until very recently, was a collective endeavour, in particular in the Mediterranean area. Nowadays, those who resort to the skills of an expert writer in "developed" countries are either old people, or require a more "professional" result.

However, in the process of building an archive of autobiographies, collaboration in the editing of a text raises many questions as to the authenticity of the sources.

How should one gather and store the documents? Is it possible to modify the text, to correct it? Is it possible to publish these autobiographies? On what conditions?

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<sup>1</sup> The word "Nègre" in French, has in this particular case a metaphorical meaning: He who writes the first draft of a text, writing for somebody else, as in "ghostwriter".

The answers must be sought for in the many years of experience of older, pre existing archives. One must also establish the cultural policy one intends to follow. Each new archive is necessarily opened with some aim in mind. The combination of theoretical and practical considerations bring forth a series of rules as to collection, the classification, and the best way to enhance the autobiographies.

### 3) *Autobiography and truth*

Philippe Lejeune – author of many texts such as *The autobiographical pact*, Paris, 1975; *I is an other*, Paris 1980; *Me too*, Paris, 1986 – has studied the dominant characteristics of autobiographies, a literary genre practiced by all human types, from great writers to common people, all united in one common endeavour: *to convey credibility*, to make their life experience legitimate. Philippe Lejeune helps us to understand that autobiography is a pact established with the potential reader, a deliberate act of communication that obeys more or less sophisticated literary conventions, according to the author's training.

It is the case in the famous example of Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. The author affirms that he tells the truth, and shows how important it is to him that the reader should believe in what he writes. At the beginning of *Les Confessions*, (1764/1776) Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote:

*I undertake a work that has no other examples, and will have no imitators. I wish to show my fellow men a man in all his naked truth; that man will be me. Myself alone. I know my heart, and I know mankind. I am unlike anyone I know, and I dare believe that I am not made in the same way as anybody else that exists. If I am not worth more, I am at least different. Whether nature operated well or badly in opening the shape into which it thrust me can be judged upon only after having read me. (Jean Jacques Rousseau, Les confessions de J.J Rousseau, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, page 5)*

Who is this “I”, able to reflect upon itself and to ask “Who am I?”, “What is my truth?”

Again Jean Jacques Rousseau, in a following paragraph, is convinced of his ability to turn an objective eye upon himself; he wishes God to be his witness:

*Let the trumpet of Judgement blow as loud as it wants; I will come, with this book in my hand, to present myself to the supreme judge. I will say clearly: “This is what I have done, what I have thought, what I have been. I have stated the good and the evil with equal frankness (...). I have shown myself as I was, despicable and vile, good, generous and sublime. I have revealed my intimate self as You have seen it. Eternal being, gather around me the uncountable mass of my fellow men: let them hear my confessions, let them blush at my unworthiness (...), and let one of them tell You, if he dares: “I was a better man than he.” (ibidem)*

Jean Jacques Rousseau emphasizes the absolute objectivity of his revelation. He wishes to exalt his past so as to reveal his own existence, naked so to speak, or in a state of purity, and synchronically accompanied by the feeling of existence.

Those who tell their life stories adopt a certain tone, and seek to make their opinion legitimate. Writing about oneself is an intentional expression, a deliberate message, and must be interpreted as more than a spontaneous act.

#### 4) Describing oneself on the Internet

Similarly, choosing to write one's diary on the Internet, as often happens nowadays, implies giving a definite shape to its contents.

Philippe Lejeune has studied this aspect and published his considerations on the subject in the book *Cher écran* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 2000).

Choosing the fluidity of the screen rather than the rigid fixity of the written page, anonymity of graphics rather than the personalisation of handwriting, one page format instead of an other, are acts and signs open to interpretation.

*I passed from an easily hidden copybook to a more visible A4 format, to 100m in the fog. This is to say as clearly as possible: I take my own responsibilities, and F... you all.... (cher écran, page 156)*

Anna's case is just as interesting. She tells us how, through the Internet, she changed her style, both conceptually and in its form. The dialogue, the presence of the other, modified her image of her "self"

*"I make a character out of my self" writes Chiara. Writing on the computer to her means escaping from this way of writing on the self for the self, and seeing the other through the lines.*

*"To forge my identity, telling my life story was a means that no longer satisfied me, I needed to find my place in an ensemble of extemporal behaviours" Thus, writing on the computer becomes more universal. And she (Chiara) feels as both actress and spectator, comments Philippe Lejeune (page 127)*

Illness is another reason for writing. It is the case in *Je vous ai tous aimés* by Johann Heuchel, sick with AIDS (page 391), or *Journal d'une Alzheimer* that Claude uses as a "memory saver". Thanks to this diary she is able to fight the disease, and to learn to live with it. Her doctor, when informed that she was keeping a diary, asked to read it, to help her.

Records of the body, records of the soul. "Our body is a parchment upon which life leaves its traces" (page 407), scars that may lead to autobiographical writing.

*With my suicide attempts, I am as unstructured as my diary is structured. (page 99) These are the words of Maria P. who says she has written a pyramid of words, (in A4 format, typeface 13), on quicksand. "By making a work out of her life, she confers unity to it". Maria, comments Philippe Lejeune, stitches up her life through her diary, healing the wounds. (ibidem)*

*(...) Yes, the Internet is the immediate evaporation into Space and into Chaos. There will come a time for selectors and archivists. This book is already a part of it.*

*Cartography of a tiny section. I thought that this dialectic in time and in space was exactly what rules the game between life and the journal. Keeping a diary means giving oneself duration in time. But to write too much might mummify the self. (ibidem, page 408)*

This is precisely why we can say that it is important to value autobiography not only as an individual fact, but also as the result of a choral culture, of a collective.

### 5) *The construction of the self through autobiography*

It is possible to adopt another point of view: doing autobiographical work does not mean to tell one's story with complacency or in an aesthetic way, to summarise one's life, to provide others with an insight, but rather to achieve one's own freedom. In this case, it would be a human necessity, a duty or a task one owes oneself, and not at all the luxury of an idle life.

Knowing oneself means to gather one's strength resolutely, in order to go forward, to summon one's energy and find the tools to carry out one's projects. Self-knowledge is therefore an *agent* and an *active self* that one gets to know in action, and which is transformed into its own activity.

In this sense, it is not an intellectual or a contemplative work, it is not a theoretical work, but a way of taking action upon oneself, an active approach to one's person. In this case, self-knowledge consists in modifying one's "object", discovering it to be incomplete. Knowing oneself corresponds to knowing one's own freedom, creating it, and setting it into motion.

By this choice, one ceases to observe one's past, and discovers one's capacity and initiative to open the future. The subject knows the luminous part of the self, the lighter part of its being, and thus realises its capacity to *be a cause in this world*, to start something on its own because it springs *ex nihilo*. The point is not, therefore, to dig up the authentic self, looking into the past, but to turn to action and to the future.

Several autobiographical works witness how one can use a diary to build an image of the self, and to anchor one's self to the construction of one's experience of life.

This is in part Luisa's intention. Luisa uses her diary to contrast her dreary life within the four walls of the family home, with no possibility of facing the outside world. Her diary is a tool to forge a complex portrait of her being:

*But now, helping my children to get through school, (...), I know I have lived up to my miserable culture and I have decided to accept myself as I am including my ignorance so I put my picture on the front page with all my personal data, so as to defeat and temptation to burn you, because I'll look at myself and I will understand that you, diary, are the real Luisa, for better or for worse, and to forsake you would be suicide. (I quaderni di Luisa – Diario di una resistenza casalinga, Milano-Piacenza, 2002, page 20)*

The extract, copied faithfully from the original, shows a unique case that is however comparable to others: the individual achieves its self in its work, by creating this image of an *agent that shapes the self*.

The danger of leaning toward radical subjectivism remains. The option is. to create an image of myself that I like and that allows me to plan new initiatives (though I may not live up to my expectations and my plans), or to create a false image, completely detached from my real possibilities and my actual achievements.

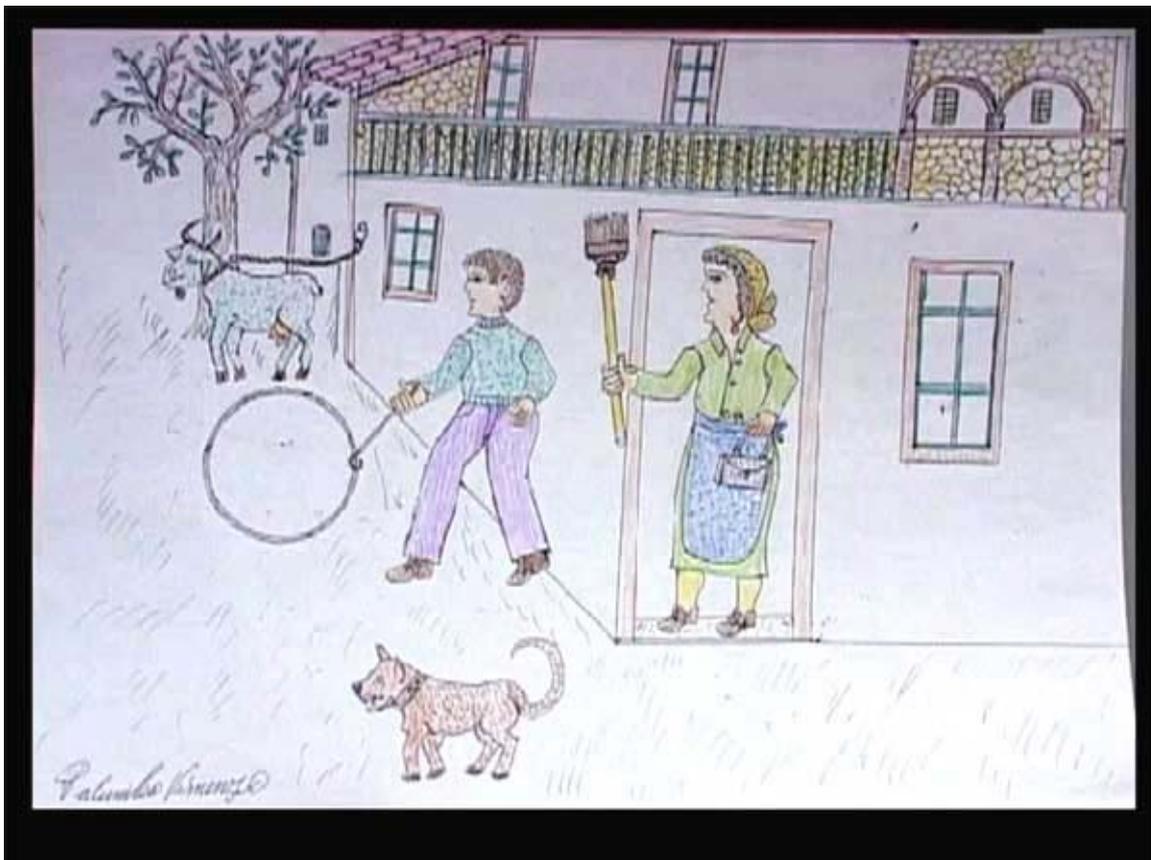
### 6) *The mirror reflection of images between the self and others*

My own image is articulated, no doubt, on the reflection that others show me of my person, and therefore cannot be completely detached from a certain objectivity.

In fact, the image that one builds from the outside, or in the third person, is quite different from the one created in the first person, because it rests much more on the past, and pays more attention to repetition, to traits that recur in time. (These represent a hindrance to action, because they limit me to certain characteristics, or character traits that prevent me from achieving certain projects or expectations.) These tendencies can be deduced

from my past and characterise me, fixing my person into a personality. They are a dark and heavy part that restricts my projects to a certain area, relative to the events of my past. Others are more sensitive to my unconscious self than I can possibly be because they can see it operating, and also see certain repetitions, a certain heaviness, the received part of my personality, a part that eludes my choices. The unconscious is in fact both individual and collective, since the self obviously does not build itself out of nothing, or in an isolated way, but within a culture. Such being the case, doing autobiographical work means to see oneself as a Me that adopts a subjective point of view to summarise a context or a collective tradition. This can often be observed among country folk, where individuals are loath to give a strictly personal image of themselves, and prefer to take on the context and use forms of expression and codes of storytelling belonging to the community.

That is the case with Vincenzo Palumbo, from Accadia (Foggia). He told his life story in close cohesion to the life of the collective, using drawing as his medium. His pictures are quite original in this specific case, and do not use collective patterns. They describe family life and the working atmosphere. Some of his pictures have been published in *Immagini di Accadia nei segni di Vincenzo Palumbo*, Napoli, Editor Generoso Procaccini, 2000)



This unpublished picture illustrates an episode from Vincenzo Palumbo's childhood: Not having any toys, he had cut out the copper rim of the cauldron to play with, and that is why his mother is chasing him with a broomstick.

Looking closely, the point does not seem to be to oppose these two images: the collective one and the individual one, the factual one and the self created one, but to understand to what extent they are intertwined, and whether they should be. The point is not to declare one false and the other true, one naïvely subjective and intentional and the other more objective and uninvolved.

Actually, the image of myself that allows me to act is corrected by the image that is shown to me by others. Vice versa, the image that others show me of myself is invested by my image of myself.

The relation between these two images of different sources, stemming from different perspectives, is dynamic.

One can speak of a reciprocal mirroring, or of a dialogue between two different perspectives, which explains that the interpretation of the self should be such a complex and constant process.

### c) Life stories: autobiography, history and stories

#### 1) The texts presented at Marly

During the June 2003 APA ( Association pour le patrimoine Autobiographique-France) meeting at Marly-le-roi, during one of the workshops, some recently found manuscripts were presented to the participants.

Martine Bachelot illustrated Alice de la Ruelle's *Journal intime 1899/1901*, 356 pages long, found by chance in a carpenter's drawer, and later given to the APA. In this diary, Alice writes of her unhappy marriage to a captain of a Dragons' regiment, and of her broken dreams. The titles of the different pages are very significant. *Buried alive, I wear the mourning of my happiness, no pleasure nor happiness...*

The text is interesting not only for its contents, but for the scientific and human perseverance of those who read, commented and studied it. As though in an attempt to bring the author back to life, they reconstructed the threads of family ties, searched archives for further information, looked for possible descendants.

These codified stories, fixed on paper, are intertwined with other stories of the present, leading up to many paths and clues. In this context, life stories seem to come alive, and become modern. Autobiographical writing always proves itself as being an act of transmission that unfolds in many stages.

Elise Louise Perrotin's diary (1818-1887) of 347 pages, has been illustrated by university student Marion Marchat. The writer was of working class descent – her parents ran a leather tanning business – but she found access, through a friend, to Doctor Larochette's private library, and acquired a certain competence and taste for literature. As a consequence of her affair with a lieutenant of the Gendarmerie, she discovers that she is expecting a child, and this inevitably brings her in conflict with her father (her mother was already dead at the time). The text is theatrical, and Elisa tries to recreate the atmosphere, the feelings, and the resentment in her diary. Not only that, but she also invents a use of words that manages to convey the force of the emotions. As in the passage where her father finds out about her pregnancy:

*One evening, my father was sitting by the hearth... I sat sewing in silence; I could feel my father looking at me, moved, Tears started to my eyelids, and the corset I was widening dropped from my hands. My Father Told me: I Dream of your Mother at Night, She Says: Good News! ...is it true?...*

a. *Yes it is true!*

b. *My Father Threw me a Kick, and my head bashed against the Cupboard, the blood gushed out!...This sight Shocked my Father, and he came to Raise me!...*

The capitals are in the text. To Elisa Louise Perrotin, they are a means underlining the tension and the stress of the situation.

The writing of *ordinary people* is also interesting because of the search for the right form, the adequate way of expressing feelings, and at times reveals autonomous communication strategies, free from codified criterion. *Ordinary people* seem to seek to shape their thoughts and live in a unique way, and to wish to avoid styles of writing that become repetitive and are used in current genres.

## 2) Thematic archives

Throughout history, keeping a diary or an intensive correspondence has been a way to give one's personality a certain coherence. This phenomenon is often observed among the weaker members of society, those who, for one reason or the other, had less interaction with the outside world. For example women, prisoners, soldiers.

Historical archives have a great importance, being a source of information related to specific events, but also for the anthropological readings they provide.

The A.L.S.P. (archivio ligure della scrittura popolare) stores documents and letters from emigrants, and from soldiers in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, in collaboration with the Modern and Contemporary History Department of the University of Genova.

The letters gathered there give important testimony of the strength and complexity of social and family ties that emigrants had to break away from, and help to understand the trauma of emigration, separation, and integration. Sometimes they speak of homecomings, that generally imply the total oblivion of the experience of emigration. The book *Storie di gente commune* relates various experiences, among them that of the immigrant Andrea Gagliardo, who came back to Italy from America. The commenter of these letters, referring to how he immediately fit back into his community, as though life in America had left no mark on him, writes: " He shook it off his back (America), like a dog coming out of the water, without getting his skin wet." The letters speak of two different life styles.

Rosa Cademartori writes to her aunt (New York 1924):

*Last Sunday was the day of the Palms, and I went to Mass, and if I wanted Palms I had to pay for them, not only that but I had to pay to get into the church, there (e.g in Italy) you go to Church when you want to and you don't pay but here those who wish to hear the Mass have to pay otherwise you must go away, and the parish priest comes to bless the houses but here if you don't send for him he doesn't come and he won't take less than five pennies. Dear aunt I find a great difference in the religion from here to there though the priests both here and there say that our Lord is one. (page 70)*

*Winds of war:* The letters from the soldiers on the front lines in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World War are sad, and the contents were often censored if they unwillingly contained information thought to be dangerous from a logistic point of view. Equally sad were the letters from very young boys who had witnessed the executions of deserters aged 20. They convey the whole horror of the war.

These documents have been defined the *front of words*. The words judge, and create parallel worlds to the brutality of the war.

In October 1915 the lieutenant Gioja wrote:

*The general ended saying:...and I condemn to the sentence of death by shooting in the back after degradation.  
I was looking at the prisoner: he seemed to be imperceptibly moved; (...) He was taken away, and a letter from his relatives that had just arrived from France was read to him.  
Poor relatives! (page 96)*

Some letters make one smile:

*I see that you continue to pester me, and want to know where I am: it's pointless to keep on asking me anyway I can't tell you because the censor would only tear up my letter (...). (letter from Emanuele Calosso to his mother, 12 March 1916. Page 93)*

These are ways of feeling about things that higher literature often stratifies with more cultured words and expressions. To read them, with this tone of immediacy, breaks away from time and gives back the fuller feelings and emotions.

#### **d) Rinterpreting autobiographies: radio, theatre, films**

The Archives of autobiographical legacy are also places where the stories come alive. During the *Ambérieu-en-Bugey* meeting (17-20 May 2002), a monologue taken from Sofia Tolstoy's diary was staged:

*I have read the beginning of his work (speaking of Leon Tolstoy) – she wrote in her journal on December the 16<sup>th</sup> 1862 – Wherever love, or woman, is mentioned, I have a pitiful feeling, I am so disgusted, that I might burn it all.*

At *Ambérieu* some extracts from *Le journal d'Etty Hillesum*, a Jewish girl of 27, who kept a diary from 1941 to 1943 in Amsterdam:

*Despite all the suffering inflicted, and all the injustice committed, I am unable to hate mankind... I have suffered a thousand deaths in a thousand concentration camps... Somehow or the other I know it all. And never the less, I find this life beautiful and meaningful. At every instant.*

A play: *J'attends de tes nouvelles* (*Adyn* *Companie de Lyon*) by Claudio Colangelo, has been built on the basis of the letters that his family (that he left at age 18) sent to him for years in France, and that he never wanted to answer. The result is an effective monologue. Now both a husband and a father, he looks back on his "ungratefulness", somewhere between laughter and tears. With this correspondence he composed a *pièce* that succeeds in communicating the universal yet unique character of a child-parent relationship. This play is a good example of how a series of letters can be dramatised. The leitmotiv "wear warm clothes, eat" with which his mother peppered her letters, conveys a feeling of daily life to Claudio that she had never lost. Put on the stage, the constancy with which the father always ended his messages "I'm waiting to hear from you", evoke feelings that are common to all.

Obviously, autobiographies can also be dramatised in radio broadcast.

Again during the *Ambérieu* meeting, Elisabeth Cepède organised a workshop called *connait la chanson* (*Maybe songs prevail upon us and our knowledge, by their rhythms and their rhymes?*) and asked whether songs speak to us: how many moments of the subconscious, how many moments of love, of our childhoods, or ideological associations does hearing of a song evoke?

Music tends to build common autobiographical ground.

Films can also be the basis of autobiographical storytelling. In the last films produced by Angelo Barbagallo and Nanni Moretti's company "Sacher", stories were taken from the archive of Pieve Santo Stefano in the presence and with the collaboration of some of the main characters.

Here, it is our object to stress the value of orality for community radios, and to call for the direct use of recorded matter, or dramatisation of written life stories.

## e) The bio-/autobiographies from Panni (Foggia)

### *The DD project*

Here we will report on the reflections and guidelines that emerged from the *Creating Community Voices – Digital Dialogues* project, carried out in Italy by the asbl Mediapolis-Europa, in the Community of Panni (Foggia):

- Panni and the local memory;
- Listening methodology
- Recording of oral stories for the creation of an *Archivio del Patrimonio Autobiografico e di Memorie Storiche Scritte e Audiovisive dell'area Dauna-Irpinia*.

### 1) Panni

Panni is considered a village threatened by extinction. Most of its population belongs to the 50-60 age group, and the chances of getting a job for young people are slim.

In the fifties, the resident population of Panni was around 4500 people, but today it has dwindled to about 850. Since 1996, the magazine *Il Castello* has been edited under Pietro De Michele's direction, and it has about 1000 subscribers. The magazine reaches European countries, the USA, Canada, South-American countries, and Australia.

Panni is part of the *Comunità Montana della Daunia Irpina*.

The exodus continues today, following new modalities, and mainly touches the younger generation. Despite the difficulties that the community has faced in the past, the elders are proud of their values and of their culture. Being able to narrate one's experience is obviously part of this pride, and of the construction of personalities.

The feeling of belonging and the attachment to their land is common to all the inhabitants. The territory around Panni is mainly devoted to agriculture, and the use of dialect is still very much alive.

The project *Creating Community Voices – Digital Dialogues* was closely linked to the idea of building an *Archivio del Patrimonio Autobiografico e di Memorie Storiche Scritte e Audiovisive dell'area Dauna-Irpinia*.

In an area hit so hard by emigration, anything that has to do with the memory of the language, of the costumes, etc. is obviously of great importance.

The basic idea was therefore to create a vocal archive that the local radio stations could use to find stories, to elicit reactions and attract similar contributions, to create contacts, and exchange stories within similar structures abroad.

### 2) Working methods:

Interviewing is a technique, but as every technique, it must be adapted to specific circumstances.

In our case it seemed preferable to avoid questions on the habits and traditions, and to interact in a semi-free manner – asking very open questions like: your most vivid recollections, the sense of work, your vision of the future – and leaving most of the talking to the interviewee.

### *A few suggestions for the interviews*

- It is a good idea to get introduced by a local. Trust comes from a feeling that the interviewer is included in the community.
- It's preferable to be alone during the interviews. Their success is based on the gestures, the expression, a certain empathy: the interviewee's freedom of expression.
- The interviewer must understand that the storyteller has an *interior voice* that communicates the individual vision of what he has lived through, the ethics that guided him, and the intentional choices that are the foundations of his life. This is not explicit, but is the leading thread of the narration.
- The success of the interview often depends on an initial agreement. It is usually best to interact as little as possible.
- A woman interviewing seems to be easier to accept, because she is perceived as a social being (see Edgar Radtke, *Bollettino linguistico campano*, 2002 - 1; page 9).
- It is indispensable to accept and understand the dialect in the locality.

### *To be avoided*

- Routine questions
- Orienting the conversation towards themes that might give it too much of a direction
- An authoritarian presence
- Censorship of the dialect

### *The leading thread of the interviews*

The people who have been interviewed up to now are more or less of the same age (60 years old). They have led different lives, fulfilled various roles, and were chosen according to the idea of a representative sample.

The stories are very different. One aspect, however, unites them. They all express the same deep beliefs. If on one hand the philosophy of the interviewees is to take what happens quietly – expressing wisdom and a certain fatalism –, on the other hand their behaviour is the fruit of a highly selective experience from an ethical point of view, and therefore intentional and deliberate. The people we interviewed displayed a fundamentally balanced relationship to themselves.

### *The contents of the interviews:*

#### *The recurring themes*

- *Emigration and social success*
- *Thoughts about the past, turning it into a myth*
- *Love*

These people have a very strong point of view.

The tone of their voices is also very lively: half way between *souvenir and avenir*, the past, in their stories, is never really past. The autobiographical narrative is in fact often in the present tense, a clear sign of interaction between experience and formulating plans. As Donato says – 65 years old – emigrant, then farmer and factory worker, to this day a tireless worker: *Però...simm'stat'bene* (All in all, we had a good time...)

### 3) Recording of oral stories for the creation of an *Archivio del Patrimonio Autobiografico e di Memorie Storiche Scritte e Audiovisive dell'area Dauna-Irpinia*

We have chosen some extracts from three of the interviews (from a total of ten), and here accompany them with a brief initial comment.

The dialect is stronger in Pietro's interview, and it is the only one we are giving a double version of. In the other recordings, the terms in dialect are few, and it did not seem worthwhile to transcribe the original version, that can however be consulted on the web site [www.digital-dialogues.de](http://www.digital-dialogues.de).

#### **Pietro Cocciardi**, farmer

*Pietro tells his life story regardless of the chronological order. The most important and dramatic event of his life is the death of his beloved and hardworking wife. Together with the interesting descriptions of country life, the way in which he organises his speech makes him a great storyteller. He may not be aware of it. His ability to narrate was probably handed down to him as part of a cultural heritage. The story of his trip to Milan, to meet the girl he was already thinking of as his companion in life, presents three obstacles. (As in Fairy tales!!!). Pietro, as he arrives in the Milan suburbs, sees the desolate autumn marshes as a desert, where the one person he meets "speaks (ba...be...) like an African..." In other words, Pietro adopts a narrative strategy to build up the tension (to him the North is Exotic, Africa), the fog he calls "quiddam" (something mysterious and unknown). The story ends with him finding the girl, the wedding, and children...*



I met my wife, like that, when we went dancing at Granddad's. "Sorry, do you want to dance?" "yes, yes" and as we danced I said "what a pretty girl". I asked "Are you engaged, are you not engaged; do you want to get engaged, do you not want to get engaged? (...)

I met her in August, then came September, October, November. In November I wrote. "I'll have to think about it, I might" (*She said*) and she kept putting it off. When she left, she gave me her address, "now, if you really care..."

I was working at the Cantina Sociale in Foggia. So on All Saints day, (1<sup>st</sup> November), since she had wrote, I said: "I must go and see her" – "will you ask your father if he wants me to come and see you?"

### **The trip**

So I packed a suitcase full of grapes. In November there is the Ermedia grape, the late variety, nice and hard. The suitcase, a big case of 50kg. One thing or the other to make a good impression. When I got there, I had already reached Milano, getting to Milano isn't like getting to Panni. (...)

It was like that there, because with the storms at night it gets all muddy. And there are little streets like our lanes, little narrow ones. I had understood the way, so had the taxi driver understood the way to get there from Milan. There was a bend, and 150m after the bend there was a Bar. We go into this Bar. We enter the Bar, and we say "Good day, Good day, excuse me Ma'am, where is Via Messina?" She says, "150m beyond the bend and you are there." "We've got there, do you understand?" "Do you understand?" – asks Pietro – "Yes, yes, don't worry", says the taxi driver.

We back up, drive round the bend, go on for a 100m, and all these crazy...

When I got off the train in the morning, it wasn't half past nine, there was this *Quiddam* (...) And there had been a storm over night, and as we drove through these little streets, we saw all the mud, the puddles, the water holes.

I could see the road signs at 200 meters, but I couldn't see the sign to Via Messina. There was a leaf covering it. The storm had filled Via Messina with puddles. We went back to the Bar. "Yes, you're almost there..." "How can we be there, if we just drove down the road (*and we couldn't find it.*)" "No, no, it's there all right." OK. We had had a coffee, and we went back again. We took a narrow street, and couldn't drive on, so we backed up. We met an old man who spoke brianzolo "excuse me?" "o...ba..bab". Who could understand him, he spoke like an African??... "Sorry, via Messina", "it's there, it's there."

There were two or three cross streets. We found a little lane. Who knows, there were trees and branches. Here there is a sign.

When we turned into the lane, we drove for about two or three thousand metres, there was a flood of water, like a river. The fog was thick, there was a bit of damp, damp, a desert.

The road ended like that, but as you turned, you could see thirty meters down, all of a sudden I saw the good soul Zio Peppe, a brother of my father in law's (*future father in law*). He had a few goats, little goats, and a couple of sheep. He woke up early, and when I saw him, I told the taxi driver "We've found someone from my village." "But how do you know him?", he said. And that's how the great welcoming celebration started. (...)

In fact she was growing fond (the future wife). She used to say "I don't like Milano." If we get married we must go back down south. I married...

Original version in dialect:

(*Ho conosciuto*) mia moglie così, e allora abballarono dal nonno. 'Scusa vuoi ballare?' 'Sì, sì', e ballando ballando dicetti 'che bella ragazza!' S'arrussi, 'u fatt' c'aveva dic're 'Sei fidanzata, nun sei fidanzata; vuoi fidanzarti, non vuoi fidanzarti?', ecc.

(...)

No, nun è comm' a mo', se ... A agosto che la trovai,... po' vista questa a agosto, settembre... ottobre... novembre... A novembre ha scritt'.

'dovrei pensarci, dovrei fare un pensiero' e rimandava rimandava. Quando s' n' i, lasciando la corrispondenza "mo' se veramente mi so' decisa se proprio ci tieni... ecc.'.

l' lavorava in una cantina sociale a Foggia. Allora a Tutti i Santi (1° novembre) visto che aveva scritt', dicett' : 'i' adda i la truvà', 'o vuo di a tuo padre se vuoi che t' veng' a truvà'.

*il viaggio*

Poi p'gliai e facietti 'na valigia... d'uva. A novembre c'è l'uva Ermedia quella tardiva, quella dura, ecc. la valigia, un valigione 50 chili. Tra una cosa e un'altra una bella figura e quando arrivai là, che già era fatto d'arrivà a Milano...quando arrivai a Milano...nun è come arrivà a Panni.

(...)

Là almeno era così perché là ch 'o temporale la notte s'appantana tutto...E là poi stanno ancora delle viottole accusi come 'sti tratturi nostri...stradine strette. l' avevo capito la strada pure o' tassista aveva capito la strada, da Milano arriva a là. Fa la curva, fa la curva dopo la curva a 150 metri sta lu bar. Andiamo a stu bar, buongiorno bongiorno dice "scusi signora dic' ..via Messina"... Sì dic' 'a centocinquanta metri dietro nella curva ci siete... ne la curva ci siete' 'ci siamo... hai capito o no?'. Dicett' 'scusa', dicett', ma lei ha capito? Sì, sì, nun te preoccupà.

Inversione, imbocca la curva, facciamo nu cent' metri tutt qui 'sti caspita sta caspita de 'sti...

La mattina scendett d'o treno...là se nun passavano le nove e mezza, le dieci 'u mese de novembre già c'era la brina c'era già lu quidd' d' ( ? ) qua agg' addiuccat'. Mannaggia la madonna!!!

(..) poi la notte aveva fatto l'acquazzone intanto che passamm 'sti stradine accusi addo' vedev' li zaparuni, li foss'd'acqua. A cent' ducent' metri tutti insegne vedeva, ma l'insegn' via Messina nur'a v'deva. Qua stava 'na frasca nanz' là. Lu temporale aveva ammarrato via Messina. Girammo ascemmo 'nata vota 'remmo 'o bar.

'Sì che ci siete...' 'ma dove ci siamo se quello abbiamo 'mboccato'.

'Ma no, è lì è lì, è lì è lì'. Va bene. Mo' c'aveva dat' 'o café turnammo nata vota.

C'entramm' p' 'nata stradina e trovamm' tutto chiuso e girammo a marcia indietro. Truvamm' nu veccharell' parlava brianzolo 'Scusi' 'o...b..bab...' , Chi le capeva cumm l'african'... 'Scusi, via Messina?' 'E' lì è lì...'

C'erano due o tre incroci. Truvamm' nu trattur' nu viottolo. Chi sap', aveva fatto le fronne d' ll'alberi...'qua pare che c'è 'na tabella'.

Comm' c'infilamm' facemmo due e trecento metri...c'era un pantano d'acqua...là hanno fatto lu parc...proprio comme fusse nu fiume. La nebbia che stava nu poco fitta.. stava nu poco de foschia... 'a foschia... 'o desert'.

Mo' la strada feneva accusi, ma comme svoltava, se vedev', svoltava a sinistra. Vedo la svolta a sinistra 'nun facev' neanche una trentina de metre, quand' pigl' e ved'tt' la bonanima de zi' Peppe, un fratello d' mio suocero. Quello teneva due o tre crapette, le crapette quelle piccole, un paio di pecore e così. Quello s'alzava priest' e quann' i' vedette a quillo, i dicett' a l'autista 'hamm' truvat' u paesan' 'Ma comm' u conosc' ' dicette. E così si svolsi la grande accoglienza.

Effettivamente si affezionava.

Diceva 'Milano, non mi piace. Se ci sposiamo ce n'amma i giù, ce n'amma i giù'.

M' sposai...

## **Maria Paglia Procaccini (emigrated in the USA 50 years ago)**

*Maria has a desire to express herself, to tell her story, and she does so by telling the story of her brother Donato's adventures. One of her manifest desires is to contrast the crystallized opinion that the people from her hometown hold of her family. These people still live with the memory of her lively young brothers, before they emigrated.*

### **Wounded memory, healed memory**

What I forgot, what came on me even more...that strong desire to write, when people met me in the course of the three trips I took back to Italy and they would tell me "Hey, Maria, what are those boys doing, those brothers of yours, what are they doing," and I laughed, My Goodness, what are they doing! They're old men now.

Anyway, these are the memories, but I am a naturally optimistic person, always happy, and I used to dream, to dream, when we used to go to the country, to that farmhouse, in that country that my father used to keep like a villa, the land was worked into a garden, it was beautiful and we have all kinds of fruit. We had a big pond, and as I explained in the book, we also had two other ponds on another piece of land further down. All in all we had a life, I won't say who knows how great, but well, good.

Yes, and I kept on dreaming, I dreamed at night when I went to bed because during the daytime I was too busy, and I would close my eyes, and see myself dreaming, and writing, I was in an elegant room with many people dancing...all these dreams and that was my therapy to be happy; in the evening because in the daytime I was very busy...

## **Carmela Bianco (owner of a pastry shop Casablanca)**

### **Carmela's dream: "I feel part of the past"**

*Carmela tells how one of her dreams came true. It is a real teleological narration: a desire that arose in her childhood became a reality through her hard work and strong will.*

B: Beatrice interviewer C: Carmela

C: I was born in Panni, in a very simple family. I worked in the fields. I worked very hard. Nothing, then my grand-father emigrated, and after him all his children emigrated. And nothing, that's it, that's how our hard work and sacrifices there began.

B: *You lived in Montreal*

C: Montreal, yes...

B: *You went to school there. How did you fit in there? And which are your most important recollections of that period in Canada?*

C: The school, with the local children, not only Italians. A mixed school, because there were many nationalities, there were English, French, Germans. Really a lot. And it was really simple, like all the other schools. I had some difficulty in fitting in. The first year I was left back, because it was difficult in Italian and I was small, I was 6. So I repeated the first year but gradually I fit in without problems, a very normal simple child. At school, at home with Granddad, because my parents were working so I spent a lot of time with my grand-parents, my grand-parents on my mother's side. And then I started high school. I went to work, that was my first job. I was 12 when I started working in a pastry shop. It was something for me... When I used to pass by on my way to school I always stopped... It was a little tiny pastry shop.

B: *Italian?*

C: Italian, Italian owners

B: *Neapolitan?*

C: No, no, from Calabria. My twelfth birthday, I remember that day, it was like from here to Vito's bar (*a bar across the road*), I was walking up and down all day, because I didn't have the courage to go in and ask if they need help. I was twelve and I was very small. In the evening I managed to ask that man if he needed anybody and he said yes, and I started in the kitchen. I remember that I was so stressed in my work, because there they packaged sandwiches for the hospitals and they had to be sealed. And I, I did that, I put the sandwiches in the paper bags and I sealed them. After a while I started to find my way in the work, as a sales girl, lets say, and then that's it, I started in the back because I'm very curious and I learned a lot of things. I worked with the same person for many years.

B: *Did you like it? Did you ever fight; have you got any bad memories?*

C: No, I have a good memory of these people, because they stood by me also as human beings, they helped me grow up, they let me into their family, they really cared for me.

B: *What language would you speak?*

C: They were Italian, but they also spoke English. Then they had small children. It had become like a family for me. 'Cause I was twelve when I started there and when I was twenty-seven I was still working with them.

B: *A very long period*

C: Yes, yes, yes, I grew up with them in part, I did pastry school, then when I found my job, that was my part-time job, then I was working in an office, and then I would leave the office at five and I would go and work there till nine. That was my thing, do you see? To me it was something I had always liked.

B: *Why did you always like pastry?*

C: it wasn't the pastry, it was the contact with the people, it was the place where I felt at home, because you were in contact with a lot of people. There were the nice ones, and the so-so ones. To me it was really the people. I liked being with the people. It was a very fine thing. And even now, here it's the same thing. I feel part of my past...

B: *Did you frequent meet the people from Panni?*

C: Yes, yes, yes

B: *And how is the pastry shop for you now...tell me the story... this is new for me. It's nice that you should have started to work in a pastry shop as a child. Even if you were packaging sandwiches, you were where you wanted to be.*

C: That was the thing... this dream that came true, it took years for me. The first year I came, I told Nicola (her husband) we should do something. And he always said "what do you want to do in Panni". So I worked at home.

B: *Because the children were small?*

C: I didn't have any in the beginning, I had problems having children. They didn't come straight away. So I had this hobby, and I carried on with it, because the children weren't coming, and I needed to keep my mind busy and I started making cakes.

B: *For the family?*

C: No, for people, they would order things...

B: *There was a market.*

C: Yes, working at home I used to charge less, because I wasn't paying tax. And I had a lot of people, it was a nice thing. The baker helped me. He baked things. They were helpful.

B: *This baker? (Indicating the one on the square)*

C: Both of them. They never were...

B: *hostile?*

C: No, no. But I always had this thing to do things. I was never interested in running a bar, but a pastry shop, yes. And there weren't any. And after a while I found a job at Federico's in Foggia

B: *Who is Federico?*

C: Federico is a big pastry shop in Foggia, I went to work there for almost a year, and then I was pregnant with my son, and I had to drop everything.

B: *of course*

C: But I always continued at home, being used to it... And then, I'm in Panni. It has always been something I wanted to do. This, to me... The thing I liked most, this dream... because bars, you must sit down, you must enjoy the coffee, I don't know, you must feel it.

B: *In Italy there is this habit of having coffee on the go, that doesn't exist in other European countries, hardly anyone has their coffee standing up.*

C: You need to stop, that's how I'm used to doing things. For me it has been a great thing to manage to carry out something like this.

B: *What kind of pastry do you make, where do you get it from?*

C: Well, from the things I learned from others, well working with other bakers. Because I wasn't only at the till. I liked to watch the others while they worked. Let's say it's all stuff that I stole. My eyes stole it. You picked it up learning other people's recipes, all that stuff, then you learn the job on your own. They aren't all the same, but they are hand made. Some say they are small, some say they are big, but in that moment the hand wanted it to be that size, and I made it.

B: *It is true that they do not have the precision of things made by a machine, but they are hand made. I think that nowadays that is much appreciated.*

C: I hope so.

B: *How do your children like all this? Because mothers always belong to their children more than to their husbands.*

C: They have accepted it, this thing. At first they didn't understand. Because Valentina said they were fine without the pastry shop. But Paolo is more silent, more reserved. Valentine always says "Ah, this pastry shop!", but I say, but this is yours.

B: *It will be a good investment for the future.*

C: If you are up to it we will go on, you've got to learn now. And talking like that, Valentina began to come behind the counter, to serve. Being small, it's not very... but I can tell you they have changed, they have realised that I'm always here. If they call me, I'm down here.

B: *So you feel happy, you've come a long way. Since you were a child, you've established something, it seems a great conquest to me.*

C: Very great, very great, now let's see when all these tourists go away.