

THE ALCHEMICAL LANGUAGE  
OF ITALO CALVINO'S  
*SIX MEMOS FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM*  
AND *INVISIBLE CITIES*

Some considerations on alchemy will serve to trace a connection between this ancient philosophy of transformation and some of the speculations typical of Calvino's literary production. The present analysis considers *Invisible Cities*' in the light of *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*,<sup>2</sup> a theoretical work which appears as a summation of the concepts and ideas Calvino had previously employed in his many works over a time span of about forty years.

Any basic definition of alchemy leads back to the conception of matter postulated by Aristotle in the fourth century BC. From the duality of "matter" and "form" he implied a *prima materia*, a pre-existing entity without form susceptible of transformation into various forms and different identities. He introduced the notion of four elements: fire, air, water and earth. The passage from the characteristic qualities of one element to another would give way to the possibility for forms to change from one condition of being to another. A philosophy of transformation developed on this elementary pattern of changes. The transmutation of raw and corrupt metals into gold — the pure metal — signified the passage from the status of corruption, of debasedness, into a purified status. The formula of "solve et coagula" expressing the loss, the alchemical death ("solve"), and the restoration of forms, the rebirth ("coagula"), is the epitome of the alchemical process. This condition of rebirth of new forms from corrupt ones was the goal of the ancient art of alchemy. This transformation was perceived, by the alchemists-maker of transformations, as a never-ending quest to attain the condition of

perfection.

All the various definitions of *materia prima* that can be found in books about alchemy are very often diverse, but always rather complex. Among them all the one given by Carl Gustav Jung should not be neglected, since in it is embedded the concept of individuation that so much influenced Italo Calvino's works.

The basis of the *opus*, the *prima materia*, is one of the most famous secrets of alchemy. This is hardly surprising since it represents the unknown substance that carries the projection of the autonomous psychic content. It was of course impossible to specify such a substance, because the projection emanates from the individual and is consequently different in each case.<sup>1</sup>

Alchemy, also referred to as the hermetic art, finds in the Egyptian god Thoth — called Hermes by the Greeks — an initiator of a less "materialistic" and "more spiritual" view of its functions. According to this hermetic view, the art of transformation stands for the possibility to find the unfindable, the unsayable, the impossible.

The task of the alchemist was, in light of these aspects, that of imposing a quality of harmony, of perfection on base matter so as to detect the combination and the interplay of the bodily aspect and the spiritual one within matter itself and to single out its positive and negative values. This is, for instance, what Paracelsus did with his experiments in chemistry and physics in the early sixteenth century. This alchemical-hermetic transformation can take place because it is desired by the maker of it, the alchemist, the searcher of pure forms. Calvino, searcher of forms himself and molder of matter, explains in *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*: "The alchemist is the man who, to achieve transformation of matter, tries to make his soul become as unchangeable and pure as gold" (p. 91: "L'alchimista è colui che per ottenere gli scambi nella materia cerca di far diventare la sua anima inalterabile e pura come l'oro," p. 91).

Keeping in mind Paracelsus's concept of "values" and their properties, it would be useful to remember that at the very end of the brief paragraph written as foreword to his lectures, Italo Calvino states: "I would therefore like to devote these lectures to certain values, qualities, or peculiarities of literature that are very close to my heart, trying to situate them within the perspective of the new millennium" (p. 1: "Vorrei dunque dedicare queste mie conferenze ad alcuni valori o

qualità o specificità della letteratura che mi stanno particolarmente a cuore, cercando di situarle nella prospettiva del nuovo millennio," p. 1). It is most significant that the values, the qualities of literature to which he refers have clear connections to the ancient art of alchemy that appears as the metaphor concealing the transformations of existence.

Calvino's brilliant essays, written with great elegance of style, clearly and explicitly employ, as never before, what I would call alchemical language. We need to go no further than read the titles of the lectures that he was supposed to read at Harvard University during the academic year 1985-86. Calvino's program was to be circumscribed within six lectures but only five were actually written; the sixth chapter, "Consistency" was to be written once he had arrived on Harvard campus. Unfortunately he never left Italy. However, this six-chapter project was not closed in itself. In fact, the first chapter devoted to the discussion of the quality of "lightness," is presented in contrast to the concept of "weight," as well as "exactitude" is opposing "vagueness." Moreover, it should be noted that in the first chapter,<sup>4</sup> there is a clear reference to the concept of "consistency," the lecture that has not been written. The "values," the "qualities," and "the peculiarities" expressed first in the title then in the body of the lectures, propose a conception of literature as the "locus" where the metaphor of transformation can take place.

The *Memos* are a six-stage compound of Calvino's own alchemical journey that goes back in time to save and remember those ideas, those books that might have some values, qualities, and particularities for the millennium to come. It is his effort to recapture objects, forms, words inscribed in the books of the past and to enclose them in the book of his own present. The urge to recapture the past and express it with the written word becomes the only possible way that can, at least, have a connotation of future.

The lectures are the stages of a journey that explores and reconsiders the multiplicity of being and beings. The striking conciseness of the titles of the lectures recalls the first six chapters of the twelve-stage structure of *The Compound of Alchemy. Or the Ancient Hidden Art of Archemie*,<sup>5</sup> written in 1591 by the English alchemist Sir George Ripley. The first six chapters or "gates" of Ripley's *Compound* are the stages that await anyone who tries to enter the imaginary castle of wisdom where lies the possibility of understanding, of seeing things. In fact, these stages demand another kind of journey that is invisible and

proceeds along the steps of the alchemical procedure of renewal through the transmutation of the old corrupt stuff into the new and pure substance. This process allows man the revisitation of what is known (his past) as a premise leading towards the unknown (his future), what is supposedly bound to lie ahead. The castle of Ripley, the journey enclosed within the place of the castle, may recall to our mind Calvino's own "castle" of crossed destinies where the mechanism of coding memory belongs to a multiplicity of men. The experience of one being is enlarged and considers also the experience of other beings.

It is with these considerations in mind that we start the reading of the *Memos* without forgetting that in his proposal for literature Calvino chooses as his patron Hermes-Mercury, the heavenly quintessence, the god of transformation and dreams, the inventor of writing, "Mercurie without which nothing being is" writes Ripley in the Preface to *The Compound*. Considering the indebtedness to the figure of Hermes-Mercury, Calvino's Harvard lectures re-propose the idea of "the combinatory systematizations of the possibles." This concept as also noted by Umberto Eco,<sup>7</sup> had already appeared in fictionalized form in *Invisible Cities*. Structured according to the "hermetic semantic encyclopedia," the lectures present the idea of the hermetic-alchemical, analogical coincidence of things that Calvino shared with Umberto Eco. Concluding the third lecture, "Quickness," Calvino states that:

All the subjects I have dealt with this evening [...] are all under the sign of an Olympian god whom I particularly honor: Hermes-Mercury, god of communication and mediation, who under the name of Thoth was the inventor of writing and who — according to C. G. Jung in his studies on alchemical symbolism — in the guise of "spirit Mercury" also represents the *principium individuationis* (pp. 51-2).

Tutti i temi che ho trattato questa sera [...] possono essere unificati in quanto su di essi regna un dio dell'Olimpo cui io tributo un culto speciale: Hermes-Mercurio, dio della comunicazione e delle mediazioni, sotto il nome di Thoth inventore della scrittura, e che, a quanto ci dice C.G. Jung nei suoi studi sulla simbologia alchimistica, come "spirito Mercurio" rappresenta anche il *principium individuationis* (p. 50).

Mercury, the symbol of transformation *par excellence*, bears the invisible possibility of infinite transformations. The author's mercurial act of communicating the written word establishes his mediating role

between the consciousness of the text and that of the reader. Within the maze of the hermetic semantic encyclopedia the principle of individuation seems to be the only possible way out.

In the journey described by Ripley, the castle is the closed, impenetrable place that contains what is still "invisible" and must be found out, taken out of invisibility. In the journeys of *Invisible Cities* the invisible/visible city of Venice is multiplied into a variety of images that transform and refer back to the original, since all the cities, so states Teresa De Lauretis, are "reflected *en abîme* within each city."<sup>8</sup> In Marco Polo's stories Venice symbolizes the impenetrable castle that needs to be explored in order to see and to understand its hidden meanings, so as to reach the stage of "visibility" and "multiplicity" of everything that participates in the experience of existence and gives form to its most diverse aspects. From this need stems the necessity of projecting all the most diverse features of thought into objectivized realities: the cities. They derive and develop from an original first city which is Venice. Venice stands for Marco's past, his history and story; his unconscious.

As the castle in *The Compound* represents man's unconscious, Venice embodies Marco's unconscious, the place through which man needs to pass in order to "see"("cities and eyes") and to understand the multiple ways of being of existence. Marco becomes the epitome of the traveller, the man who embarks on all sorts of adventures ("trading cities") within the land of memory ("cities and memory"). Memory is for Calvino a promised land of literature where knowledge is acquired by remembering and imagining both past and future.

Just as Ripley informs the reader about what needs to be done to achieve this, so, too, Calvino in *Invisible Cities* employs a few direct addresses to the reader to direct his/her reading. In some of these he uses the first person plural as if to include himself in the category of what Umberto Eco defines as "model reader" in *The Role of the Reader.*<sup>9</sup> Arrayed in the form of a philosophical treatise, the texts of *Invisible Cities* are introduced by authorial, "theatrical"-like descriptions in italics.

Kublai Kan, so the implied author informs the reader in the first italicized section of *Invisible Cities*, has reached the awareness that the only thing left to do is to set out along the journey that finishes when the purer form of being is reached. "Only in Marco Polo's accounts was Kublai Kan able to discern through the walls and towers destined to

crumble, the tracery of a pattern so subtle it could escape the termites' gnawing" (pp. 5-6: "Solo nei resoconti di Marco Polo, Kublai Kan riusciva a discernere, attraverso le muraglia e le torri destinate a crollare, la filigrana d'un disegno così sottile da sfuggire al morso delle termiti," pp. 13-14). The journey through the invisible cities of Calvino's text presents a movement that proceeds forward by introducing a new kind of cities, but it also moves back to represent an already introduced type of city in a way that turns out to re-define and re-code the transformation of forms.

The titles of each section of *Invisible Cities* present an interesting combination of signifiers. The word "cities," a word that fits in the register of realistic conventions in narratives, is accompanied by various qualifications that demand an effort from the reader in order to break their "hermetic" signified. All the nouns and the appellations that follow the word "cities" are of alchemical bearing. Consider, for instance, the puzzling "città sottili," a phrase that makes us think of the "materia sottile," the object of desire of the alchemist; or again of the improbable "città nascoste," which reminds us that, in the hermetic art of alchemy, the pure form is always hidden, not visible. The section-title "le città e i segni" indicates a clear reference to signs and symbols whose interpretation was one of the main concerns of the alchemist, a sort of semiologist of the hermetic-alchemical art of transformation, and of a system of relationships between elements taken out of entropy. "Invisible play" of forms develops the search for hidden things.

According to Jung's principle of individuation, the cities would stand for multiple descriptions — the written texts — and the understanding — the reader — of the same city-form: Venice. Each one of its aspects is doubled in whatever may be comprehended by the one who writes (Calvino), the one who tells (Marco), the one who listens (Kublai), and the one who reads (the model reader). The individuality of each one of the performances refers back to the process of individuation which calls into play the conscious and unconscious whenever the activities of writing, remembering/inventing, reciting, reading, and re-reading occur. The unfolding of these actions in the "invisible play" of forms develops the search for something that is hidden. Calvino himself declares: "I think we are always searching for something hidden or merely potential or hypothetical, following its traces whenever they appear on the surface" ("Exactitude," p. 77: "[... ] penso che siamo sempre alla caccia di qualcosa di nascosto o di solo

potenziale o ipotetico, di cui seguiamo le tracce che affiorano sulla superficie del suolo," p. 74).

Marco Polo and Kublai Kan are the only *dramatis personae* of a "play" which recalls the central acts of the tragedy of *King Lear*. In fact, the reader is presented with the action starting already in *medias res*. The reader finds himself in the unfolding of a dialectic that has just reached the stage of awareness. Unlike Lear, Kublai, "the King" has already plunged into the "mystery of things."<sup>10</sup> There has been no need for him to have undergone the experience of folly. He has no doubt about the importance of the words of Marco, his "Fool." Engaged in metaphysical meditations, they stand out as the archetypal figures of a play that can be performed endlessly outside time. The "actantial" pattern considers the cities that lie along the outside-of-space mental journeys of man through the past and the present as well as towards the future.<sup>11</sup> Their "play" recreates an endless variety of speculations whose only possible language remains that of alchemy, which shapes Marco and Kublai's reciting. These speculations of alchemical bearing are combined to an anxiety that never allows the text to lose contact with the actual reality of the time in which Calvino conceived it. The employment of the old art of alchemy becomes in Calvino's *Invisible Cities* a metaphor for existence.

The alchemical journey through memory, in *Invisible Cities*, uses the power of memory to highlight the importance of the individual mind in the process of understanding through the act of recalling the forms and the objects of the past. Martin Heidegger, in *What is Called Thinking*, considers the word memory in much the same fashion:

"Memory" initially did not at all mean the power to recall. The word designates the whole disposition in the sense of a steadfast intimate concentration upon the things that essentially speak to us in every thoughtful meditation. Originally, "memory" means as much as devotion: a constant concentrating abiding with something — not just with something that has passed, but in the same way with what is present and with what may come. What is past, present, and to come appears in the oneness of its own *present* being.<sup>12</sup>

The cities are the places that allow "devotion" to concentrate what has passed, in order to build up the multiplicity of associations in memory and make for the possibility of "visibility" and the consequent knowledge of what is present and, eventually, to come.

In her study on "the art of memory,"<sup>13</sup> Frances Yates explains that, according to the old "art of memory," man could master the ability of recalling precisely the way things were by simply employing a series of places (*loci*) as well as things that would become the object-target of the first kind of artificial memory. Calvino has followed the line of procedure of the classical art of memory invented by Simonides of Ceos by systematizing Marco Polo and Kublai Kan's artificial remembering.

Yet, this possibility has also to relate to the second kind of artificial memory, "the memory of words," the one discussed by Cicero in *De inventione*<sup>14</sup> which is bound to remain neglected, because once the images are fixed and find a form in words they erase themselves. Polo declares: "Memory's images, once they are fixed in words, are erased [...]. Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little," (p. 87: "Le immagini della memoria, una volta fissate con le parole, si cancellano [...]. Forse Venezia ho paura di perderla tutta in una volta, se ne parlo. O forse, parlando d'altre città, l'ho già perduta a poco a poco," p. 94). In "Visibility" (p. 83), Calvino distinguishes two types of imaginative process: "the one that starts with the words and arrives at the visual image, and the one that starts with the visual image and arrives at its verbal expression" (p. 83: "quello che parte dalla parola e arriva all'immagine visiva e quello che parte dall'immagine visiva e arriva all'espressione verbale," p. 83).

Ranking himself in the second type, Calvino states: "there was always an image at the source of all my stories" ("Visibility," p. 88: "all'origine d'ogni mio racconto c'era un'immagine visuale," p. 88). Calvino, in fact, adds that in the end it was writing that guided the story. The original fear of fixing visual images with words could only be fought by writing them, that is by being "the director" of them so as to give them a shape to be "seen." The different images of the cities functions as a multiplicity of metaphors through which it seems possible to capture and fix forms. This clarifies what he had explained earlier on: "My discomfort arises from the loss of form that I notice in life, which I try to oppose with the only weapon I can think of — an idea of literature" ("Exactitude," p. 57: "Il mio disagio è per la perdita di forma che constato nella vita, e a cui cerco d'opporre l'unica difesa che riesco a concepire: un'idea della letteratura," p. 59).

The discomfort Calvino refers to is the all-pervasive fading away of any "consistency" in life. *Invisible Cities* gives voice to Calvino's



fear of losing the possibility of keeping forms, their visibility and multiplicity. It is in the chapter of "Lightness" that Calvino also remembers how in *The Metamorphoses* by Ovid, "everything can be transformed into something else and knowledge of the world means dissolving the solidity of the world [...]" (p. 9: "tutto può trasformarsi in nuove forme; anche per Ovidio la conoscenza del mondo è dissoluzione della compattezza del mondo [...]" p. 11). The continuous loss and restoration of forms that unfolds along the "reciting" of each city's peculiarities activates the basic rhythm of alchemical "trans-formation" which indicates the passage from one form into the other and is indicated by the formula of "solve et coagula." This process signifies the transmutation of solid matter into vapor ("solve") consequently congealed into a purified solidity ("coagula"). This alchemical change of forms carries along the hope of reaching the pure status of perfection into a new derived form which obeys the condition of oneness and being.

Calvino's response to the desire for the alchemical result of oneness and being occurs with the production of literature. The territory of the written is to him "the Promised Land in which language becomes what it really ought to be" ("Exactitude," p. 56: "la Terra Promessa in cui il linguaggio diventa quello che veramente dovrebbe essere," p. 58). But no matter how dangerous the "memory of words" might be, the word, and the memory of it, is the first step towards the formation of language which can realize the possibility of understanding what lies beneath the visible. "The word connects the visible trace with the invisible thing, the absent thing, the thing that is desired or feared, like a fragile emergency bridge flung over the abyss" ("Exactitude," p. 77: "La parola collega la traccia visibile alla cosa invisibile, alla cosa assente, alla cosa desiderata o temuta, come un fragile ponte di fortuna gettato sul vuoto," p. 74). In this way, it can be understood why for Calvino "all 'realities' and 'fantasies' can take on form only by means of writing [...]" ("Visibility," p. 99: "tutte le 'realtà' e le 'fantasie' possono prendere forma solo attraverso la scrittura [...]" p. 98). Unlike T. S. Eliot's "waste land," Calvino's "promised land" has still some hope to offer.

In this "land" the dual aspect of matter can, from the status of solidity, what Calvino refers to as "weight," reach that of volatility, Calvino's "lightness." Metaphorically speaking, this procedure justifies the passage from dissolution to perfection, the journey of man, the bodily weight of matter, to the understanding of his own spirit, the

lightness, the subtlety and the volatility of spirit, "the soul imprisoned in the corruptible body" ("Visibility," p. 84: "l'anima incarcerata nel corpo corruttibile," p. 84), as Calvino says when discussing the imaginative process. In "Exactitude," Calvino had already stated: "In my *Invisible Cities*, every concept and value turns out to be double — even exactitude" (p. 72: "Nelle *Città invisibili* ogni concetto e ogni valore si rivela duplice: anche l'esattezza," p. 70). In "Exactitude," two pages later (p. 74), Calvino states that his writing had always been confronted with two different paths corresponding to two different kinds of knowledge that remain, rightly, without a truth as an answer.

[...] My writing has always found itself facing two different paths that correspond to two different types of knowledge. One path goes to the mental space of bodiless rationality, where one may trace lines that converge, projections, abstract forms, vectors of force. The other path goes through a space crammed with objects and attempts to create a verbal equivalent of that space by filling the page with words, involving a most careful, painstaking effort to adapt what is written to what is not written, to the sum of what is sayable and not sayable. These are two different drives towards exactitude that will never attain complete fulfillment [...] (pp. 74-75).

[...] Sempre la mia scrittura si è trovata di fronte due strade divergenti che corrispondono a due diversi tipi di conoscenza: una che si muove nello spazio mentale d'una razionalità scorporata, dove si possono tracciare linee che congiungono punti, proiezioni, forme astratte, vettori di forze; l'altra che si muove in uno spazio gremito d'oggetti e cerca di creare un equivalente verbale di quello spazio riempiendo la pagina di parole, con uno sforzo di adeguamento minuzioso dello scritto al non scritto, alla totalità del dicibile al non dicibile. Sono due diverse pulsioni verso l'esattezza che non arriveranno mai alla soddisfazione assoluta [...] (p. 72).

Aware of the two different kinds of knowledge as mental spaces, Calvino recognizes the fact that he has moved in and out of them both since his first novel, *The Path to the Nest of Spiders* (1947). The book already contained the indications of a concern that has never ceased to exist for him. A "devotion" as Heidegger would say; a constant disposition to listen to whatever speaks to us in every thoughtful meditation.

This concern about the duality of things and of matter was so

dramatically important as to be detected in the writings of others as well. During his discussion of "Lightness" Calvino remembers Lucretius, for whom the certainty of the physical reality of the world can become "the poetry of the invisible, of infinite unexpected possibilities — even the poetry of nothingness — issues from a poet who had no doubts whatever about the physical reality of the world" (p. 9: "La poesia dell'invisibile, la poesia delle infinite potenzialità imprevedibili, così come la poesia del nulla nascono da un poeta che non ha dubbi sulla fisicità del mondo," p. 10). The "poetry of the invisible" propelled by "the poetry of nothingness" does, in fact, give shape to the whole procedure of the alchemical process of transformation.

What Lucretius calls the "poetry of nothingness" had been one of the crucial concepts of the chemical theatre, and it also concerns Calvino, who feels the need to discuss it further in "Exactitude" (pp. 71-4; 70-2). Nothingness, is in fact, what Kublai Kan "sees" on the chessboard once the king has been checkmated. Then Marco invites him to look closer and to consider what lies beneath the apparent nothingness:

Your chessboard, sire, is inlaid with two woods: ebony and maple. The square on which your enlightened gaze is fixed was cut from the ring of a trunk that grew in a year of drought: you see how its fibers are arranged? Here a barely hinted knot can be made out: a bud tried to burgeon on a premature spring day, but the night's frost forced it to desist [...]. The quantity of things that could be read in a little piece of smooth and empty wood overwhelmed Kublai (pp. 131-2).

La tua scacchiera, sire, è un intarsio di due legni: ebano e acero. Il tassello sul quale si fissa il tuo sguardo illuminato fu tagliato in un strato del tronco che crebbe in un anno di siccità: vedi come si dispongono le fibre? Qui si scorge un nodo appena accennato: una gemma tentò di spuntare in un giorno di primavera precoce, ma la brina della notte l'obbligò a desistere [...]. La quantità di cose che si potevano leggere in un pezzetto di legno liscio e vuoto sommergeva Kublai [...] (pp. 139-40).

In so doing, Marco, the "seer," the Fool, the maker of possibilities, continues his function in the economy of a fiction that never becomes tragedy as it does in *King Lear*, one of the most "chemical" plays by William Shakespeare and of the entire Elizabethan theatre, where the

concept of *nothingness* appears over and over again as the necessary *locus* to be explored by the ritual of performing the experience of existence. It is the Fool who states that King Lear has now been reduced to an "0," to a zero, to nothingness. He says: "thou art an O without a figure. I am better than you art now; I am a fool; thou art nothing."<sup>15</sup> In order to reach awareness, and understand the corruption of his kingdom, Lear had to get to the condition of nothingness. When the condition is reached Lear can "see." Kublai, being already aware, is only required to speculate on this matter and move on from there.

The fear of nothingness or of the fact that, as Lear states: "Nothing can be made out of nothing,"<sup>16</sup> is resolved through the effort of discovering what seems to be nothing, what is "invisible," therefore unknown, but there to be discerned. For Lear the path towards overcoming the corruption of his world crosses through the land of folly, the alchemical death where the old corrupt form is to be lost so as to find the new one. The outcome resolves itself into a definite change that reaches the condition of rebirth of the king himself but sacrifices his offspring. Conversely, Kublai finds himself fixed in the continuous process of having to re-code the metaphysics of Marco's speculations and, as a consequence, his own, in a multiplicity of shapes — the cities. His experience embodies "the example" that has been singled out. The reader is, in fact, immediately informed that: "In the lives of emperors there is a moment which follows pride [...]" (*Invisible Cities*, p. 5: "Nella vita degli imperatori c'è un momento che segue all'orgoglio [...]," p. 13). Regularly, as if struck by an imaginary clock, there comes "a moment", when problems arise and set to motion the quest of the combinatory alchemical process and its unpredictable results.

However, no matter how disappointing and unsatisfactory the outcome might be, the search for the condition of gold, the quest within the realm of the Imaginary, remains the necessary step to come to terms with the world of Reality. The invisible structure of the realm of imagination becomes objectivized in the sequence of stories about improbable cities that Marco is summoned to deliver to Kublai, who functions both as point of arrival and of departure. What comes back to Marco is enriched from the experience of having been shared. The necessary loss of unity, the de-composition of Venice into segmented aspects — here the numerous cities — signifies a loss, "the" alchemical death, since the words that can recall truth are forgotten. We may

remember here again Cicero's remark in *De inventione* that the memory of words requires a stronger effort than that of objects. However, these objects, these parts of the "materia prima-Venice" are randomly recalled without an order; they are forms that have to regain their rightful place. They follow the personae of the fabula and are subject to their choices.

Both Marco and Kublai experience an alchemical kind of death which implies the loss of the corrupt form, the necessary stage previous to the moment of "solve" that guarantees the possibility of transformation into a purified condition of awareness: the rebirth of matter into a purified form. Their telling stories about cities either seen or imagined produces the "consistency" of their mutual awareness. They are not merely the makers of possibilities. They are charged with the difficult task of giving form to the "perfect city," even if this means coping with the hell we experience in our everydayness, either by accepting our condition or by trying to discern its negative and positive values and particularities. This second possibility of visibility seems to be the one suggested by *Invisible Cities*: a reminder not to forget to look for what cannot always be seen; a memo for *Everyman* entering the next millennium.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili* (Torino: Einaudi, 1972). My citations will give the English first from William Weaver, *invisible Cities* (New York and London: Jovanovich, 1974), followed by parentheses with the page number for the English, then the original Italian, followed by its page number.

<sup>2</sup> Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane* (Milano: Garzanti, 1988). My citations will give the English first from Patrick Greagh, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), followed by parentheses with the page number for the English, then the original Italian, followed by its page number.

Carl Gustav Jung, *Collected Works* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), Vol. 12, p. 317.

<sup>4</sup> *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> George Ripley, *The Compound of Alchimy* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1591).

Consulted in UMI: Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1954. (Early English Books, 1475-1640, reel 550), STC, No. 21057.

<sup>6</sup> *The Compound* (B4, 38).

<sup>7</sup> Umberto Eco, "La combinatoria dei possibili e l'incombenza della morte," *Sugli specchi* (Milano: Bompiani, 1985), p. 210.

<sup>8</sup> Teresa De Lauretis, "Semiotic Model, *Invisible Cities*" *Yale Italian Studies* 1, No. 2 (1978), 13-37.

<sup>9</sup> Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> *King Lear* (V, ni, 16).

<sup>11</sup> See A. J. Greimas, *Sémantique structurale* (Paris: Larousse, 1966). English translation by D. McDowell, R. Schleifer and A. Velie, *Structural Semantics* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Was Heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1954). Translation by J. Glenn Gray, *What Is Called Thinking?* (New York, N. Y.: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 140.

<sup>13</sup> Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Cicero, *De inventione* (I, vii, 9): quoted by Yates, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> *King Lear* (I, iv, 188-90).

<sup>16</sup> *King Lear* (I, iv, 131).