Rhetorical Topographies of Post-Earthquake L'Aquila:

Locality, Activism, and Citizenship Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Rhetorical Topographies of Post-Earthquake L'Aquila:

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This dissertation examines citizens' activism in the city of L'Aquila, Italy, after the destructive earthquake of April 6, 2009. A natural catastrophe such as L'aquila earthquake brings up feelings of human powerlessness in front of the destructive fury of nature. It conveys an instant and overwhelming awareness of the fragility and impermanence of everything we normally consider static, durable, and stable -- including human lives, places, buildings, and the experience of every day life. A disaster like a destructive earthquake can, in just a few seconds of terror, shatter the sense of security that grounds the lives of people and communities. By forcing people and communities to face the unexpected on such a large scale, a destructive event like the L'Aquila earthquake interrupts the flow of everyday life and re-defines the new normal as one characterized by a state of emergency, insecurity, and dependence. The people and communities that happen to inhabit such a context are also forced to re-negotiate the meanings of what surrounds them and adjust their perspectives to the new experience of their everyday lives. Beyond metaphor, the L'Aquila earthquake caused a *mutation*, not only of the material texture of the territory of L'Aquila, but also of the lives and

experiences of those affected by it. The earthquake, in the words of a local resident, changed "the meanings of many things" for the Aquilani, both the personal meanings attributed to life experiences, and the shared social meanings that guide communal life. This dissertation project will investigate the public dimensions of the drastic changes generated by the earthquake that also affected the lives of the Aquilani in very serious and dramatic ways. The mutations that I consider relevant to this project are those concerning the representations of the disaster by the Italian state institutions and the mainstream media. Those representations often collided with the experiences of the local residents, thus creating a deep disconnect between the local public of the Aquilani and the larger Italian public. This disconnect was largely an effect of the politicians', entrepreneurs', and journalists' exploitation of L'Aquila's disaster. The earthquake generated a sort of "semantic void" on the territory of L'Aquila that was often occupied by political narratives that interpreted the post-earthquake plight in ways that did not exactly resonate with the perspectives of the local residents about their own situation. The Aquilani, who were also experiencing that symbolic and material vacuum in their daily lives, were also trying to ascribe new meanings to their situation, but in contrast to more official depictions, the narratives that emerged locally strived to recreate the broken sense of community, not to benefit a specific configuration of political or economic power. The political discourse about post-earthquake L'Aquila has thus generated a series of public misunderstandings, polarized narratives, divergent accounts, and often colliding and confusing perspectives about the recovery and reconstruction of the town.

In order to study citizens' activism and local public discourse, in Chapter One I conceptualize the heuristic of *locality* as a critical tool to study rhetorics of protest and

social resistance. I theorize locality as a critical lens that foregrounds the situated

character of rhetoric, its cultural emplacement, and the specificity of the public modalities

of protest considered in their unique context of enactment. Using locality to study the

rhetoric of social resistance does not simply entail identifying and cataloguing the topics

and issues associated to protest discourse in relation to a specific place. Rather, focusing

on this perspective encourages scholars to look at the different rhetorical possibilities or

opportunities arising in specific contexts, places, or circumstances, and at how those

opportunities are realized through specific modes of publicity within a bounded

geographical locale. Using locality for the rhetorical study of protest and civic

engagement also highlights the connections between public modalities of protest and the

inventional resources available to citizens and activists in a given spatio-cultural context,

and it highlights the inter-relatedness of public discourse, embodied performances, non-

human persuasion, and the ways spaces and places affect local practices of citizenship

engagement. Locality, in conclusion, emerges as a heuristic that allows scholars to map

rhetorical topographies of under-represented narratives in protest rhetoric and civic

engagement.

In Chapter Two, through a series of case studies, I explore how L'Aquila activists

and citizens mobilized to re-appropriate their civic voice, their communal spaces, and

their right to participate in making decisions concerning the reconstruction of their town.

Specifically, I illustrate how the dramatic changes generated by the earthquake shaped

the public modes of protest that the activists employed within their reality of destruction

by analyzing the protest rhetoric of the Aquilani. By analyzing a series of local protests

from a rhetorical perspective, such as for example the "Yes We Camp," "The Last Ladies

March," or "The People of the Wheelbarrows" protests, I explore the ways in which the local modes of citizenship engagement succeeded in affecting the political discourses about the management of the emergency and the future reconstruction of L'Aquila, and over time also positively impacted the social and communal life of the local residents.

In Chapter Three, I perform an extended case study about local citizens' activism and the divergent public discourses related to the trial of the Major Risks Committee (MRC) scientists in L'Aquila. On October 22, 2012, surrounded by journalists and media from all over the world, an Italian Judge read the verdict concluding the controversial trial of the members of the MRC. De Bernardinis, engineer and former vice-president of the Civil Protection Agency, and the six scientists who participated in the MRC meeting in March 31, 2009 were found guilty of multiple-manslaughter and all sentenced to six years in jail by the court in L'Aquila. The jail sentence immediately generated a reaction of outrage in the public sphere and prompted an instant mobilization of and uproar from the international scientific community. The aim of this chapter is to suggest a different reading of the events that took place in L'Aquila, by illustrating the divergent narratives about the MRC meeting produced by the main parties involved in the trial. Such a reading pays closer attention to the local discourse around the trial, and foregrounds the perspective of the Aquilani that has been under-represented in its national and international coverage. Specifically, this chapter explores how the Aquilani's testimonies about the "disastrous reassurances" communicated to the public by the MRC worked rhetorically to persuade the judge, and affected the outcome of the trial. By mapping the narratives that circulated in L'Aquila along side those circulating nationally and internationally in the technical spheres, this case has revealed that it is necessary and

productive to think about citizenship engagement also when looking at technical and political discourse in context. The case of "the L'Aquila Seven," in brief, demonstrates that it is not sufficient to advocate for public inclusion from below in technical discourses: it is also necessary to encourage scientists and experts to think of themselves and of their role as one that is not detached from the communities they serve. In the case of the MRC meeting in L'Aquila, the gap between the information discussed by the scientists and the information received by the local citizens generated dangerous and deadly consequences. In this chapter, I suggest that bridging the communicative gap between scientists and citizens does not only involve recognizing citizens *as* experts. It also involves recognizing experts *as* citizens. Namely, it is necessary to look at the relationship between citizenry and experts from a perspective that emphasizes community, citizenship, and the necessity of continuity and connection of technical and public discourses. This change of perspective can make the experts accountable for the ways in which their assessments get turned into management, policies, or recommendations for action in specific settings.

For my father, Andrea Pietrucci,

who made me realize that things are better seen

when you look at them from multiple perspectives.

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I am in also in debt to the citizens-activists of L'Aquila, for having shared their stories with me and for having done so much for our devastated town. For having kept me sane during the difficult moments of the last few years, I want to thank my friends in L'Aquila and those here in Seattle. A special acknowledgement goes to Simone Pallottillo, for the 24/7 tech support and for his patient assistance in all kinds of trouble-shooting activities. Many thanks also go to my many yoga teachers, who taught me to deal with the uncomfortable and remain relatively calm, and to Seattle's many baristas, for keeping me caffeinated when necessary.

A wave of gratitude goes to Chance Hamro for his unlimited patience in the last few months, and for making this year much easier for me with his loving presence and kindness. I also need to give Chance credit for reminding me of the basic grammar rules of the English language every now and then.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER THREE

AFTERWORD

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER TWO

Verba Volant, Sisma Manet.

- Words Fly Away, the Earthquake Stays -

Solidarity Epicenter Citizens' Committee, 2009.

FOREWORD

Divergent Narratives of the Earthquake Disaster: An Auto-Ethnography of the Experience of the "Seismic Crater"

Ridono di noi,
e ci fanno a pezzi,
ridono di noi,
e ci fanno a pezzi,
Poi cascano i palazzi e ci chiaman pazzi..

Tettaman – "Ridono di noi"[1]
Voci dal Cratere Vol. II

Parlo nel nome di chi non si è salvato,
o chi s'è visto il futuro crollare col muro di lato
il mio soffitto è crepato, il mio profitto è crollato
come la mitti la mitti, so rimasto inculato…
Io non ridevo e non ho dimenticato!
Manifesto, perchè non te lo sei mai chiesto
Che mondo è questo, se non fai testo?
Qual'è il mio posto, se provo disgusto
Non resto nascosto, non mi ci riconosco
Piuttosto mi travesto sado-masonesto,
masochista losco
Per questo manifesto.

Souleloquy – "Manifesto"[2]
Voci dal Cratere, Vol II[3]

They laugh about us,
and they're breaking us into pieces,
They laugh about us,
and they're breaking us into pieces
then buildings collapse, and we're called mad.

Tettaman – "They laugh about us"
Voices from the Crater Vol. II

I speak in the name of those who did not survive,
and of all of us whose future has crumbled along
with the walls of their homes
My ceilings are cracked, my business collapsed
However you want to see it, I have been crushed...
I did not laugh, I did not forget!
I protest, because haven't you asked yourself: what
kind of world is this, if you don't even try to be
heard?
What is my place, when I feel disgust
I do not stay hidden, it's not who I am
I'd rather be a sinister mas-honest
Because of all this, I protest.

Souleloquy – "I protest"
Voices from the Crater Vol. II

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[1] *TettaMan - Ridono Di Noi (2011)*, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ct-BHqIQcg&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

[2] *Asilo Occupato L'Aquila - Voci Dal Cratere 2 - Souleloquy: Manifesto*, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHjvekKOWks&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

[3] The translations from Italian texts throughout this dissertation are all mine.

The L'Aquila Earthquake

A destructive earthquake struck the city of L'Aquila, capital of the Abruzzo Region in central Italy -- and my hometown -- at 3:32 am on April 6, 2009. The consequences throughout the seismic crater[4] include 309 victims, 1600 people wounded, and damages estimated to exceed 10 billion Euros. More than 2 billion euros were spent in 2009 for managing the Abruzzo earthquake aftermath and the almost 70,000 evacuees who were initially left homeless by the main shock. As of today, five years after the catastrophe, the city of L'Aquila is still undergoing reconstruction of its residential neighborhoods, while the restoration of the historical city center, the area most damaged by the seismic event, has only recently begun. The "Report on the Assisted Population"[5] published on the website of the City of L'Aquila estimates that as of today (July 2014) between 16,000 and 20,000 people are still living in temporary, government-subsidized, accommodations.

On April 6, 2009, the news of the destructive earthquake in my hometown hit me hard, despite the 10,000 kilometers that separated me from L'Aquila. I remember the shock that I felt when I first read about it on the Internet and saw the first images of the disaster. I also remember the feeling of agony when I could not get in touch with my family during the first 48 hours that followed the earthquake, and an overall sense of confusion and denial about the news that I was seeing on my computer. Those first few

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[4] "Seismic crater" is an expression that denotes the area affected by a seismic event. Here, it is used to identify the urban area of L'Aquila, where the April 6 earthquake generated damages to things and people. The expression "seismic crater" or simply "crater" is also often used by the residents of L'Aquila, with a more specific connotation to identify the community of people affected by the quake and still residing in the area.

[5] "Comune dell'Aquila," accessed July 16, 2014, http://www.comune.laquila.gov.it/pagina663_popolazione-assistita.html.

days, with all the terrible news that slowly unfolded as the situation became clearer and the coverage more precise, still evoke for me a strange, surreal, and scary mix of emotions. Those days almost felt like an apocalypse to me, even though I was perfectly safe in the comfort of my Seattle apartment and regularly attending my classes at the University of Washington. Those first weeks following the earthquake affected and changed me, and most people in L'Aquila, in a deep and permanent way. A natural catastrophe brings up feelings of human powerlessness in front of the destructive fury of nature. It conveys an instant and overwhelming awareness of the fragility and impermanence of everything that surrounds us, and everything we normally consider static, durable, and stable -- including human lives, places, buildings, and the experience of every day life. A disaster like a destructive earthquake can, in just a few seconds of terror, shatter the sense of security that grounds the lives of people and communities. By forcing people and communities to face the unexpected on such a large scale, a destructive event like the L'Aquila earthquake interrupts the flow of everyday life and re-defines the new normal as one characterized by a state of emergency, insecurity, and dependence. The people and communities that happen to inhabit such a context are also forced to re-negotiate the meanings of what surrounds them and adjust their perspectives to the new experience of their everyday lives.

Beyond metaphor, the L'Aquila earthquake caused a mutation, not only of the material texture of the territory of L'Aquila, but also of the lives and experiences of those affected by it. The earthquake, in the words of a local resident, changed "the meanings of many things" for the Aquilani, both the personal meanings attributed to life experiences, and the shared social meanings that guide communal life. This dissertation project will

not deal with the personal and more intimate dimension of those mutations. Rather, it will investigate the public dimensions of the drastic changes generated by the earthquake that also affected the lives of the Aquilani in very serious and dramatic ways.

The mutations that I consider relevant to this project are those concerning the representations of the disaster by the Italian state institutions and the mainstream media. Those representations often collided with the experiences of the local residents, thus creating a deep disconnect between the local public of the Aquilani and the larger Italian public. This disconnect was largely an effect of the politicians', entrepreneurs', and journalists' exploitation of L'Aquila's disaster. The earthquake generated a sort of "semantic void" on the territory of L'Aquila that was often occupied by political narratives that interpreted the post-earthquake plight in ways that did not exactly resonate with the perspectives of the local residents about their own situation. The Aquilani, who were also experiencing that symbolic and material vacuum in their daily lives, were also trying to ascribe new meanings to their situation, but in contrast to more official depictions, the narratives that emerged locally strived to recreate the broken sense of community, not to benefit a specific configuration of political or economic power. The political discourse about post-earthquake L'Aquila has thus generated a series of public misunderstandings, polarized narratives, divergent accounts, and often colliding and confusing perspectives about the recovery and reconstruction of the town. In the rest of this foreword I will sketch an illustration of some of those colliding narratives before describing my methodological approach to the study of the post-earthquake grassroots activism that arose in post-earthquake L'Aquila, and the analysis of the case studies that I will present in the following chapters.

Divergent Representations of the Seismic Crater

In July 2011, I spent the summer in L'Aquila. My friend Andrea, at the time also an Italian PhD student in an American institution, visited L'Aquila for the first time since 2008. Andrea is from Tuscany, and he had previously visited L'Aquila before the earthquake when we were both preparing for our departures to the United States. As most other Italian citizens, Andrea followed the news about the disastrous quake that hit L'Aquila in April 2009. As my friend, he knew a lot about the post-disaster situation from our conversations. After the earthquake we talked about my family, my house, my friends, my neighborhood, my former University, and all the things that drastically changed in my life and in the lives of all the residents of L'Aquila since April 2009. Andrea, thus, knew a lot about the post-catastrophe emergency: he read about the Aquilani living in tent cities during the controversial construction of the "new-towns" to host the quake evacuees; he followed the coverage of the G8 in L'Aquila during summer 2009 and saw the images of Barak Obama and Silvio Berlusconi standing in front of the rubbles in downtown L'Aquila; and he also saw the Aquilani protesting in L'Aquila and in Rome.

Andrea knew more than most people who were not residents of the seismic crater because I told him a lot about the local perceptions of the politics concerning the recovery of L'Aquila. I told him about the emergence of the citizens' committees, the groups of local activists that mobilized to resist the changes and political maneuvers unfolding in the reorganization of the urban tissue of post-earthquake L'Aquila. I told him about the construction of the expensive new towns scattered throughout the suburbs of L'Aquila that initially substituted for the reconstruction of the original city, the option

for which the Aquilani strongly advocated. I also told him the stories about the heavy

constraints that the Aquilani tolerated while living in the tent cities in the immediate

aftermath of the earthquake, and I clearly explained to him that living in L'Aquila after

the earthquake felt very strange, claustrophobic, and hopeless.

Figure 1 View from the tents. Collemaggio tent city, L'Aquila. 2009.

Figure 2 Inside the tents. Photo taken in L'Aquila, 2009.

However, despite all our conversations, Andrea still seemed puzzled about the evacuees'

motivations for the protests regarding the management of the emergency and the

reconstruction of L'Aquila. Voicing an opinion that I've often heard in the Italian media,

and from many other people, he told me that he had the impression that the protests of the

Aquilani seemed somehow "inappropriate."

The Aquilani had been praised for having been strong, kind, and dignified people

in facing the disaster, but when they started protesting the governmental management of

the disaster their motivations were hardly intelligible to anyone who did not reside in the

area affected by the earthquake. Andrea asked me to explain to him why the Aquilani

resented the government, especially after having been efficiently assisted during the state

of emergency: tent cities were set up immediately after the earthquake, and world leaders

visited L'Aquila during the G8, even promising international help for the reconstruction.

Additionally, the government agreed to suspend the payment of state taxes for the

evacuees and promised to rebuild all the damaged houses of the Aquilani. The L'Aquila

earthquake was all over the news for quite a bit of time, and both the Italian government

and Italy as a nation showed a lot of solidarity in helping the people affected by the

disaster.

Figure 3 Mass Funeral for the Victims of the Earthquake, L'Aquila, 2009.Photo by www.protezionecivile.org.

Andrea obviously understood that something very tragic had happened: many people died, many homes were destroyed, a city center of historical and artistic value almost completely collapsed during the quake, and that ultimately the lives of many people had been affected in a permanent way. Still, he could not fully grasp why many people in L'Aquila were targeting their protests at precisely those who were providing them with the help necessary to get through the catastrophe: the institutions that acted as their "saviors" during the emergency, namely the government and the Civil Protection Agency (CPA). I remember Andrea saying during one of our conversations:

> Obviously it's not Berlusconi's fault this time…Earthquakes happen unfortunately, and a lot has been done to help, right? I mean your family and many others have a place to stay, and soon the reconstruction will start, and eventually everyone will be able to go back their homes! … It will obviously take time for doing something concrete for the historical center, all that rubble that needs to be sorted out and catalogued, all the works of art that they need to try to save; you Aquilani have to be patient... After all there's no magic trick that can bring your city back to what it used to be.

Andrea's light skepticism about the protests mirrored a discourse that circulated in the Italian national mainstream media. For outsiders, the Aquilani's marching in Rome and protesting the government that was assisting them appeared to be unreasonable and ungrateful. And in effect, the wave of news coverage following the earthquake disaster in L'Aquila and of the management of the emergency was characterized by mostly positive representations of the government's assistance of the evacuees, but the media systematically neglected to feature the perspectives of the local residents who were mostly portrayed as passive, voiceless victims rescued by a paternal, benevolent government backed by a nation united in solidarity around the Aquilani.

However, the Aquilani kept protesting to improve their conditions in the post-disaster context, and between 2010 and 2011 they also brought their rallies to Rome, since the protests in L'Aquila were easily ignored and mostly not covered by the mainstream media. Several public authorities, and even the Bishop of L'Aquila Monsignor Molinari, commented on the alleged "ungratefulness" of the Aquilani[6] who protested despite all that had been done at the national level to help them. Silvio Berlusconi, Prime Minister at the time, on occasion of the news regarding the initial investigation for the charges of negligence by the Major Risks Committee (MRC), also made public statements during a convention he was attending at *Federalberghi*. He said that the members of the CPA should perhaps avoid going to L'Aquila because the Aquilani seemed a bit "off," and those with "fragile minds," such as those who perhaps lost a family member during the earthquake, could easily go crazy and do things like shooting at someone from the CPA out of desperation. The Aquilani did not take this comment very well, and in solidarity with the families of the earthquake victims who were mobilizing to ask for an investigation of the human responsibilities associated with the public statements of the MRC in the days before the earthquake, responded to Berlusconi's statements with banners around the destroyed town that read: "The only fragile mind is yours!"[7]

[6]"Aquilani Ingrati, Molinari Divide La Citta - Cronaca - Il Centro," *Il Centro*, accessed March 22, 2013, http://ilcentro.gelocal.it/laquila/cronaca/2010/08/26/news/aquilani-ingrati-molinari-divide-la-citta-1.4643271.

[7]"Gli Aquilani a Berlusconi:," *Il Corriere d'Abruzzo*, accessed March 18, 2013, http://www.ilcorrieredabruzzo.it/laquila/politica-laquila/865-gli-aquilani-a-berlusconi-qlunica-mente-fragile-sei-tuq.html.

Figure 4 The Aquilani to Berlusconi: "The only fragile mind is yours!!" Photo by corriereabruzzo.it

Nevertheless, the portrayals of the Aquilani as "ungrateful" and "a bit off"

became common and were emphasized especially in right wing leaning national media.

What I found puzzling and meaningful in those media portrayals of the situation of the

Aquilani was the continuously widening gap in perception of the post-earthquake

situation between the citizens of L'Aquila and the broader Italian public. Basically, there

seemed to be a deep disconnect between the Aquilani who were living and experiencing

the consequences of the disaster and of its public management, and the broader national

public that was just looking at its representations from outside the seismic crater. That

gap became wider and wider due to the unilateral media portrayal of L'Aquila's recovery

after the earthquake.[8] The L'Aquila citizens' activism started precisely in order to bridge

this gap by attempting to make the reality of the disaster visible to those outside the

seismic crater.

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[8] For detailed references about scholarship and journalists' accounts about the media
    coverage of the earthquake, see Chapter Two.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, the Aquilani citizens organized as a counterpublic striving to represent their reality from within. They did so through many different creative public modes of protest inspired by the situation in which they were living. One example of a creative medium that the activists used to tell their story from their own perspective is that of DIY music recordings. Citizen activists of the "Committee 3e32" (one of the most active groups of activists in L'Aquila) responded to Berlusconi's statement about the Aquilani having "fragile minds" and their general sense of alienation generated by the disaster by writing a collection of songs entitled *Voices from the Seismic Crater Vol II*. Tettaman, a local activist, journalist, and musician (cited in the epigraph) resisted Berlusconi's statements and the emerging corruption scandals linked to the reconstruction that were emerging at the time, singing: "They laugh about us, and they're breaking us into pieces, then buildings collapse, and we're called mad." In this verse, Tettaman responded to Berlusconi's declaration that the Aquilani were "off" and to the news that was emerging in those days about the criminal ring of entrepreneurs involved in a corruption scandal concerning the reconstruction. The criminals had been phone-tapped and recorded saying that they "were smiling in happiness" upon hearing about the earthquake because of the business opportunities that it could offer entrepreneurs with the right political connections. Reconstruction efforts can be lucrative, and these business people were eager to capitalize on the situation. In his song, Tettaman effectively highlighted the paradox that the Aquilani were living in that moment: while a ring of corrupt entrepreneurs and politicians was exploiting destruction for their own interests, the ones who were publicly shamed and accused of being "off" by Berlusconi were the Aquilani themselves, and in particular those who had lost their loved ones on

April 6. Souleloquy's song (also in epigraph) "Manifesto," meaning "I protest," also

explains some of the reasons for protesting by rapping in Aquilano dialect: "I speak in the

name of those who did not survive, and of all of us whose future has crumbled along with

the walls of their homes/ My ceilings are cracked, my business collapsed/ However you

want to see it, I have been crushed/ I did not laugh, I did not forget/ I protest, because

haven't you asked yourself/ what kind of world is this, if you don't even try to be heard?"

Souleloquy's song is interesting not only because it narrates the experience of loss shared

by the Aquilani, but also because it uses the Aquilano dialect, thus foregrounding the

local perspective and specifying that during a dire time of economic crisis, the only hope

to make a change and to "try be heard" for the Aquilani was to "protest." The Aquilani

activists, in short, mobilized to tell their stories, to represent their experience of the

disaster, and to expose the reality that they felt was being misrepresented in the Italian

public sphere. They aimed to foreground their political requests and to demand a more

transparent reconstruction by protesting the corruption scandals that were slowly

emerging and that would fully explode in the ensuing years.

Walking through the Disaster

All of these types of efforts were meant to convince people not familiar with the

local context, like my friend Andrea, that the reality in L'Aquila was quite different from

what had been portrayed in the media. Andrea himself, as an outsider, couldn't

understand the Aquilani and their protests until he experienced their reality first hand. He

arrived to visit L'Aquila from Siena on a warm July afternoon, in 2011, and we went for

a walk in the accessible streets of downtown L'Aquila. At that point, two main streets of

the city center had been re-opened to the public after a massive shoring up of the dangerous cracked buildings in the inaccessible "red zone." Except for two main streets, all the rest of the downtown area was still closed to the public, restricted by the many fences that signified the borders of the red zone.

Figure 5 View of the roofs of downtown L'Aquila, 2009.

During the short drive downtown, Andrea was silent, and he kept looking around with an expression of disbelief on his face. After walking around for a bit, he told me that he had seen many times, on TV and on several newspapers, all those iconic pictures of the destroyed dorms of the University of L'Aquila and of the main square.

Figure 6 Damage to the roof of a church in the main square, downtown L'Aquila 2009.

Figure 7 Piazza Duomo, Main Square of Downtown L'Aquila, 2009.

Figure 8 University of L'Aquila, collapsed dorm, 2009.[9]

Figure 9 University of L'Aquila's dorms, downtown. 2009.

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[9] All the pictures with the red date tag are courtesy of Gabriele Bassini, who took the pictures in downtown L'Aquila while in service of the Italian Fire Department. All other pictures, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

However, he said that seeing them in person still felt like a shock, mostly because seeing those buildings in the context of the general destruction and decay of the town was just "overwhelming and sad," and gave him a better sense of the "magnitude of the disaster." It wasn't just that one dorm, or that one church. He only then realized that the destruction was not limited to the iconic buildings that had been repeatedly shown on television, but rather it pertained to most places and buildings in town.

Figure 10 Piazza della Prefettura, downtown L'Aquila, 2009.

Figure 11 Piazza San Pietro, downtown L'Aquila, 2009.

Figure 12 Residential neighborhood, downtown L'Aquila, 2009

As we walked down the main street, Andrea kept silently looking around, commenting only on the unreal silence and emptiness of the streets.

Figure 13 Piazza Palazzo, Portici, and University of L'Aquila, downtown, 2009.

He told me that he was having quite a hard time matching his memories of those places, which used to be lively and crowded with people, with the dusty and silent succession of empty shored up buildings and scattered rubble among which we were walking during that summer day. Upon arriving in the main Piazza, the silence was broken by loud music coming out of a gelato stand situated close to the big tent for public assemblies that stood in the middle of the empty square. Andrea commented on the music and its echo coming back from the empty broken churches all around, saying that it felt "quite unsettling," and "increased the feeling of unreality" that now characterized that place. We bought gelato and kept walking. In the vicinity of the University of L'Aquila, we found a breach through one of the red zone fences. There seemed to be no army on patrol in that zone and the possibility of being caught seemed unlikely, so we decided to break into the red zone and take a closer look around. We walked in the tiny streets around the University of L'Aquila, looking at the former students' apartments that were completely and terrifyingly destroyed.

Figure 14 University of L'Aquila neighborhood, downtown L'Aquila, 2009.

Figure 15 Collapsed apartments in the UnivAQ neighborhood, 2009.

Andrea was quiet and solemn as I incessantly told him about my many memories of the places that we were visiting. As we arrived in another of the many L'Aquila's squares, Andrea finally broke his silence again, commenting on the smell of the rubble. He told me that L'Aquila "smelled like death," the smell that comes from a mix of dust, cement, empty spaces, rust, and rubbish, a mix that evokes feelings of decay, destruction, and abandonment. I took some pictures and snuck out of the red zone. On the way back to the

small apartment where my mom was temporarily living and working at the time, we

passed by my family's destroyed apartment.

Figure 16 My mom's apartment. Collapsed walls, L'Aquila, 2009.

Figure 17 My neighbor's house, middle story collapsed, L'Aquila, 2009.

We then decided to go to L'Aquila's largest mall, *L'Aquilone*, to buy groceries for the evening. We got stuck in traffic for a while since the mall, being the only place where the Aquilani could go for their needs, was always excessively crowded and the traffic around it was constantly jammed. L'Aquilone was paradoxically the only place left untouched by the earthquake and still functioned fully. Andrea commented on the striking contrast between the emptiness of the city center and the insane amount of cars trying to get to the mall -- "not even that impressive of a mall" -- he ironically specified. Upon returning home, Andrea looked relieved. All of a sudden, after walking in the midst of the rubble and experiencing the everyday reality of the Aquilani, a reality characterized by the forced coexistence with a sense of immanent disaster, he announced to me that he "was finally getting it." He meant to say that he understood for the first time the perspective of the residents of L'Aquila, of those protestors whose motivations he did not fully grasp when only looking at the TV coverage of the recovery of L'Aquila. For the first time, he was realizing that L'Aquila and its surroundings could hardly be described as miraculously recovered, as most mainstream media kept reporting at the time.

Experiencing the reality of L'Aquila helped change Andrea's perspective on the post-earthquake situation and on L'Aquila citizens' activism. Being present, and exploring the emplaced reality of the disaster made a difference for Andrea, and provided him with an experience that he was not able to have by just looking at the highly selective images of L'Aquila circulated in the mainstream media. I often saw similar expressions of confusion and disappointment to that of Andrea on the faces of many of the "disaster tourists" who started visiting L'Aquila in that period. It's hard to say who looked more confused in those days: the Aquilani, who were witnessing bus tours unloading groups of

people equipped with cameras and smartphones and taking pictures of themselves in front of every single cracked house (also blocking traffic and making life even more difficult for the residents, who felt invaded and violated) or the disaster tourists who arrived to check out L'Aquila's "ground zero" (the site of the collapsed dorm of the University of L'Aquila, that killed several students the night of the earthquake) and found instead a wasteland. They also found many distressed and not-so-kind local people who just wanted to be left alone and try to pull their lives back together.

In short, I realized that experiencing the locality, being present, and inhabiting the site of the disaster was useful in order to understand the Aquilani and their different perspective on the recovery and reconstruction of their town. The emergence of the different narratives of the recovery of L'Aquila in the post-disaster period and the related rise of local citizens' activism are significant phenomena for scholars interested in rhetoric and social change because they foreground the connections between:

1. the rhetorical power of the experience of the *locality,* constituted in this case by the material reality of the disaster but also by the ways of living, talking, and dealing with it, in order to make sense of situated public rhetorics of social resistance;

2. the connection between specific *localities* and the public modalities of protest and civic discourse that arise within them.

Furthermore, the being there, to be present *in situ,* enables on to gain a different perspective than the one provided by mainstream media representations. This is an important lesson highlighted by the citizens-activists and their efforts, but also by the many scholars, journalists, and directors who became interested in reporting on post-

earthquake L'Aquila. Alberto Puliafito and Sabina Guzzanti, for instance, went to

L'Aquila in the aftermath of the quake to see things with their own eyes and experience

the vicissitudes of the Aquilani, filming and blogging about their experiences. Both

Puliafito and Guzzanti ended up filming a full documentary about their experiences in

L'Aquila, in which they both allied with the local residents, and acquired an insider's

perspective that they voiced, respectively, in *Comando e Controllo* [10] and in *Draquila*.[11]

These films represented a very different situation than the one of the reports broadcasted

on TV and mainstream media, and they contributed to exposing the fact that, for the

Aquilani, in the words of one evacuee interviewed by Puliafito, "the reality was another

thing."[12]

Exploring the dimension of *locality* is also theoretically significant because it

reveals layers of meaning that are often not accessible to outsiders. By identifying

insiders' and outsiders' perspectives here, I do not seek to reify the rigid boundaries

between an outside and an inside of a public sphere's discourse, or of the related

dominant and resistive discourses. On the contrary, a perspective that looks closely at the

dimensions of locality and emphasizes public modalities[13] of discourse, "aims not only to

foreground the fluidity of discourses and identities across time and space, but also to

recognize how specific contexts of time and space constitute our identities."[14]

Foregrounding locality and its related public modalities, in effect, can show how local

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[10]*Comando E Controllo - Trailer Ufficiale DVD*, 2012,
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rqRylG5DUlU&feature=youtube_gdata_player.
[11]*Draquila: Il Trailer*, 2010,
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_pYa0nW6J0&feature=youtube_gdata_player.
[12]*Comando E Controllo - Trailer Ufficiale DVD*.
[13]Daniel C. Brouwer and Robert Asen, *Public Modalities: Rhetoric, Culture, Media, and the Shape of Public Life* (University of Alabama Press, 2010).
[14]Ibid., 103.

rhetorics of protest that arise and circulate in specific contexts can also communicate

effectively to larger publics of outsiders through creative publicity, and succeed in

creating rhetorical strategies for inclusion and social change. The next chapter of this

dissertation, thus, will describe the heuristic of locality that I will use throughout this

project to analyze protest and civic engagement in post-earthquake L'Aquila.

CHAPTER ONE

Foregrounding Locality in Protest Rhetoric:

Tracing Rhetorical Topographies of Social Resistance

In 1952, Leland Griffin laid the foundations of social movement rhetoric

challenging rhetorical critics to expand their object of inquiry beyond the study of the

rhetorical strategies of individual orators to include the analysis of the rhetoric of

"historical movements."[15] Since then, social movement rhetoric has been concerned with

studying how rhetoric of protest and dissenting discourses can foster social change.

However, in the ensuing decades scholars noticed that the rhetorical modes that facilitate

social change shift depending on their historical, cultural, and social contexts.

Additionally, scholars also observed that those rhetorical modes do not necessarily need

to be unified or organized in order to be effective. In fact, they also found that "treating

the discourses of dissent on a given social issue as a 'movement' dangerously risks

homogenizing a diverse set of voices, viewpoints and volitions under a single label,

motive and purpose."[16]

In realizing these shortcomings of social movement rhetoric, critics have begun to

blur the boundaries between the study of discrete movements and that of public

discourse. At the same time, they have begun to use alternative conceptual vocabularies

to allow for more critical flexibility in the study of resistant rhetorics and strategies of

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[15]Leland M. Griffin, "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 38, no. 2 (April 1952): 185.

[16]Brian L. Ott, "Review Essay: Assessing Rhetorics of Social Resistance," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 3 (August 2011): 335.

protest. Asen and Brouwer, for instance, introduced the study of "counterpublics" and

"public modalities" in rhetorical studies.[17] Other scholars have focused on image-based

movements and resistant bodies,[18] on performativity and corporeality,[19] or on

materiality.[20] In order to better describe the variety in rhetorical studies of social change

in contemporary scholarship, Brian Ott proposed the conceptual umbrella of "rhetorics of

social resistance (RSR)," a notion that includes the multiform variety of approaches and

perspectives that characterize the scholarship concerned with rhetorical practices and

social change: "I define resistance as any discourse, performance, or aesthetic practice,

which through its symbolic and/or material enactment, transgresses, subverts, disrupts,

and/or rebels against the social codes, customs, and/or conventions that – through their

everyday operation – create, sustain, and naturalize the prevailing relations of power in a

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[17] See, Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer, *Counterpublics and the State* (SUNY Press, 2001); Daniel C. Brouwer and Robert Asen, *Public Modalities: Rhetoric, Culture, Media, and the Shape of Public Life* (University of Alabama Press, 2010); Robert Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics," *Communication Theory (10503293)* 10, no. 4 (November 2000): 424; Daniel Brouwer, "Counterpublicity and Corporeality in HIV/AIDS Zines," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 5 (December 2005): 351–71.

[18] See; Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples, "From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the 'Violence' of Seattle," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19, no. 2 (June 2002): 125; Kevin Michael DeLuca, *Image Politics : The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999); Christine Harold and Kevin Michael DeLuca, "Behold the Corpse: Violent Images and the Case of Emmett Till," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 263–86.

[19] See: Christina R. Foust, *Transgression as a Mode of Resistance: Rethinking Social Movement in an Era of Corporate Globalization* (Lexington Books, 2010); Kerry Kathleen Riley, *Everyday Subversion: From Joking to Revolting in the German Democratic Republic* (Michigan State University Press, 2007).

[20] See: Helene A. Shugart and Catherine Egley Waggoner, *Making Camp: Rhetorics of Transgression in U.S. Popular Culture* (University of Alabama Press, 2008); Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, *In the Wake of Violence: Image & Social Reform* (Michigan State University Press, 2008).

particular time and place."[21] In short, throughout the last decade rhetoric and public

discourse scholars have developed new and more flexible conceptual tools and critical

methods to study social change in an increasingly fragmented and interconnected world.

They have also expanded their object of study from discrete social movements to

discursive fields and arenas such as publics and counterpublics, and focused on the

different channels of mediation and the diverse modalities through which social change

occurs.[22]

In his assessment of the state of the study of rhetorics of social resistance, Ott, by

reviewing recent scholarship on resistance and social change, identified five main

heuristics used in rhetorics of social resistance scholarship: materiality, visuality,

corporeality, performativity, and publicity.[23] These five heuristics have contributed to

overcoming the shortcomings of the social movement rhetoric tradition by introducing

new conceptual lenses to analyze rhetorics of social resistance. Nevertheless, these

heuristics are not to be considered an exhaustive set of approaches in the study of

resistant rhetorics and public discourse. In fact, as technology and communication

continue to evolve and change, so will the modalities of social resistance. Therefore, one

task of rhetoric scholars is to continue to observe the evolutions of rhetorics of social

resistance and to map and conceptualize new heuristics that are attuned to the historical,

social, and political context analyzed. This chapter attends to this task by conceptualizing

the heuristic of *locality* and reflecting on how on this dimension shapes the inventional

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[21]Ott, "Review Essay," 335.

[22]Andrea A. Lunsford, Kirt H. Wilson, and Rosa A. Eberly, *The SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies* (SAGE, 2009), 622. See Robert Cox and Christina R. Foust, "Social Movement Rhetoric" for a concise history of the study of Social Movement Rhetoric, 606-27.

[23]Ott, "Review Essay," 344.

resources of the activists and the realization of public protests and modes of citizenship

engagement. By conceptualizing the heuristic of locality, I develop a methodological and

conceptual toolbox for the analysis of the case studies from post-earthquake protests in

L'Aquila that I will consider throughout this dissertation project. More broadly, I also

think about the heuristic of locality as a rhetorical approach to explore modalities of

social resistance in geographically bounded activism that integrates the consideration of

both material and symbolic dimensions of resistive discourses.

My project is grounded on the assumption that rhetoric is a situated activity, and

as such it is shaped by and contributes to the shaping of the contexts of its enactment. The

cultural and historical context, the time and the place, the channels and the modalities of

expression are all factors that need to be taken into account in studying rhetorics of social

resistance. Scholars in the material[24] and spatial[25] turn have talked about this set of

contextual factors in terms of "texturality,"[26] encouraging rhetoricians to attend to the

"textural" context of public discourse in order to better understand democratic practices

in contemporary society. The idea of "texturality" can help rhetoricians grapple with the

tensions among the dimensions of space, matter, mediation, and democratic practices that

constitute the contexts of public discourses of social resistance:

> Mediation (the symbolic, the virtual, the signifier, the copy) is often
> thought to be opposed to the material (the physical, the real, the signified,
> the original). […] Our four terms do not easily align, each seeming to

[24] For more on the material turn see: Biesecker, B. A., & Lucaites, J. L. (2009). *Rhetoric, materiality, & politics*.Peter Lang; Packer, J., & Wiley, S. B. C. (2011).*Communication matters: Materialist approaches to media, mobility and networks*. London: Routledge.

[25] For a special issue about the "spatial turn" in rhetorical studies see:Donovan Conley and Greg Dickinson, "Textural Democracy," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 1 (March 2010): 1–7.

[26] Ibid.

demand priority over the others. Yet we want to insist that it is precisely in the tensions, the incongruities, the very chaos of everyday life, and everyday politics, and everyday spaces that citizenship is (re)enacted, (re)materialized, and (re)mediated.[27]

This conception of situated, "textural" rhetoric calls for a closer examination of the dimensions of spatiality and rhetorical emplacement.[28] Furthermore, thinking about the situated-ness and the "textural" contexts of rhetoric also forces scholars to recognize that in order to explore the rhetorical modalities available in public discourse it is necessary to identify them as embedded in a particular configuration of time, space, history, and medium.

Locality, in particular, emerges as an essential heuristic to better investigate situated strategies of protest and social resistance. Attending to Ott's suggestion to expand and map the heuristics for the study of rhetorics of social resistance, I conceptualize in the next section "locality," and I explain how it will inform my investigation of the case studies from the context of post-earthquake citizens' activism in L'Aquila in the following chapters. The specific situation of material destruction generated by the earthquake of April 6, 2009, the geographically bounded locale in which the protests took place, and the communal experience of the post-earthquake top-down management of the emergency imposed on the citizens of L'Aquila make the context particularly fit for the analysis of rhetorical modalities of protest and their localized rhetorical effects.

The analysis of citizens' activism in L'Aquila will focus on the intersections among public engagement in protest discourse, the deployment of space, place, and

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[27]Ibid., 2.
[28]Ott, "Review Essay," 345.

materiality in local activism, and the *poietic* aspects of public modalities in context. The cases of public protests in L'Aquila included in this project will show how the activists' creative engagement with the local spatio-material situation of disaster generated public awareness of the issues of the post-earthquake plight, re-constituted a sense of community for the Aquilani people, and facilitated political changes in the management of post-disaster reconstruction practices. Citizens' protests in L'Aquila in the aftermath of the earthquake show that paying attention to the locality and the situated public modalities arising within it can help both public discourse scholars to identify creative, successful strategies of social resistance and activists to engage productively with their local realities.

Locality

Resistive rhetorics and social movements' strategies of protest are deeply shaped by the cultural context in which they come to life. The many ways in which citizens protest and participate in civic life are shaped by the time, the place, and the socio-historical and material conditions of their enactment. It is unsurprising to notice that people in different countries, situations, or times use different modalities to engage in public life. Thinking about locality as a critical tool to study rhetorics of protest and social resistance foregrounds the situated character of rhetoric, its cultural emplacement, and the specificity of the public modalities[29] considered in their unique context of enactment. Using locality as a heuristic for the rhetorical study of protest and civic engagement highlights the connections between the modes of protest and the inventional

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[29]Brouwer and Asen, *Public Modalities*.

resources available to citizens and activists in a given spatio-cultural context, and it emphasizes the specificity of the public modalities of engagement arising within determined material, social, and cultural settings.

The concept of locality proposed in this chapter aligns with Greg Dickinson and Donovan Conley's notion of "texturality,"[30] and it aims to "texturalize" the rhetorics of social resistance by broadening the scope of analysis to the network of situated relations that allow for certain modalities of publicity to arise and be articulated in the uniqueness of their locale. Like texturality, locality foregrounds the materiality of public democratic practices, as it acknowledges the rhetoricity of the material and the materiality of rhetoric.[31] The heuristic of locality is a critical lens that expands the focus of analysis exclusively on the textual/symbolic dimension of public modalities of protest and civic engagement, nor does it limit the study of publicity to the embodied/performative manifestations of protest discourse. Although locality stresses the dimensions of rhetorical emplacement and the situated articulations of public modalities, its focus is not exclusive to these dimensions. Locality, in brief, does not solely focus on bodies and performativity, places and spaces, objects and materiality, or language and mediated images. Instead, locality aims to encourage scholars to look at the inter-relatedness of all these dimensions and to consider them as a whole, a network of relations to disentangle in order to better understand how publics and counterpublics act upon their realities

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[30] Conley and Dickinson, "Textural Democracy."

[31] For more on rhetoric and materiality, see: Barbara A. Biesecker and John Louis Lucaites, *Rhetoric, Materiality, & Politics* (Peter Lang, 2009); Jeremy Packer and Stephen B. Crofts Wiley, *Communication Matters: Materialist Approaches to Media, Mobility, and Networks* (Routledge, 2012); Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley, *Rhetorical Bodies* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

through modalities of public discourse that are shaped and in turn contribute to re-shape and bring forth change in the locale in which they circulate.

Locality, by definition, directs scholarly attention to a specific place or to a spatially situated reality enclosed within clear boundaries. Locality derives from the Latin term *locus,* meaning place, both in a literal and conceptual sense, and it is similar to the Greek term *topos.* But *locus* also has figurative meanings that range from condition, situation, circumstance, opportunity, and moment in time.[32] It is precisely this connotation coming from the Latin *locus*, namely the idea of a "conceptual place," which informs the notion of locality proposed here.

The notion of locality as a "conceptual place" defined by a network of relations that encompass material, social, human, cultural, and political constraints is different from the classic idea of the "rhetorical situation" described by Lloyd Bitzer[33] as one constituted by exigence, audience, and constraints that can be modified by human, *kairotic* rhetoric. The network of relations that shape a locality setting cannot be reduced to the three constituent parts of the rhetorical situation: locality exceeds the characterization of Bitzer's objectivist rhetorical situation and does not restrict the possibilities of rhetorical influence to human persuasion only. The notion of locality is also different from Richard Vatz's re-thinking of the rhetorical situation[34] that placed rhetoric as the origin of a situation, as opposed to Bitzer's conceptualization that saw the need of rhetorical intervention arising from an existing situation. A locality approach

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[32]"Zanichelli - Dizionari Online," accessed March 15, 2013, http://dizionarionline.zanichelli.it/dizionariOnline/#castiglioni.

[33]Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 25 (January 1, 1992): 1–14.

[34]Richard E. Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 6, no. 3 (July 1, 1973): 154–61.

considers the dimension of materiality as playing a fundamental and active role in shaping the situated discursive relations arising within it. Materiality in the locality approach does not just refer to an inert constituent of an objective situation that calls for human rhetorical intervention (as in Bitzer's view) or to an equally passive material presence that is only salient and significant insofar as it is included in rhetorical discourse (as in Vatz's view).

Locality represents more than the simple "context" of discourse, the flat, bi-dimensional background of specific rhetorics and practices. I conceptualize locality specifically to render the "textural" dimension in which discourse comes to life. Locality, with its focus on material emplacement, is intended to represent the depth, texture, and, thickness of discursive practices and their interactions within specific localized socio-cultural contexts. If we think about context as a simple background for rhetoric, the idea of locality should instead suggest a multi-dimensional and textural rendering of the network within which public discourse is embedded.

Using locality as a heuristic prompts rhetoric scholars to focus on rhetorics of resistance that arise in specific locales. However, using locality does not just entail identifying and cataloguing the topics and issues associated with protest discourse in relation to a specific place. Rather, focusing on the heuristic of locality encourages scholars to look at the different rhetorical possibilities or opportunities arising in specific places and circumstances and at how those opportunities are realized through specific modes of publicity.

The heuristic of locality also differs from the one of "*place in protest*" proposed by Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook.[35] *Place in protest* encourages scholars to explore how place functions in social movements' discourse, along with other rhetorical performances.[36] Endres and Senda-Cook carefully describe how social movements use both "*place-based arguments*" and *"place-as-rhetoric."* Place-based arguments are those that discursively invoke memories or images associated to a place to support an argument, while *place-as-rhetoric* assumes that the very place in which protest occurs acts rhetorically as a performance, and that it is part of the message of the movement.[37] While looking at the use of place in protest is consistent with approaching the study of rhetorics of resistance through a heuristic of locality, the opposite is not true. A locality approach attends to more than rhetorical emplacement, as it requires tracing the connections among places, embodied performances, mediated messages, and material constraints given in any context for analysis. In this sense, *place in protest* stands in a synecdochic relation to the heuristic of locality: it is consistent with its focus, but it has a narrower scope of analysis.

Finally, the heuristic of locality conceptualized here also differs from the "rhetoric of locality" described by Jesse Stewart and Greg Dickinson[38] as an artificial folding of the local dimension into a global one: "locality offers images of place rooted in time and geography but drawn from globalized images. Even as recent shopping centers and

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[35]Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook, "Location Matters: The Rhetoric of Place in Protest," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 3 (August 2011): 258 (emphasis in original).

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid., 259.

[38]Jessie Stewart and Greg Dickinson, "Enunciating Locality in the Postmodern Suburb: FlatIron Crossing and the Colorado Lifestyle," *Western Journal of Communication* 72, no. 3 (2008): 280–307.

lifestyle centers offer images of place they do so to cover, without directly addressing, the difficult relation between the global and the local."[39] While the rhetoric of locality described by Stewart and Dickinson covers over the historical specificities of the identities and the places that it redefines, the idea of locality that I advance in this chapter is meant to instead highlight the specificities of the relations between place, materiality, discourse, and power that circulate within its (ephemeral) borders.

Analyzing locality, thus, entails more than looking at the rhetorical use of place in protest rhetoric. Furthermore, the scope of locality is not limited to the rhetorical study of social movements insofar as it aims to become a conceptual lens that can be used to deepen the understanding of rhetorics of social resistance and also of the modalities of civic engagement in public discourse more broadly. Adopting the heuristic of locality for the study of rhetorics of social resistance and civic engagement provides a foundation for developing a methodological perspective that examines the rhetorical force of the situated network of relations among places/spaces, bodies, materiality, texts, power, mediated images, and democratic practices.

Locality stresses the focus on the relationality of these dimensions, and it encourages scholars to investigate their specific configurations. Locality, in fact, aims to texturalize the study of rhetorics of social resistance by providing a critical lens to help scholars expand their focus of analysis to the contingency and situated-ness of democratic practices. The rhetorical exploration of the situated network of cultural, spatial, and material relations that characterize a unique locale can produce detailed *rhetorical topographies* of public discourse in context. Adopting the locality perspective shifts the

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[39]Ibid., 280.

attention from the specific aspects of public modalities, such as the use of language, bodily performances, or the interaction with a place, to the contingent relationships among them and to the effects that they have on each other. The shift towards the focus on the relationality of these dimensions can reveal the ways in which public modalities of resistance are deeply influenced by their locality of enactment and can tell us more about the ways in which the locality shapes the inventional processes for engaging in social resistance or civic democratic practices. In fact, the means to articulate social resistance and civic engagement can often be traced back to the situated network of relations in which public modalities arise. The means vary with the contexts and can include raw materials, spatial dynamics, local necessities, cultural characteristics, and any potentiality that can be actualized within a specific locale.

For example, the outbreak of violent riots in India protesting against the culture of impunity in cases of rape and in favor of justice and equality for women is contingent on the gravity of that specific situation, and it is hardly comparable to other modes of protests such as the more domesticated encampments of *Occupy Wall Street* at Zuccotti Park in New York City. The violent anti-austerity rallies in Greece, similarly, are very different from the marches of the NO-TAV protest movement in Northern Italy, and surely the massive protests of the Spanish *Indignados* utilize different ways of conveying their message when compared to public local demonstrations such as the rallies of the "people of the wheelbarrows" in post-earthquake L'Aquila. However, if we look beyond the different modalities and motivations for protesting publicly in all the cases mentioned here, it is also possible to identify one fundamental commonality that pinpoints the necessity to adopt a perspective that emphasizes locality in the study of rhetorics of social

resistance. In every protest action -- rally, demonstration, march, sit in, or vigil -- we can notice the necessity to expose a different narrative, a diverse interpretation or perspective of a reality that often collides with mainstream discourses about politics, economy, and culture. The heuristic of locality is a tool for representing those different narratives that protestors and citizens are voicing, embodying, representing, and mediating in many different ways, and it aims to do so by tracing "rhetorical topographies" that render alternative perspectives and discourses intelligible for both rhetorical critics and the larger publics at stake.

Focusing on locality can thus encourage scholars to develop accounts of the big picture behind specific protest actions, or alternatively, can allow them to zoom in to highlight details and complicated connections that are not easily visible from the outside. Developing the different perspectives and paths that the heuristic of locality can reveal also allows scholars to create topographies of the textural locality in which unique public modalities arise from unique local contexts. Narrowing the focus to the study of the rhetoric of social resistance framed through the notion of locality also helps foreground the consequences of the public modalities considered, making it possible to render a critical judgment on their creative, *poietic* potential for bringing forth social change. The textural and relational dimension that locality highlights is rhetorically meaningful because it brings to light the insiders' perspectives on protest discourse thereby creating possibilities to bring forth public inclusiveness and reveal how the different experiences of realities between the protestors' and the protested views came to life. Reconstructing rhetorical topographies of the locality of public practices is a methodological approach that can foreground under-represented narratives and succeed in highlighting the

contingency of public modes of citizenship engagement, thus helping critics render

critical judgments of their productivity and promoting public dialogue more broadly.

Analyzing Locality: Participant Observation

Analyzing rhetorics of social resistance through a locality perspective can be

challenging for rhetoricians because of the complexity of the relations among the

dimensions that constitute the textural experience of a locality, and because the presence

of the critic is often required in the context of analysis to capture those connections.

Analyzing locality requires critics to go beyond textual analysis and incorporate accounts

of how materiality, spatiality, emplacement, embodied performances, and mediated

artifacts work together rhetorically to create the public modalities of democratic

practices. The locality approach aims to render the uniqueness of the situated rhetorical

experience embedded in any local context, and it maps rhetorical topographies from

within the contexts analyzed in order to understand their texture from an insider's

perspective -- one that accounts for the immediate and situated rhetorical experience of a

locale.

Phaedra Pezzullo, in her analysis of breast cancer activism and toxic tours, argues

that "by definition the discourses of counterpublics (for lack of a better term) are not

represented significantly in mainstream culture owing to their marginalized status and/or

because the perspectives expressed are what Raymond Williams calls 'emergent,'"[40] thus

encouraging rhetorical critics to engage in participant observation for the study of public

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[40]Phaedra C. Pezzullo, "Resisting 'National Breast Cancer Awareness Month': The Rhetoric of Counterpublics and Their Cultural Performances," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 4 (November 2003): 350.

discourse that cannot be understood through textual analysis only. In her case, arguing

that a lot of what happens in protests is often not represented in mainstream culture, and

often not documented for posterity, she encourages scholars to "affirm the importance of

cultural performances unrecognized by mainstream culture and, in the process of

interpretation, offer a record of them."[41] Foregrounding the importance of the ephemeral

experience of protest rhetoric is significant for an approach that looks at the dimension of

locality. Pezzullo's work, in fact, demonstrates how participant observation can be used

to extend and compliment the study of public discourses of protest.[42] In her introduction

to *Toxic Tourism*[43] she explains her rationale for critical fieldwork:

> An invitation to a toxic tour is a request for outsiders to travel in order to
> *be present* and, perhaps more importantly, *to feel present*. More than
> simply "showing up," being present as a mode of advocacy suggests that
> the materiality of the place promises the opportunity to shape perceptions,
> bodies, and lives with respect to the people and places hosting the
> experience. Being "present," like roll call in school, indicates the
> significance of someone literally coexisting with another in a particular
> space and time. […] Through the rhetorical performance of a toxic tour,
> for example, people, places, processes, and things may seem more tangible
> to us and thus, we may be more persuaded to identify with or believe in
> their existence, their significance, and their consequence. Communicating
> a sense of presence, in other words, offers a means for marginalized
> communities to challenge feelings of alienation from the land and each
> other.[44]

As Pezzullo explains in this passage, presence is an important factor for critics interested

in studying situated rhetorics of resistance, especially in contexts affected by dramatic

external constraints, like the toxicity of the land in the toxic tours studied by Pezzullo, or

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[41]Ibid.

[42]Phaedra C. Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice* (University of Alabama Press, 2009); Pezzullo, "Resisting 'National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.'"

[43]Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism*.

[44]Ibid., 10.

in post-disaster contexts such as that of post-earthquake L'Aquila. Participant observation, inhabitation, and the presence of the critic can be crucial in complimenting rhetorical methods of analysis even when studying less dramatic situations insofar as it allows us to better understand the relations among "people, places, processes and things,"[45] thus helping to represent marginalized narratives and foster public inclusion through the critical process.

An approach that pays attention to the locality of protest and civic discourse specifically encourages critics to "be present," in Pezzullo's words, and to engage in practices such as participant observations and auto-ethnography. As I have illustrated in the foreword, by telling the story of my friend Andrea and mentioning the disaster tourists visiting L'Aquila, physical presence can often reveal the connections in the fabric of the scattered experiences of a locale that one can have from an outsider perspective: Andrea had seen the images of the cracked buildings, and he had heard all my stories before visiting L'Aquila. However, he wasn't able to see the "big picture," the close network of relations among the material destruction, the spectacular media portrayals, the citizens' alienation in their post-disaster lives, and citizens' activism as a response to the top-down politics of the reconstruction. His presence in L'Aquila revealed to him that network of relations and close connections, and made it possible for him to have a "topographic" view of post-earthquake L'Aquila and of the Aquilani public discourse. Thus, critics interested in rhetorics of resistance and social change can benefit from an approach that foregrounds locality and relationality in studying public discourse, and

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[45]Ibid., 9.

from complimenting rhetorical analysis with experiential critical modalities grounded in direct physical presence such as participant observation or ethnography.

Being from L'Aquila, and having been closely affected by the earthquake, I will render rhetorical topographies that reconstruct the fabric of post-earthquake L'Aquila and citizens' activism from an insider's perspective. Although I have not lived in L'Aquila consistently in the years after the earthquake, and I did not experience the earthquake in person, I have spent an average of four months per year there, and I have been in close contact with my family, friends, and fellow Aquilani citizens during all the stages of citizens' activism. I have participated in many protests and rallies[46] and I have followed many others from Seattle, while keeping in touch with the people in my hometown. I have talked to the activists, and I have also talked to many Aquilani who decided to not participate in the protests in person. I have explored the destruction in L'Aquila, breaking into the red zone more than once and I have seen my own house half collapsed after the earthquake. I knew people who did not survive the night of April 6, 2009 and I know people whose family members did not survive it. I have followed closely the vicissitudes of the reconstruction and I have been in the temporary accommodations for the quake evacuees. I remember the conversations that I had with my family and friends in the days immediately preceding the earthquake and those we had in the days after the quake.

I have also been following all the trials regarding the human responsibilities concerning the effects of the L'Aquila earthquake that made the news nationally and internationally.[47] My topographies, therefore, will be an account of my experience as a resident of L'Aquila, but one who also had the luxury of experiencing both "realities"

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[46] See Chapter Two for an analysis of the post-earthquake protests.
[47] See Chapter Three for an in-depth study of the trial to the Major Risks Committee.

from two different vantage points: the one of the Aquilani and that of the outsiders. I realize that when I'm in Seattle for long periods of time, for instance, I have a harder time understanding what is happening back home, and if I'm away for too long it becomes increasingly difficult to remember how the experience of everyday life has changed there in the last few years. However, I always return to L'Aquila and going back always refreshes my insider experience of the locality in a way that brings up a feeling very similar to the one that a far-sighted person experiences when she puts glasses on. Everything finally becomes clear and focused again. The topographies that I will trace throughout this project will thus necessarily also reflect my own experiences.

Nevertheless, it is in no way necessary for rhetorical critics interested in adopting a locality approach to *be* insiders in the same way in which I consider myself to be an insider in the case of post-quake L'Aquila. Engaging in participant observations and being physically present in the locales analyzed is in general enough to make a difference in critical reflection. Participant observation and ethnographic work can also contribute in deepening the understanding of the dimension of locality, thus enriching rhetorical analysis through interdisciplinary fieldwork.

More specifically, throughout the four years of development of this research project I engaged in different kinds of rhetorical fieldwork, such as participant observation and collection of oral histories and testimonies through non-structured voluntary interviews with the local activists. Over the course of the last four years I have collected oral histories from a group of roughly 30 activists from different citizens' committees and different demographic groups. The age range of the activists I interviewed spans from 25 to 65 years of age; roughly sixty percent of the interviewees

were male and the rest were female; some of them were professionals (professors, journalists, surgeons, engineers) others were precarious workers or unemployed; finally, the activists described themselves as having different political affiliations, ranging from the extreme left to the conservative right. This group included some of the most engaged local activists, and this is thus not a representative sample of the larger population of evacuees that engaged in post-earthquake activism. All the testimonies cited in this dissertation were voluntarily shared with me, and all interviews/oral histories were collected through in depth, non-structured interviews that lasted approximately one hour each. A few activists were interviewed multiple times during the 4 years of this research. The testimonies collected through this fieldwork will be used to enrich the rhetorical analysis of the case studies that I will present in Chapter Two and Three. In Chapter Three, I included a few sample transcriptions of the oral histories of the relatives of the victims involved in the Major Risks Committee trial, while in Chapter Two I anonymized all the testimonies to respect the privacy of the activists who are withstanding trials and prosecution related to the protest events occurred between 2010-11.

Analyzing Locality: Rhetorical Ethnography

Beyond participant observation, another appropriate methodological approach to investigate rhetoric-in-action that aligns with the locality heuristic is ethnographic fieldwork. Specifically, "rhetorical ethnographies"[48] are particularly useful for

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[48] For more about rhetorical fieldwork see: Robin Patric Clair, "Reflexivity and Rhetorical Ethnography: From Family Farm to Orphanage and Back Again," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 11, no. 2 (April 1, 2011): 117–28; John Ackerman and David Coogan, *The Public Work of Rhetoric : Citizen-Scholars and Civic Engagement* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010); Gerard A. Hauser,

rhetoricians interested in adopting a locality approach to study situated rhetorics of resistance. Candice Rai defines "rhetorical ethnography "and "rhetorical fieldwork" as:

> Qualitative research engaged by those studying a rhetorical phenomenon in a fieldsite over a substantial period of time. Rhetorical field research facilitates an investigation not only into how symbols, language, and discourse order life, but also into the ways that individuals use rhetoric in fleeting everyday instances to get things done. Fieldwork helps us examine the ways that rhetoric manifests from and circulates consequentially within the dynamic places, practices, ideologies, relationships and material conditions of every day life.[49]

According to Rai, rhetorical ethnographies can provide a theory and method for studying "rhetoric in action, that foregrounds the relationship among rhetoric, power, agencies, materialities, ideologies, and contexts."[50] Specifically, rhetorical ethnography as a method represents a particularly appropriate ally of the conceptual heuristic of locality proposed in this chapter. These two methodological tools share a perspective and conception of rhetoric that calls for the integration of "fieldwork" or inhabitation and presence of the rhetorical critic in the context of analysis. Rai describes such conception of rhetoric and justifies the importance of fieldwork in these terms:

1. rhetoric is kairotic, eventful, agonistic, emergent, dynamic, consequential, situational and bound to materiality, thus, can only be fully understood in the contexts and moments of its everyday use where one can observe the dynamic interplay of the various elements of the rhetorical situation, such as materiality, ideologies, social relationships, affective forces, texts, audiences, rhetors, and situations;
2. resources for rhetorical invention and intervention emerge from, circulate within, and guide practices and believes, thus, being

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Vernacular Voices : The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Aaron Hess, "Critical-Rhetorical Ethnography: Rethinking the Place and Process of Rhetoric," *Communication Studies* 62, no. 2 (April 2011): 127–52.

[49] Candice Rai. *Democracy's Lot: Rhetoric, Publics, and the Places of Invention*. (University of Alabama Press, Forthcoming 2015), p. 21.

[50] Ibid.

present in the field facilitates the observation of how and why rhetoric travels and evolves over time, how rhetoric and its resources invent culture, and how people inventively put existing rhetorical structures, genres, topoi, affective forces, salient symbols, objects, and so on to work;

3. Given this complexity of rhetoric, discovering the available means of persuasion, as Aristotle defined rhetorical invention, calls for immersive methodologies and the inhabitation of the sites of rhetorical production where one might study the places of invention.[51]

Rhetorical ethnographies and the heuristic of locality, thus, are two complimentary tools that allow rhetoric scholars to go beyond the focus on the textual/symbolic in rhetorical criticism and towards an approach that can incorporate the study of materiality, affect, non-human rhetorics, and spatial dynamics. Specifically, both locality and rhetorical ethnography aim to foreground the relations between the material and the symbolic, the emplaced dimension and the "inventional resources" embedded within particular contexts and localities.

For the purposes of this project, and more broadly for research that explores situated, specific discourse in context, I advocate for a locality approach integrated with participant observation and rhetorical-ethnography because of their combined potential for producing detailed accounts of experiences, objects, situations, and meanings that are only available through inhabitation and that are only accessible by "being there," being present in the locale analyzed. The unique characteristics of the locality of post-earthquake L'Aquila, for example, such as its affective impact on the locals and visitors, the experience of the disaster, destruction, and death, the local meanings ascribed to particular local practices, the use of the local dialect in many of the protests are all elements that are not easily grasped when looking at that case from afar or from outside

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[51] Ibid.

the borders of the area affected by the earthquake. Rhetorical ethnography, participant observation, presence, inhabitation, being and feeling *in situ* are thus fundamental for this project and for studying emplaced rhetoric of resistance in general. In Rai's words, "the idea that one must inhabit the places of rhetorical production to comprehend rhetoric goes far in explaining the impetus for rhetorical ethnography. In fact, ethnographies are replete with field practices devised to collect contextual data through inhabitation and with genre conventions designed to represent that context once gathered in ethnographic narratives that approximate the experience of inhabitation."[52]

For this dissertation, I did not conduct structured and formal ethnographic interviews. However, I collected a series of oral histories during my trips to L'Aquila, from 2009 to 2014. I gathered a collection of recorded conversations with the activists and the local residents in L'Aquila in order to keep track of the evolving local narratives and preoccupations circulating in Abruzzo. Specifically, I recorded (audio and video), transcribed, and translated several testimonies that the local activists and the relatives of the earthquake victims voluntarily shared with me. I also interviewed local scholars involved in public advocacy during the trials related to the earthquake disaster. Over time, I built a multimedia archive that includes different kinds of texts retrieved in L'Aquila (pamphlets, fliers, banners, pictures, videos, documentaries, movies, books, online testimonies, local news, etc). These materials, which I consider the outcome of my "rhetorical fieldwork" in L'Aquila, have been fundamental for drafting this manuscript, and they are the building blocks of my arguments throughout this dissertation.

Rhetorical ethnography and participant observation represent useful "rhetorical

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[52] Ibid.

field methods"[53] that rhetoricians can use productively "to analyze situations in which meanings depend on places, physical structures, spatial delineations, interactive bodies, and in-the-moment choices."[54] Rai explains the potential of the ethnographic genre for rhetoric scholarship by describing it as a mode of recording "rhetoric doing work in the world that captures the intensely situational and kairotic forces that are generated when symbols interact with the particularities that exist in concrete places and times."[55]

In reflecting on the potential of ethnography for rhetorical research, Rai identifies a series of theoretical touchstones that illustrate the productive reasons for integrating field methods in rhetorical scholarship. These touchstones show the consistency between fieldwork and a locality-based approach to the study of rhetoric. Rai says that rhetorical ethnographies provide methodological tools and theoretical orientations that can allow researchers to:

1. Foreground the relationship among rhetoric, materiality and ideology.
2. Capture the vernacular, multiple and conflicting perspectives and experiences among people, groups, etc. in a fieldsite that may not be available to researchers relying on official discourses, public statements, or other public artifacts already in circulation.
3. Resist static models of the rhetorical situation in favor of studying rhetoric's flux, portability, timeless, force, and consequences in concrete situations.
4. Capitalize on and respect the embodied presence of the researcher, as well as the embodied and other extra-linguistic qualities of persuasion.
5. Study rhetoric and not cultures and people per se.
6. Capture rhetorical forces, not 'facts'.
7. Craft field write-ups that function metaphorically, heuristically, as technê.[56]

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[53]Michael K. Middleton, Samantha Senda-Cook, and Danielle Endres, "Articulating Rhetorical Field Methods: Challenges and Tensions," *Western Journal of Communication* 75, no. 4 (July 2011): 386–406.
[54]Ibid., 388.
[55] Rai, *Democracy's Lot*, p. 24.
[56] Ibid., p. 25-28.

In brief, Rai's conceptualization of rhetorical ethnography provides a detailed justification for the necessity and usefulness of fieldwork practices for the study of situated rhetoric. At the same time, it conceptualizes theoretical orientations and methodological tools that align with and compliment the locality approach that I advocate in the study of protest rhetoric in L'Aquila by aiming to represent "the interplay of forms, contents, and contexts that constitutes rhetoric-in-action."[57]

Analyzing Locality: Ephemerality, Materiality, Relationality

In the previous paragraphs I have elaborated on the reasons to consider physical presence, inhabitation, and participant observation as appropriate methodological choices to enrich critical practice when approaching the study of rhetoric of resistance through the heuristic of locality. Physical presence makes it possible for critics to foreground the ephemeral experience of protest rhetoric in tracing rhetorical topographies. Presence, thus, can reveal the connections among the dimensions that constitute the texture of a locality. However, scholars have argued that not only protest rhetoric is ephemeral, but also "places themselves are ephemeral."[58] Endres and Senda-Cook, theorizing the role of place in protest, specify that places are also fluid and ephemeral, both in their physical aspect and in what they symbolize. Because of this vision of place as ephemeral, they encourage critics to focus on both the material structures (place in protest as material rhetoric), and the symbols interrelated with these structures. Arguing that "a place is a fluid tension between materiality and symbolism"[59] they consider how material structures

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Endres and Senda-Cook, "Location Matters," 263.
[59] Ibid., 262.

are rhetorical, but also how those structures have material consequences: "we are interested in what places in protest do in terms of how they occupy places in new ways, disrupt traffic and bodies, and can have a variety of results beyond the intent of protest organizers."[60] Arguing for the ephemerality of materiality through the concept of place, Endres and Senda-Cook stress the importance of looking at the temporary and fluid characteristics of materiality, especially when looking at situated protest rhetoric:

> For example, although a building may seem to be stable and permanent, graffiti, cracks, weeds and earthquakes can all alter a physical structure. […] This understanding of the fluidity of place is particularly important to the rhetoric of place in protest because the possibility of struggling over and reimagining places is what motivates social movements' attempts to reconstruct places. Places are 'made, maintained and contested' through the rhetorical practices and performances of protesters. Beyond the fluidity of the physical and embodied aspects of a place, the concomitant symbolism of places is continually under challenge.[61]

This ephemerality of the material, illustrated through the conception of place as fluid and in tension between symbolism and materiality, is important because it pinpoints the inter-relatedness of the material and the symbolic. Highlighting the ephemeral relations between materiality and symbols directs critical attention to the ways in which they work together rhetorically, as in the heuristic of *place in protest*, thus providing an example of how rhetorical critics can engage with the heuristic of locality, which specifically encourages scholars to look at the relations of the dimensions that constitute the texture of a particular place. In this sense, shifting the critical focus to the relations within a locality directs the attention away from each single dimension, such as the focus on materiality only, or the exclusive focus on texts, and towards their rhetorical interactions.

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[60]Ibid.
[61]Ibid., 263.

The focus on relationality in the heuristic of locality aims to provide an alternative to approaches that tend to narrow the focus of rhetorical analysis to one dimension, be it textuality, materiality, performativity, and so on. In order to better understand the reasons for advocating for relationality in engaging with the heuristic of locality, I will conclude my overview by briefly illustrating how locality builds on the notion of texturality. Texturality, in effect, provides a way of overcoming the dichotomy between analyzing textuality as opposed to materiality in rhetorical studies, and locality aims at expanding the holistic focus of texturality by proposing an approach that aims to highlight the inter-relatedness of public discourse, practices, things, bodies, and places for looking at protest rhetoric.

Analyzing Locality: Texturality and Materiality

In the last decade, both the currents of the "material turn"[62] and "the spatial turn"[63] in the field of rhetoric and communication have tried to overcome textualist,

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[62]Biesecker and Lucaites, *Rhetoric, Materiality, & Politics*; Packer and Wiley, *Communication Matters*.

[63]Conley and Dickinson, "Textural Democracy"; Donovan Conley, "Grid and Swerve," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 1 (2010): 24–38; Andrew F. Wood, "Two Roads Diverge: Route 66, 'Route 66,' and the Mediation of American Ruin," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 1 (2010): 67–83; Ronald Walter Greene, "Spatial Materialism: Labor, Location, and Transnational Literacy," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 1 (2010): 105–10; Nathan Stormer, "Mediating Biopower and the Case of Prenatal Space," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 1 (2010): 8–23; Conley, "Grid and Swerve"; Joan Faber McAlister, "Domesticating Citizenship: The Kairotopics of America's Post-9/11 Home Makeover," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 1 (2010): 84–104; Ryan H. Blum, "Anxious Latitudes: Heterotopias, Subduction Zones, and the Historico-Spatial Configurations within Dead Man," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 1 (2010): 55–66; Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L Ott, *Places of Public Memory : The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010).

narrative, semiotic, or ideological paradigms and turn toward materiality as a "corrective" to the ontological assumption that considers communication as an essentially ethereal and immaterial phenomenon and over-determined by the logic of representation. The shift towards materiality in the field of communication and rhetorical studies also reflects a broader shift in the humanities and social sciences toward an approach that can be defined "materialist realism." Packard and Wiley[64] have found that rhetoricians and communication scholars who focus on materializing communication have used diverse strategies, and done several theoretical efforts that so far resulted in at least a couple of different perspectives on the meanings of the materiality of communication:

1.   One such strategy has been to think about materiality in the sense of physicality. In this perspective, bodies, spaces, and technologies become the focus, and communication is materialized and situated within a tangible and corporeal context.

2.   Another strategy has been that of considering the materiality of communication itself, "focusing on discourse as inscription in the material strata of sound, optical media, the built environment, and the brain."[65] In this other perspective, scholars draw on post-humanism and medium theory and see discourse itself as a material process.

To summarize, scholars interested in materialist approaches tend to move beyond the exclusive focus on textuality and towards a situated context characterized by physical space, bodily presence, material power relations, and technologies as the ground for their scholarly endeavors. In *Communication M@tters,* Packard and Wiley note: "For these

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[64]Packer and Wiley, *Communication Matters*.
[65]Ibid., 3.

material-rhetorical analyses, 'materiality' is understood as physicality, and a materialist analysis entails the application of rhetorical strategies of interpretation, critique, and invention to the ways in which physical, embodied, and networked spaces exert rhetorical effects."[66]

Furthermore, the call for a "spatial turn" in rhetorical scholarship introduced a perspective that succeeds in integrating both the strategies described above and used by scholars to materialize communication. In "Textural Democracy,"[67] Conley and Dickinson resolve the opposition between textuality and materiality through re-thinking spatiality as the dimension that can dissolve their contrast, thus introducing the idea of "texturality" that encompasses both dimensions: the material and the textual. These scholars argue for a reconsideration of the idea of mediation in order to overcome the materiality/textuality divide in rhetoric and communication studies. In fact, they point out that mediation is usually thought of in terms of textual representations, and therefore scholars usually deal with mediated messages by isolating a text to read and analyze through the various methods of semiotic analysis, rhetorical criticism, or poststructuralist deconstruction. Reading media artifacts like texts, in their perspective, flattens their spatial and material context rendering them a blank page against which the scholars read a text inscribed on it. Thus, rethinking materiality through a spatial lens reframes scholarly perspectives on textuality. Conley and Dickinson argue that "texts infiltrate the fabric of material space while material space invades texts."[68] In brief, scholars should

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[66]Ibid., 13.
[67]Conley and Dickinson, "Textural Democracy."
[68]Ibid., 4.

not be looking exclusively at media artifacts as simple "texts," or at materiality as mere

physicality, rather they should understand both as a whole:

> As our history indicates, the semiotics of democracy are articulated
> spatially, and ingrained historically. The images, words and performances
> that constitute our socio-political relations are fully material, bearing their
> own particular shapes, sizes, weights, volumes, and velocities. They come
> to matter and take on significance through specific configurations of
> space, time, and energy. If the signifiers that give strength to our political
> struggles can be said to "float," they do so not through immaterial clouds
> of representation, but rather as the magma of everyday existence. Social
> spaces, material conditions, and signifying practices make up the texture
> of our political horizons.[69]

The notion of texturality suggests that texts *matter*, in other words they possess a texture

that is constituted within and by their spatial-historical-material context. In addition to the

emphasis on the "spatio-material dimension of democracy's semiotic practices,"[70] the

conception of texturality also allows critical rhetoric scholars to consider the four aspects

of space, materiality, mediation, and democracy as inescapably interwoven in the

processes that advance dynamic political struggles: "If space is not static or ontologically

prior to the possibilities of politics, then the making of space and the performance of

politics unfold through vibrating networks of agency. In short, texturality concerns the

becoming-ness of political life."[71]

In conclusion, if texturality accomplishes the aim of bridging the gap between the

critical focus on texts and that on materiality through the dimension of spatiality, then

what is specifically the aim of locality? In proposing the heuristic of locality, I aim to

push the boundaries of the notion of texturality further, by attending to all the relevant

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[69]Ibid., 2.
[70]Ibid., 4.
[71]Ibid., 5.

contextual network of local factors that are meaningful to understand public discourse in a locality setting. With its focus on relationality, locality represents an approach that aligns with theoretical and methodological orientations such as those of rhetorical ethnography and interdisciplinary rhetorical fieldwork for engaging in focused analysis of public discourse. By restricting its scope to the situated dimensions of specific localities, and at the same time by expanding its focus to the relations among the many factors relevant to understand public discourse in context, locality is a critical lens that allows scholars to map under-represented narratives in protest rhetoric and citizenship engagement. Lastly, the locality approach encourages interdisciplinary modes of inquiry that can bring together textual analysis, rhetorical ethnography, critical rhetoric, and participant observation.

Conclusion: Rhetorical Topographies

Throughout this introductory chapter I often mentioned that the goal of the locality approach is to enable critics to trace *rhetorical topographies* of protest rhetoric and public civic discourse. The term "topography" derives from *topographia,* a combination of the Greek words τόπος (*topos*, "place") and -γραφία (*-graphia*, "writing"). Topography was a genre of writing that described "existing" places, usually opposed to *topothesia*, which referred instead to the description of "imaginary" places. Both terms belong to the *enargia* (from the Greek *enarges*, meaning "visible, palpable, manifest") and *hypotyposis* (from the Greek *hypotypoein*, meaning "to sketch") group of figures of speech aiming to generate lively, vivid descriptions of places (imaginary or real ones), or events, people, conditions, etc. used to create an illusion of reality.

More recently, the term topography assumes a meaning that often refers to the activity of mapping and delineating the features (natural or artificial) of a place, or representing the configuration of those features and their structural relationships on a surface (like, for example, a map). The *Merriam Webster Dictionary* online, for instance, defines topography as:

1.   a: the art or practice of graphic delineation in detail usually on maps or charts of natural and man-made features of a place or region especially in a way to show their relative positions and elevations.
b: topographical surveying.

2.   a**:** the configuration of a surface including its relief and the position of its natural and man-made features.
b**:** the physical or natural features of an object or entity and their structural relationships.

For the purposes of the critical methodology that I am describing in this chapter, I am interested in conceptualizing an idea of "rhetorical topography" that plays on the etymology of this term and encompasses the meaning of "description of a place," and mapping/representing graphically "the features" and "their relationships" of a place. This notion of topography is particularly appropriate to describe the rhetorical work that the heuristic of locality aim to produce, namely a "textural" representation of a locality and of the network of relations that function rhetorically to bring forth social change within it.

A topography, by definition, is a representation, a form of mapping or describing. It is, however, a form of representation that evokes a textural and almost material dimension, because it is traced to represent the shapes, the heights, the depths and the relations of all the elements situated on a given surface, or area of land. The notion of rhetorical topography that I propose here aims to generate a similar outcome. When I use the term "topography" associated to "rhetorical," thus, I want to translate the textural

dimension of a graphic praxis of mapping into the rhetorical critical practice. A rhetorical topography, thus, is a representation that evokes a material, thick, lively, and textural network of relationships. It is, however, still a representation. The paradox that may be ascribed to a conceptualization of rhetorical topographies is one that is often used to critique materiality scholarship: that is, despite its focus on materiality and its efforts to critique and theoretically overcome a logic of representation, it still ends up using representation as the focus and outcome of the critical practice. Rhetorical topographies, however, question the binary between the material and representation, and they do so through critical rhetorical practice by "texturalizing" representation, and mediating materiality. My goal, in short, is to conceptualize an integrated critical approach that allows me to look at materiality, symbolicity, and their relations and interactions within a locality setting.

The notion of rhetorical topography, thus, is intended to translate this critical approach into a concrete rhetorical practice. In the rest of this project, I apply the conceptual, methodological, and theoretical orientations explored in this chapter through critical praxis. In the following two chapters of this dissertation I will approach my analysis of post-earthquake L'Aquila activism through the locality heuristic, and by employing rhetorical fieldwork practices such as participant observation and rhetorical ethnography. Chapter Two, specifically, will explore the rhetorics of resistance in the immediate aftermath of the L'Aquila earthquake, tracing a rhetorical topography of L'Aquila during and after the G8 Summit and reflecting on the productive potential of emplaced public modalities of citizenship engagement. Finally, Chapter Three will

carefully map the local outcomes and polarized discourses about the trial to the Major

Risk Committee in L'Aquila emerged in the aftermath of the earthquake.

CHAPTER TWO

Citizens' Activism in Post-Earthquake L'Aquila:

Locality and Citizenship Engagement in Times of Disaster

The April 6 earthquake wreaked massive destruction on L'Aquila, reducing to rubble much of the historic, economic, and social heart of the city. Downtown L'Aquila was declared a "red zone," meaning it was closed to the public and garrisoned by the Italian army. L'Aquila's citizens experienced significant losses. 309 people died during the night of April 6, most of L'Aquila's 70,000 residents lost their homes, many lost their businesses and jobs, and all the local residents experienced the disintegration of their social life and sense of community. The catastrophe in L'Aquila and the Italian government's top-down management of the emergency through the Civil Protection Agency[72] (CPA) created a difficult situation that led to the rise of cross-partisan "citizens' activism"[73] to demand public participation and the inclusion of the local residents' perspectives in the post-earthquake political discourse. The material, spatial, and political constraints affecting public life and civic engagement for the Aquilani

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[72] Alberto Puliafito and Fulvio Nebbia, *Comando e controllo. L'Aquila. Dalla Protezione Civile alla protezione militare.Con DVD* (Aliberti, 2011).

[73] I will use the term "citizens' activism" in the sense attributed to it by the Aquilani. They used it to describe their status as inhabitants of the town concerned about its future reconstruction, and to indicate anyone involved in the post-earthquake discourse, independently from specific individual political affiliation.

facing life in the post-disaster context generated a unique situation that favored the rise of cross-partisan and grassroots mobilizations.

Post-earthquake activism in L'Aquila highlighted both the problematic governmental discourse about the situation of emergency, and the mainstream media representations of the disaster. By exposing the material destruction of L'Aquila through several protest actions, and by voicing their opinions about the local politics in the aftermath of the quake, the citizen-activists mobilized to disseminate their own perspectives on the post-disaster situation. They contested the media representations of the effective management of the emergency, and also questioned Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's rhetoric of the "miraculous recovery"[74] of L'Aquila.

Berlusconi often used the expression "miracolo Aquilano" to describe the governmental management of the emergency in L'Aquila. The miracle, according to Berlusconi, consisted of the immediate creation of tent cities to host the evacuees and in the parallel construction of new towns in the outskirts to provide a less temporary accommodation for the thousands of people in need of housing after the earthquake. For Berlusconi, the creation of the new towns represented the material realization of the

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[74] For examples about the rhetoric of the "miraculous recovery" of L'Aquila (miracolo Aquilano) see: "Berlusconi Consegna Alloggi a Terremotati 'Ce L'abbiamo Fatta, È Un Miracolo' - Repubblica.it," accessed June 3, 2014, http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2009/09/29/news/berlusconi_consegna_alloggi_a_te rremotati_ce_labbiamo_fatta_e_un_miracolo-1820548/; "Berlusconi: La Ricostruzione Aquilana È Un Miracolo'' - Politica L'Aquila - Abruzzo24ore.tv," accessed June 3, 2014, http://www.abruzzo24ore.tv/news/Berlusconi--La-ricostruzione-e-uin-miracolo--/15925.htm; Franco Grilli, "Berlusconi: 'Ricostruire L'Aquila Con Un Miliardo All'anno,'" accessed June 3, 2014, http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/berlusconi-ricostruire-laquila-miliardo-allanno-924879.html; "Berlusconi: Case all'Aquila, Un Miracolo - Politica - ANSA.it," accessed June 3, 2014, https://www.ansa.it/web/notizie/rubriche/politica/2009/09/29/visualizza_new.html_96 3584437.html.

miracle. At the inauguration of the first group of apartments in Bazzano, a suburb of

L'Aquila, he declared:

> We did it! Considering the Italian laws and the Italian bureaucracy, this is
> a miracle. We will not stop until the last person who lost his house will
> have an elegant and comforting roof over his head. We broke a world
> record here, and we will keep our promise to build a new town every
> week, and to inaugurate 300 new apartments weekly to give to the
> evacuees. Here in L'Aquila we demonstrated that the Italian State is
> present and does not leave anyone behind. This is the nation that we like
> and that we all want, one with a gold medal on its chest.[75]

Local citizens, who continued to live in the tent cities for much longer than they

imagined, saw these kind of official media and political statements as negatively

affecting the future reconstruction by portraying L'Aquila's situation as one already

solved, and miraculously so. This rhetoric of the miraculous recovery started while

people were still in the tents, with a very vague prospect of being transferred to one of the

new towns, and continued throughout the construction of the new neighborhoods, which

delayed the reconstruction of the recoverable buildings of L'Aquila. The constructions of

those new towns also created serious controversies about the squandering of the

reconstruction funds for a plan that the Aquilani strongly opposed, and the sustainability

of the new urban plan that was not integrated with the old town.

Berlusconi's rhetoric of the miraculous recovery, circulating extensively on

national and international media at the time, conveyed the message that the situation in

L'Aquila was not only under control, but already resolved. In some cases, Berlusconi

even suggested that the construction of the new towns was all that was necessary for the

recovery of L'Aquila, and made it appear as if L'Aquila was being rebuilt, while actually

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[75]"Berlusconi Consegna Alloggi a Terremotati 'Ce L'abbiamo Fatta, È Un Miracolo' -
     Repubblica.it."

the old town was closed to the public and neglected in favor of the construction of the new residential neighborhoods in the suburbs, which, as highlighted by the many citizens activists that protested the new towns in that period, would not resolve the long term issues generated by the earthquake, rather, they would create additional problems to a city already devastated.

The mass media coverage of the G8 in L'Aquila during the summer of 2009, the media portrayal of the management of the emergency, the media spectacles carefully organized to be televised during the aftermath of the earthquake (images 4-9), and the widespread governmental rhetoric of the "miraculous recovery" are all examples of the problematic representations of the experience of L'Aquila's citizens in the aftermath of the disaster. In the words of a woman interviewed during summer 2009 in one of the many tent camps in which the evacuees resided for months after the main seismic event, the reality in L'Aquila (images 2 & 3) was "another thing," it was "the complete opposite of what they show on TV."[76]

Figure 1. & 2. Tent cities for the earthquake evacuees in L'Aquila: Summer (right) and Winter 2009 (left).
Photo by www.ilcentro.gelocal.it and www.croceviola.com

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[76]*Yes We Camp #01*, 2011,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxakL6CyKEs&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Those spectacular images of L'Aquila's recovery that the evacuee characterized as "the opposite" of her reality, circulated widely on Italian public and private TV networks. In that period, in effect, Berlusconi and the CPA officials visited L'Aquila countless times, and during each visit there was an occasion for a media event to broadcast on national and private television, such as the personal visits of the Prime Minister (PM) to the evacuees, or his official inaugurations of the new apartments. The images of Berlusconi wearing a security helmet during his visits of the rubble of the red zone, or during his televised and spectacular "inspections" of the progress of the construction sites of the new towns, became in fact iconic for the Italian public.

Figure 3. Silvio Berlusconi in L'Aquila, wearing a security helmet, comforting a L'Aquila resident. Photo by www.corriere.it.
Figure 4. Sabina Guzzanti's spoof of Berlusconi and his helmet, from the documentary "Draquila."[77]

Berlusconi's hat, and his personal involvement in the emergency-management activities conveyed the image of a hands-on, practical, and efficient PM, who used his experience in the field of construction management (before his career as media tycoon and politician, Berlusconi used to be a construction entrepreneur) to help the Aquilani. His many visits of the tent cities, where he was followed by journalists reporting on his acts of solidarity

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[77]"Draquila-L'Italia Che Trema. Il Nuovo Film Di Sabina Guzzanti," accessed May 6, 2014, http://www.draquila-ilfilm.it/.

towards the elderly evacuees and the disadvantaged people of L'Aquila, also conveyed

the idea that Berlusconi, and the Italian State that he represented, were doing their best to

show empathy for the victims and to assure them that everybody would be taken care of

in a benevolent, paternal, and generous way.

Figure 5. Berlusconi visiting the construction sites of the "Progetto C.A.S.E." Photo by www.casa.guidone.it
Figure 6. Berlusconi giving the keys of the first temporary house built in Onna to a family of local evacuees.
Photo by www.politicamentecorretto.com

Figure 7. & 8. Berlusconi, escorting Obama during a visit of downtown L'Aquila's red zone, July 2009. Photos
by www.tg24.sky.it

Citizens Activism and Public Inclusion in the Seismic Crater

L'Aquila's citizens' activism showcases modes of "citizenship engagement"[78] that emerged from, circulated within, and contributed to shape the future of a specific locale. Furthermore, the Aquilani adopted "public modalities"[79] of citizenship that employed the rhetorical opportunities generated by the post-disaster situation. Throughout this project, I use the term "public modalities" in Asen & Brouwer's conceptualization, namely as a metaphor that foregrounds "productive arts of crafting publicity"[80] and allows scholars to focus critical attention on the ways in which citizens engage in public activities.

The inventional processes of the Aquilani protestors, I argue, emerged from their experience of the materiality of destruction of the post-quake context, the affective and traumatic experiences of the evacuees, the power relations experienced during the local state of emergency, and the circulation of media representations that failed to capture the "reality" experienced by the Aquilani after the earthquake. Furthermore, those modalities of citizen engagement employed by the Aquilani, rooted in the local experience of the disaster, not only managed to affect the political discourses about the management of the emergency and the future reconstruction of L'Aquila, but over time also impacted positively the social and communal life of the local residents, as reported in countless public testimonies of the local residents.

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[78]Throughout this essay, I use the expression "citizenship engagement" following Asen's conceptualization of the term. See: Robert Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship.," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 2 (May 2004): 189–211.

[79] See Daniel C. Brouwer and Robert Asen, *Public Modalities: Rhetoric, Culture, Media, and the Shape of Public Life* (University of Alabama Press, 2010).

[80]Ibid.

In the first part of this chapter, I illustrate the post-disaster situation reading a variety of texts that include: the existing literature (scholarly, journalistic, etc.) on post-earthquake activism; news articles from local, national, and international sources; testimonies published online; the oral histories of the Aquilani citizens' activists that I collected between 2009 and 2014; and my own experience as both a citizen of L'Aquila and a communication scholar engaged in participant observation during many of the protests and rallies that I analyze in this chapter. Secondly, I will use the analysis of post-earthquake modes of citizenship engagement to build on Brouwer and Asen's theorization of public modalities to conceptualize "productive" modes of citizenship engagement. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with an analysis of some of the most significant protest actions enacted by L'Aquila citizens' activists, such as the "Yes We Camp" and "Last Ladies" protests, the "People of the Wheelbarrows" movement, and the "Rubbles of Democracy" rally.

Figure 9. Urban Knitting Banner covering up a broken historic building in downtown L'Aquila: "A red zone, wherever it is, it's a national matter. Let's fix it." Photo by Giovanni Giax Mangione.

Collision of Realities

Several journalists[81] and scholars[82] documented the tension between the local

experience of the disaster and the mainstream media coverage of the "miraculous

recovery" touted by Berlusconi through a variety of media events and his numerous

declarations about the local reconstruction. In the national public discourse about

L'Aquila and its catastrophe, mainstream media neglected to portray or deliberately

excluded the material reality of destruction and hardship experienced by L'Aquila's

residents. They favored, instead, the polished version that the governmental authorities

promoted through a series of media spectacles organized to be broadcast on national

television. Those spectacular portrayals of post-earthquake L'Aquila made it difficult for

the Aquilani evacuees to identify their experience and their daily reality of emergency

with the ones shown on national television. The local residents, thus, mobilized to

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[81] See: Manuele Bonaccorsi, Daniele Nalbone, and Angelo Venti, *Cricca economy.
Dall'Aquila alla B2, gli affari del capitalismo dei disastri* (Edizioni Alegre, 2010);
Giuseppe Caporale, *Il buco nero* (Garzanti, 2011); Francesco Erbani, *Il disastro:
L'Aquila dopo il terremoto : le scelte e le colpe* (GLF Editori Laterza, 2010); Puliafito
and Nebbia, *Comando e controllo. L'Aquila. Dalla Protezione Civile alla protezione
militare. Con DVD*.

[82] See: Cinzia Padovani, "Citizens' Communication and the 2009 G8 Summit in
L'Aquila, Italy," in *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 4, 416–39; Manuela
Farinosi and Emiliano Treré, "Challenging Mainstream Media, Documenting Real
Life and Sharing with the Community: An Analysis of the Motivations for Producing
Citizen Journalism in a Post-Disaster City," *Global Media & Communication* 10, no. 1
(April 2014): 73–92; Pamela Pietrucci, "'Poetic' Publics: Agency and Rhetorics of
'netroots' Activism in Post-Earthquake L'Aquila," *The Journal of Community
Informatics* 6, no. 3 (January 14, 2011), http://ci-
journal.net/index.php/ciej/article/view/733; Manuela Farinosi and Emiliano Treré,
"Inside the 'People of the Wheelbarrows': Participation between Online and Offline
Dimension in the Post-Quake Social Movement," *The Journal of Community
Informatics* 6, no. 3 (November 3, 2011), http://ci-
journal.net/index.php/ciej/article/view/761; Manuela Farinosi and Alessandra
Micalizzi, *NetQuake: media digitali e disastri naturali : dieci ricerche empiriche sul
ruolo della rete nel terremoto dell'Aquila* (Milano, Italy: FrancoAngeli, 2013).

express the "local perspective on the disaster,"[83] to pinpoint the "distorted portrayals"[84] circulating in the mainstream media, and to call attention to the "political exploitation of their dramatic experiences."[85]

Within the fields of communication studies and sociology, Manuela Farinosi and Emiliano Treré[86] explored the motivations that drove many ordinary people to produce citizen journalism in the aftermath of the earthquake. They found that the online dimension of post-earthquake activism was largely motivated by the needs to rectify the Italian mainstream media news, to document the "real situation"[87] of the city, and to interact and re-establish connections with the other local residents that had been spatially displaced because of the earthquake. Another media scholar and also citizen of L'Aquila, Cinzia Padovani,[88] described the citizens' reactions to the relocation of the 2009 G8 Summit from La Maddalena (in Sardinia) to L'Aquila. The Summit had been relocated to L'Aquila specifically to promote a show of international solidarity, and allegedly to support the area hit by the earthquake. Padovani studied the three main forms of communication used to protest the G8 event in L'Aquila (interpersonal, online, oppositional to mainstream media) that weaved together to support the citizens' need to unite and demand "less spectacle"[89] and more attention to the reconstruction process.

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[83] A. C. personal communication, 2010. Throughout this chapter I anonymyze all the names of the activists who shared their oral histories with me in the course of the last few years. From now on, I will only indicate in the footnote their initials and the year in which I collected the testimony.

[84] F. P., 2013.

[85] A. C., 2013.

[86] Farinosi and Treré, "Challenging Mainstream Media, Documenting Real Life and Sharing with the Community."

[87] Ibid.

[88] Padovani, "Citizens' Communication and the 2009 G8 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy."

[89] A.C., 2010.

Furthermore, Micalizzi and Farinosi[90] analyzed the role of digital media in extraordinary situations, such as natural catastrophes. Through a series of empirical case studies, they explored the communicative practices on the Aquilani vis-à-vis the sociology of disasters, psychology, and digital media studies. In their case studies, they consistently found that online platforms such as Social Network Sites (SNS) and blogs had a positive impact on the life of the evacuees because they provided a digital space for collective commemoration and for sharing emotions and ideas, which ultimately allowed the Aquilani to build a communal memory, discuss their shared goals for the local reconstruction, and collectively elaborate the earthquake trauma.

Existing studies about post-quake activism in L'Aquila, in brief, reveal two recurring themes: the citizens' need for public inclusion and public visibility in the post-earthquake political discourse, and their need to rectify the representations of the post-disaster situation circulating in the mainstream media. The initial goal of post-quake citizens' activism in L'Aquila was, in fact, to disseminate the local perspective on the disaster by narrating directly the experiences of the evacuees who were trying to re-build their lives in the post-disaster context. The Aquilani activists, in their testimonies, clearly remember that in the period of emergency they quickly realized that it was necessary to "perforate Berlusconi's media spectacle"[91] and to "break the semantic glass"[92] that had descended on the city after the earthquake. In order to do so, they recognized the importance of making their own representations of the local reality visible to national and international audiences, as a counterpoint to the coverage of the earthquake as a "media

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[90]Farinosi and Micalizzi, *NetQuake*.
[91] A. T., 2010.
[92]Padovani, "Citizens' Communication and the 2009 G8 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy," 420.

spectacle of catastrophe"[93] (images 4-9). In effect, the Berlusconi government had been

"able to build a 'media spectacle framework,' behind which the many inflated promises

of the Italian government about the reconstruction process hid the sad reality of a city left

alone once the media attention had disappeared."[94]

Despite the joint efforts of the government and the mainstream media --

notoriously intertwined during the Berlusconi years[95] -- in managing the public portrayal

of L'Aquila's disaster, the "Citizens' Committees"[96] of activists were determined to

create a counter-discourse to illustrate their perspectives and voice their opinions about

the future of their city. During the last decade "citizens' committees"[97] have become a

frequent phenomenon in the Italian political scene. The committees are spontaneous

social organizations, weakly structured, and composed of citizens who meet to discuss

and debate problems that affects a limited area. They are characterized by local identity,

flexible organizational structure, high level of participation, low level of coordination,

and action strategies that favor the protest. As highlighted by sociologist Chiara

Sebastiani, the citizens' committees have "a hybrid character, halfway between interest

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[93]Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Nick Couldry, Andreas Hepp, and Friedrich Krotz, *Media Events in a Global Age* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010).

[94]Farinosi and Treré, "Challenging Mainstream Media, Documenting Real Life and Sharing with the Community," 75.

[95] For more about Silvio berlusconi's conflict of interest and the state of Italian media plularilsm, see: Matthew Hibberd, "Conflicts of Interest and Media Pluralism in Italian Broadcasting," *West European Politics* 30, no. 4 (2007): 881–902.

[96] For more about the constitution of L'Aquila's Citizens' Committees see: Padovani, "Citizens' Communication and the 2009 G8 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy"; ibid.; Farinosi and Treré, "Challenging Mainstream Media, Documenting Real Life and Sharing with the Community."

[97]Chiara Sebastiani, "Comitati Cittadini E Spazi Pubblici Urbani," *Rassegna Italiana Di Sociologia*, no. 1/2001 (2001).

groups and social movements, oscillating from lobbying and participatory demands"[98]

and they are a kind of political action that takes place outside traditional political parties

as an independent "exercise of citizenship."[99] This mode of citizenship engagement was

widely used in L'Aquila, where groups of activists organized different citizens'

committees, each concerned with specific issues or themes for local intervention such as:

the reconstruction problems (Citizens' Assembly), the social integration issues

(Committee 3e32, Epicentro Solidale), or the association of the relatives of the victims

who advocated for an investigation regarding the public messages of the Major Risk

Committee before the earthquake (Committee of the Relatives of the Victims of the

Earthquake).

Some appropriate strategies for regaining public visibility in the post-earthquake

discourse were, for the citizens committees of activists, those aiming at re-appropriating

or re-inventing new spaces for public aggregation (see images 12-13), or those using the

earthquake devastation instrumentally for making statements about the possibilities of

recovery of L'Aquila (images 10-11). In the words of one of the Citizen's Committee

3e32[100] activists:

> In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake we were facing a
> situation…. a moment in which we finally had to face some serious
> choices -- to decide what to do for the future, because everything needed
> to be rebuilt from scratch, and so we had the possibility to re-write the
> meanings of many things.[101]

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[98]Ibid.

[99]Ibid.

[100] The Citizens' Committee 3e32 was, and still is one of the most active groups of
activists in L'Aquila. See their website: "3e32 -," accessed June 20, 2014,
http://www.3e32.org/.

[101]*Casematte - Storie Di (r)esistenza, Di Arianna Vergari, Valentina Traini, Lab.
Conclusivo Del I Anno*, 2014,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVE1IXBnNww&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

With the goal of promoting public inclusion in local politics, the citizens-activists

engaged in a series of cross-partisan, grassroots mobilizations: they occupied abandoned

buildings and transformed them into civic-cultural centers (image 14 & 15); they

occupied the highway that connects Rome to L'Aquila to protest the delays in the

reconstruction and the politics of the emergency management (image 20 & 21); they

collectively broke into the red zone and re-appropriated their public agora (image 16 &

17), where they established a permanent tent for hosting public assemblies to brainstorm,

re-think, and reorganize their civic life (images 12 & 13); they also pushed for

sustainable options in the reconstruction practices, and considered the massive need for

material reconstruction as an "opportunity"[102] to re-imagine L'Aquila as a better, safer,

and more sustainable place to rebuild for future generations.

As we can infer from the many protest activities listed here, and from the review

of the scholarship about post-earthquake activism in L'Aquila, the local-based grassroots

mobilizations were articulated both through online activism and through emplaced and

embodied modes of protest. In many cases, such as in the rallies of the "People of the

Wheelbarrows" (image 16), the movement of Aquilani citizens who occupied L'Aquila's

red zone, wearing overalls and carrying wheelbarrows to sort out the rubbles that were

impeding the recovery of the city center, it is possible to note the interplay of the online

and offline dimension in organizing mobilizations that is peculiar to this context:

> The event is launched on Facebook and on the activists' personal blogs,
> then it is carried out in the squares, where the *scarriolata*
> ("wheelbarrowing" protest) is performed and the meetings organized.
> Then it is reported online, on the anno1.org Internet site, on the Flickr
> photosharing platform, on the You Tube videosharing hub, on Facebook

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[102] A. C., 2012.

again, and on the individual blogs. Online practices on different platforms are intertwined with offline ones in what we previously called the protest cycle.[103]

While it is important to acknowledge the important role of Internet Communication Technologies (ICTs) in post-earthquake activism, it is also important to recognize the fundamental value of the local dimension, where most protests and public gatherings were realized in the local spaces and places through embodied and emplaced performances after coordinating online.

Figure 10. & 11. Yes We Camp & The Last Ladies, 2009 G8 Protests.
Photos by www.blogs.reuters.com and www.ilmessaggero.it

Figure 12."Let's take the city back," (2009), tent for public assemblies. Piazza Duomo, downtown L'Aquila.
Photo by www.globalproject.info.com
Figure 13. "RicostruiamolAQ" (Let's Rebuild L'Aquila) (2012). Urban-knitting on permanent assembly tent.
Photo by www.oranges-and-apples.com

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[103]Farinosi and Treré, "Inside the 'People of the Wheelbarrows,'" 11.

Figure 14. Committee 3e32, during an assembly in the Unicef Park, 2009 (left).
Figure 15. The new 3e32, in the occupied space "CaseMatte" (MadHouses).
Photos by 3e32 (www3e32.org).

Figure 16. & Figure 17. "The people of the wheelbarrows" breaking into the red zone. L'Aquila, 2010. Photos by
www.laquilablog.it

Figure 18. & Figure 19. L'Aquila's evacuees protesting in Rome and clashing with the police. Photos by
www.parliamone.eldy.com and www.abitareroma.it

Figure 20. & Figure 21. L'Aquila Citizens, occupying the A24 Highway that connects Rome to L'Aquila, (June 16, 2010). Photos by 3e32/Mediacrew CaseMatte.

Post-earthquake citizens' activism, however, cannot be fully captured by the analysis of the digital practices of the activists only. Instead we must attend to the interplay of mainstream media, alternative and social media, and embodied/emplaced performances of citizenship engagement. Studying post-earthquake activism by paying attention to the local "modes"[104] of citizenship engagement is useful because it provides a perspective that allows scholars to deepen the understanding of protests and rhetorics of resistance. Looking at these protests as modes of citizenship engagement emphasize the "civic-ness" of unruly activities like rallies and protests[105] that are not commonly associated with the traditional connotation of "civic" engagement -- that evokes, for instance, activities like voting.

More broadly, by exploring the modes of citizenship engagement in the post-disaster locality of L'Aquila, I lay the foundations for developing a conception of public modes of citizenship engagement that foregrounds their *poietic* potential within their

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[104] In this chapter I use the terms 'modes' and 'modalities' interchangeably. See: Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship."

[105] For an exploration of the rhetorical power of unruly bodies in public argumentation see: Kevin Michael DeLuca, "Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, Act Up, and Queer Nation," *Argumentation & Advocacy* 36, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 9-21.

context of enactment. Developing a conception of "productive" modes of engagement

within a local setting can help rhetoric scholars analyze situated rhetorics of resistance,

their impact on related public and political discourse, and their relations to the network of

factors surrounding them. In particular, thinking about productive modes of engagement

throughout a locality approach aims at capturing the emergence of specific public

democratic dynamics *in situ*, and at understanding how they work rhetorically to affect

the social and political discourses within their "places of invention." As Candice Rai

specifies in her conceptualization of the "places of invention":

> When I say that I study democracy-in-action, democratic persuasions,
> democratic rhetoric, or everyday democracies, I signal my interest in how
> (democratic) rhetorical structures (topoi, commonplaces, icons, symbols,
> practices) are evoked in situ, and how such structures emerge from,
> circulate within, and become adhered to broader ideological structures,
> affective valences, materialities, and public subjectivities.[106]

Highlighting the relations between the places, the democratic practices, and the material

conditions of every day life, thus, can help scholars and citizens understand how certain

modes of engagement emerge and circulate within specific locales. Furthermore, a better

understanding of the situated-ness and local-ness of such modes can also highlight the

ways in which they create emplaced consequences and affect productive changes in

context.

A local approach: Modes of Engagement in Times of Disaster

In order to better understand how L'Aquila activists' strategies worked in the

processes of re-appropriating their communal spaces and their right to participate in

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[106] Candice Rai, *Democracy's Lot: Rhetoric, Publics, and the Places of Invention*., p. 20.
Forthcoming, University of Alabama Press, 2015.

making decisions about the reconstruction of their own town, it is necessary to carefully consider the ways in which the dramatic changes caused by the earthquake affected their public modalities. It is also useful to consider how the interaction of the material and rhetorical forces at play in the particular situation of post-earthquake L'Aquila provided the activists with inventional tools that they used to craft creative discursive strategies to cope with their reality of destruction, the political spectacularization of the post-disaster situation, and the vested interests of politicians and businessmen who stood to benefit financially from the reconstruction effort.

Focusing on the citizens' modes of engagement in the aftermath of L'Aquila's destructive earthquake of April 6, specifically, means exploring the practices and performances of public inclusion of the residents of L'Aquila. The Aquilani counterpublic's practices include a range of digital and material actions that citizens developed to promote local public participation in the emergency-management and reconstruction discourses. The performances encompass the varied ways in which the local community performed and articulated their own perspectives and experiences through embodied/emplaced protest and creative engagement with the local reality of destruction.[107]

The material devastation in the aftermath of the L'Aquila earthquake mobilized the residents to protest against a top-down management of the emergency, and at the same time, the residents capitalized on that material devastation in order to offer their perspective on the post-earthquake reconstruction practices. By highlighting the

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[107] For more about counterpublicity and embodied performances of resistance see: Phaedra C. Pezzullo, "Resisting 'national Breast Cancer Awareness Month': The Rhetoric of Counterpublics and Their Cultural Performances," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 4 (2003): 345–65.

productive potential of this dialectic, it is possible to explore the modes through which

the activists creatively used the local experience of the disaster to re-appropriate their

civic voices and their ability to speak "as" and "for" their community. Attending to the

emplaced rhetorical practices and performances of the Aquilani can, in Rai's words,

"capture the intensely situational and kairotic rhetorical forces that are generated when

symbols interact with the particularities that exist in concrete places and times"[108] and

can also highlight how "power is (or social energies are) both manifest, leveraged, and

reproduced in and by rhetoric and how these processes of reproduction are intimately

linked to materiality (material practices, bodily habits, institutional practice, spatial

arrangements, etc."[109]

In the following section I will situate this study within the context of rhetorical

conversations about counterpublicity and discursive citizenship in order to conceptualize

the idea of "productive" modes of engagement in local political practices. Productive

modes of engagement are the modalities that promote creative and effective public

inclusion in local democratic life and that succeed in affecting the local political

discourse thereby bringing forth relevant change in the context of their enactment. The

productivity, or *poiesis* (a Greek term that indicates actions that transform and bring forth

the world) of public modes of engagement, in this specific case, can be traced by

analyzing the local rhetorics and narratives of the Aquilani. For instance, the oral

histories, the several DIY documentaries, the videos and movies, the creative projects, the

websites, the books, the songs, the blogs, the digital archives, the material and artistic

artifacts retrievable around town, the social and political community work, are all

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[108] Candice Rai, *Democracy's Lot*, p. 24.
[109] Ibid.

testimonies that speak to the productive impact of citizenship engagement in post-earthquake L'Aquila.

Locating Productive Modes of Citizenship Engagement

The use of "counterpublic" and "social movement" in relation to L'Aquila activism throughout this chapter is not casual: L'Aquila citizens' activism was not, and it is not as of today, a unified, single, coherent, and coordinated phenomenon. When I use the expression "post-earthquake activism," in effect, I think of it as an umbrella-term that refers to a varied set of voices and groups from the area affected by the earthquake (some of them organized in citizens' committees, others not) that interacted in the context of post-earthquake L'Aquila in a fluid, multimodal way. Some of the voices and groups, such as the "Citizens' Committee 3e32," have been more consistently engaged in the post-disaster public discourse, others have been active more marginally. The degrees of coordination between activists and groups have also shifted over time. Beyond their common and cross-partisan goal of "democratizing from below," there was never a complete consensus and integration of the modes of citizenship engagement among the various voices of the citizens' committees and of the other groups of activists. Rather, post-earthquake activism has been characterized by a degree of fluidity and openness that makes it hard to label the phenomenon unambiguously as a unified "social movement." Arguments could be made to define post-earthquake activism as a movement, or more fluidly as a counterpublic, both synchronically (existing as a movement or existing as a counterpublic) and diachronically (thinking about it as a counterpublic that evolved into a social movement). In this context, however, my goal is not to define, in one way or

another, the nature of post-quake resistance in L'Aquila, rather it is to explore the productive engagement of the activists with the local and national post-earthquake discourse.

While recognizing the shifting nature of citizens' activism in L'Aquila -- for example, the "People of the Wheelbarrows" acted more like an organized movement, while I interpret many of the G8-themed protest actions as episodes of counterpublicity -- I prefer turning the attention to the study of their practices of engagement in the public discourses circulating in the aftermath of the earthquake. Specifically, in this paragraph I draw from public sphere theory in the field of rhetorical studies to conceptualize "productive" modes of engagement, namely those modes that succeed in realizing their social and political creative potential, advancing the changes that they advocate. This concept of productive modalities is informed by the study of post-quake activism, but it has a scope that can go beyond the case studies analyzed in this chapter and can possibly be applied to study rhetorics of protest, citizenship, and activism in general.

Daniel Brouwer and Robert Asen[110] extensively developed Nancy Fraser's theorization[111] of counterpublics from a rhetorical perspective. They focused on the inclusion of marginalized voices in public discourse as a remedy and alternative to the exclusiveness of the bourgeois public sphere. According to Asen, "as a critical term, 'counterpublic' signifies the collectives that emerge in the recognition of various exclusions from wider publics of potential participants, discourse topics, and speaking

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[110]Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer, *Counterpublics and the State* (SUNY Press, 2001); ibid.
[111]Craig J. Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992).

styles and the resolve that builds to overcome these exclusions."[112] Moreover, in Asen's

perspective, counterpublic theory "foregrounds contexts among publics, exclusions in the

discursive practices of publics, and attempts by some publics to overcome these

exclusions."[113] Brouwer and Asen argue: "counterpublics derive their 'counter' status in

significant respects from varying degrees of exclusion from prominent channels of

political discourse and a corresponding lack of political power."[114] Therefore, the critical

concept of the "counterpublic" is presented as a tool for rhetorical scholars to help them

identify marginalized groups and to account for their ways of engaging wider publics and

the state, thus illuminating the different ways in which social actors can engage in

political participation and public discourse.

Maintaining the focus on inclusiveness in public discourse, Asen proposed a

rhetorical conceptualization of citizenship and engagement in his essay "A Discourse

Theory of Citizenship."[115] He started by shifting the scholarly focus from approaches that

sought to define "what" citizenship is, and that saw citizenship as a citizen's attribute or

possession, to an approach that seeks to better understand "how" such citizenship is

enacted by citizens in everyday contemporary democratic practices. Asen's theory

describes citizenship as a mode of public engagement, thus highlighting how citizenship

is a "process" and not a "product" and advancing a new conceptual tool to account for the

fluid, varied, and multiform practices of engagement in a postmodern world, the

"modality" metaphor.

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[112]Robert Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics," *Communication Theory*, no. 4 (November 2000): 438.
[113]Ibid., 426.
[114]Brouwer and Asen, *Public Modalities*, 2.
[115]Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship."

Asen and Brouwer describe the modality metaphor as one that can foreground "productive arts of crafting publicity,"[116] a concept that is complimentary to other scholarly metaphors such as public sphere, public screen,[117] network, or culture, and that avoids defining public subjectivity as an exclusively text-based reality. In this sense, modality represents a "displacement, and not a replacement"[118] of other pre-existing metaphors that illuminate public life. In their introduction to *Public Modalities,* Asen and Brouwer frame modality as a metaphor inspired and informed by the tradition of *technê.* They discuss how this Greek term originally meant "art or craft,"[119] and how over time it expanded in meaning to signify a "process of productive knowledge."[120] By drawing on a characterization that sees technê as a dynamic process of intervention and invention, Asen and Brouwer intend to highlight technê's *"connection to ameliorative social action,"*[121] thus illustrating the continuity between the tradition of technê and their critical concept of modality. In reviving this vision of technê through the modality metaphor, they suggest that public engagement should be thought of and critically analyzed as a mode that is an active and purposeful process enacted by agents intending to bring about social change. The critical discussion of technê also allows Asen and Brouwer to frame the modality metaphor as one that can illuminate how individuals and groups can "craft" their lives through social and transformative processes:

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[116]Brouwer and Asen, *Public Modalities*, 16.
[117]Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples, "From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the 'Violence' of Seattle.," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19, no. 2 (June 2002): 125-151.
[118]Brouwer and Asen, *Public Modalities*, 16.
[119]Ibid., 19.
[120]Ibid.
[121]Ibid.

> Further, technê indicates a social, transformative process. A technê is learned and practiced among others, which reminds us that engagement has an epistemic value: we may learn when we engage others publicly, even in cases of conflict and disagreement. As a productive art, technê transforms the material it uses—as woods serves as material to build a house, words can construct an inspiring vision of the future.[122]

One of Asen's main concerns in his conceptualization of counterpublics is the theorization of the possibilities of including marginalized voices in the public sphere. Seeing citizenship as a dynamic process, and thinking about "modalities" as fluid and contingent ways of enacting one's citizenship, Asen clarifies that the idea of public subjectivity that he wants to advance is one that is meant to be inclusive rather than exclusive, and one that works to affirm rather than negate citizens' engagement in its varied modes of expression:

> Theorizing citizenship as a mode draws on a radical, not an unattainable, view of democracy. […] Democracy asks not for people's unlimited energy and knowledge, but for their creative participation. Moreover, the spirit of democracy manifests itself in its most quotidian enactments.[123]

Furthermore, for Asen, "the power of citizenship engagement arises in important respects from its capacity to refashion social norms and beliefs and to recast nonpolitical activities as political."[124] However, in order for publics and counterpublics to enact their agency in productive modalities that impact their context of enactment, a discourse theory of citizenship needs to recognize that not all modalities of public discourse are necessarily and already political, and that the lack of boundaries of the political realm can be problematic, as Rufo and Atchinson[125] have correctly suggested.

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[122]Ibid., 20.
[123]Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship.," 196.
[124]Ibid., 207.
[125] For a thorough critique of the idea of citizenship in rhetorical studies, and in particular of Asen's discursive theory of citizenship see: Kenneth Rufo and R. Jarrod Atchison,

I agree with their critique about the potential dangers of theorizing citizenship as a default mode of being for the democratic citizen, who seems to end up floating un/intentionally within an unbounded political realm. Thus, my aim here is to contribute to rethinking the boundaries that are necessary for using the discursive theory of citizenship in the study of emplaced rhetorics of social resistance. Therefore, in order to conceptualize modes of engagement that can be "creative" or "productive" in the locality and political contexts in which they arise, it is useful to rethink Asen's theory in a way that -- while avoiding essentializing the fluid concept of modalities -- can suggest ways of understanding those modes in context. Such contribution will facilitate the study of citizenship engagement for scholars interested in rhetorics of social resistance by encouraging us to focus on the ways in which specific modes of engagement work rhetorically to bring forth democratic change within specific localities. One of the many ways to better understand the potential of public modalities is to analyze them relationally. By situating the modes of citizenship in the network of relations of the locality in which the citizens are engaging, and by contextualizing them in the socio-political and material content in which they are enacted, it is possible to observe the ways in which these modalities actually affect public and political discourses at the local level. Productive modalities of citizenship engagement, thereby, are those modes of citizenship that creatively, productively engage with their locality and also manage to have a socio-political impact on the issues that they protest, or on the discourse about those issues, or on the people affected by the issues at stake.

"From Circus to Fasces: The Disciplinary Politics of Citizen and Citizenship," *Review of Communication* 11, no. 3 (Luglio 2011): 193–215.

Camping, Wheelbarrowing, and the Debris of Italian Democracy

Two days after the earthquake, as firefighters dug the bodies of missing people

out of the rubble and the death toll was rising every hour, Silvio Berlusconi told the

survivors of the earthquake to lift their spirits and think about the accommodation in the

tent cities as a "weekend of camping."[126] Unsurprisingly, this statement did not resonate

well with the thousands of people who were forced out of their wrecked homes and were

mourning the loss of their friends and family. Journalists reported disappointed survivors'

comments, such this one from *The Times* online: "If Berlusconi thinks we are all on a

camping holiday, I invite him to do a swap,"[127] said Vincenzo Breglia, as he stood

outside his tent on a sports field on the outskirts of L'Aquila. "He can come here to sleep

and I will be Prime Minister. Let's see how he likes spending the night in freezing

temperatures with no hot water."[128]

Three months after the beginning of the Aquilani's forced "camping holiday," and

during the organization of the G8 in L'Aquila, 50,403 evacuees were still living in

temporary accommodations. According to the "Report of the Assisted Population"

released by the Structure for the Management of the Emergencies (in Italian S.G.E.) on

June 30, 2009, there were 20,011 people residing in the tent cities, 19,749 in hotels on the

Abruzzo coast, and 9,643 staying in "autonomous accommodations" or as guests of

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[126] See: John Hooper, "Berlusconi: Italy Earthquake Victims Should View Experience as
Camping Weekend," *The Guardian*, April 8, 2009, sec. World news,
http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/apr/08/italy-earthquake-berlusconi; Hanna
Ingber Win, "Berlusconi's Earthquake Gaffe Causes Outrage," *Huffington Post*, May
8, 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/08/berlusconis-earthquake-
ga_n_184587.html.
[127]"Silvio Berlusconi Tells Earthquake Survivors to Head for the Beach - Times Online,"
accessed June 19, 2014, http://archive.today/v1BO3.
[128]Ibid.

relatives.[129] During this period, there was a frenzied atmosphere in L'Aquila because the city was undergoing preparations for the upcoming G8 Summit in the midst of the post-catastrophe emergency. In order to organize a show of international solidarity, Berlusconi decided to move the gathering from La Maddalena to L'Aquila. Allegedly, Berlusconi arranged this change to avoid wasting the millions of Euros allotted for the G8 preparations in La Maddalena by investing them instead in the devastated territory. Berlusconi declared: "It's a big effort. We would like to be dressed up in one's Sunday best, but they will find us in overalls."[130] He also stated that he was sure that the No-Global movements "will not dare to come here and protest heavily; they won't have the heart to hit a land that is already severely devastated by the earthquake."[131] This decision drew conflicting feelings from those in L'Aquila. Many people welcomed the idea because of the visibility and attention that the G8 Summit could attract to L'Aquila's catastrophic situation. However, others considered Berlusconi's decision a strategic move to internationally promote the media spectacle of the "miraculous recovery of L'Aquila" that he had already started promoting through national media. According to the critics, the decision also marked a good opportunity for the government to keep G8 protestors under stricter surveillance by holding the G8 in that particular locale. Local and global

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[129] For detailed data about the assisted populace after the earthquake:"Situazione Della Popolazione Post-Sisma - Commissario Delegato per La Ricostruzione in Abruzzo," accessed June 19, 2014, http://www.commissarioperlaricostruzione.it/Informare/Situazione-della-popolazione-post-sisma.

[130]"L'Aquila, Berlusconi: "Spostato Qui Il G8" Ok Da Obama E Brown," accessed June 19, 2014, http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/laquila-berlusconi-spostato-qui-g8-ok-obama-e-brown.html.

[131]"Il Governo Sposta Il G8 all'Aquila Sì Di Londra E Washington - Esteri - Repubblica.it," accessed June 19, 2014, http://www.repubblica.it/2009/04/sezioni/esteri/g8-vertice/g8-aquila/g8-aquila.html.

activists of the international social justice movement also interpreted this decision as

instrumental to the organization of a successful G8 gathering in Italy, with neutralized

protest forces, that could potentially represent a media spectacle capable deleting the bad

memories associated with the violence during the previous Italian G8 in Genoa, in

2001.[132]

Yes We Camp!

In this controversial context, on July 8, 2009, 50 activists from the network of the

Citizen's Committees (3e32, Epicentro Solidale, etc.), drove to the Roio mountainside

from their "media headquarters" -- a public Internet point in a removable wooden house

inside an occupied UNICEF Park -- determined to enact a peaceful and strategic protest

to connect with national and international publics. As Barack Obama and the other world

leaders landed in L'Aquila, the activists gathered to catch their attention and that of the

thousands of journalists stationed in the G8 media headquarters in L'Aquila. The activists

placed huge letters made of white bed sheets that read "YES WE CAMP!" in a position

on the mountainside that could not be missed by anyone staying at the Guardia di

Finanza, the military compound where the G8 meeting was taking place (image 10 &

22).[133]

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[132] For more about the G8 in Genoa and the related protests: "Genoa Anti Capitalist Protest July 2001," accessed June 19, 2014, http://www.urban75.org/genoa/index.html.

[133] For a video account of the protest see Alberto Puliafito's documentary: *Yes We Camp - The Other G8 - L'Aquila*, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZQ2CFl1nVk&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Figure 22. World leaders working inside the Guardia di Finanza Compound in L'Aquila, during the 2009 G8. Phobo by www.montagnatv.net

Figure 23. and 24. Yes We Camp, on the Roio mountainside, facing the Finanza Compound. Photo by www.skytg24.it

The activists designed the slogan "Yes We Camp!," a parody of Obama's campaign motto, "Yes We Can," to attract international attention to the situation of the Aquilani that the government had carefully kept out of public visibility in those days. For example, as the world leaders were escorted to the Finanza Compound in L'Aquila, the fenced tent cities in which the evacuees were residing at the time had been covered up

with huge panels making it impossible for the passersby to see the camps, thereby

making the Aquilani invisible to the leaders and to anyone arriving in town for the G8.

The Aquilani evacuees and their situation, according to the activists, were being

"erased,"[134] while the luxurious apartments of the world leaders in the Finanza

Compound and the G8 proceedings monopolized media attention.

In this context, a group of photographers, documentary filmmakers, and freelance

reporters went with the activists to the mountainside to film the Aquilani counter-

spectacle while banners, pins, and flyers with the same slogan appeared all over

L'Aquila.[135] In an interview during the protest, Marco S., a 33 year old protestor from the

3e32 citizens committee, described the perspective of the activists on the G8 in L'Aquila

during the period of emergency in these terms:

> The G8 is just another, the latest—governmental media showcase. We are
> exploiting it, like the Italian government is exploiting it. Having the G8
> here is a wrong decision. Our territory is devastated. People here do not
> have homes to go back to. The Aquilani won't even be able to follow this
> G8 event on TV. "Yes We Camp!" is a complaint. We are picking up
> Obama's famous campaign motto "Yes We Can," and we want everyone
> to understand that after three months since the earthquake we are still
> living in tent camps. This has never happened in any previous Italian
> earthquake. We want the big world leaders, and everyone that will see our
> protest, to understand that things here in L'Aquila are not going as well as
> the media portray them on television. We're not all happy. Very few have
> been able to re-start their lives. Most are still in the tent camps and they do
> not know if they have a job. Many already know that they lost their job.
> We do not have any certainty, not even one, to start rebuilding our
> lives.[136]

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[134] A. T., 2009.

[135] See also Padovani, "Citizens' Communication and the 2009 G8 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy."

[136] *Yes We Camp #02*, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPjflMpzRr8&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

In his description, Marco clearly explained how the perspective of the activists was deeply rooted in the particular experience, moment, and place defined by life in post-earthquake L'Aquila. He also specified that the activists' parodic use of Obama's motto on the Roio mountainside was a strategic way to create a connection between the world of the G8 leaders, and that of the local residents. At the same time, with that slogan, the Aquilani also intended to highlight the clash of those two parallel "realities" colliding there and then in the locality of L'Aquila. The activists exploited the mass media coverage of the G8 to provide a different representation of L'Aquila during the G8 meeting, and specifically one that would give visibility to their hardship.

The protestors designed "Yes We Camp!" to hijack Berlusconi's rhetoric of the miraculous recovery of L'Aquila, and to contest the G8 that was happening just one mile away from the closest tent camp, where the evacuees were struggling daily to reorganize and restart their lives. The "Yes We Camp!" counter-spectacle meant to expose the local experience of the Aquilani. It foregrounded both the highly-surveilled, government-subsidized "camping," and the material destruction of their territory against the media and institutional portrayals of the miraculous recovery. Through this protest action, the activists materialized, performed, and made visible their own "reality" and contested the "erasure" of the local residents' experiences during the G8 event and in the period of the post-earthquake emergency.

This particular protest employs a public mode of engagement that exemplifies "rhetoric in-action that foregrounds the relationship among power, agencies, materiality, ideologies, and contexts."[137] The rhetorical engagement with the locality and the

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[137] Candice Rai, *Democracy's Lot*, p. 22.

interaction between symbolic and material forces at play during this protest contributed to subverting the meaning of Obama's motto through the mobilization of the experience of the earthquake. In this case, the use of the English language and the parody of Obama's motto were instrumental to reach the international audience of the G8 Summit. Thinking about the modes of engagement through the locality approach also foregrounds their potential to bring forth social and political change. For example, if we look closer at the "Yes We Camp!" protest and at the discourses and impact that it generated in the public sphere, we can assess its productive political potential in the context of post-earthquake L'Aquila.

On the day of the G8 counter-spectacle, the activists wore T-shirts with the slogan "Forti e Gentili Sì, Fessi No" meaning "Strong and Kind Yes, Dumb No" that grew in popularity after the protest. The activists designed those T-shirts to respond to politicians who had praised the Aquilani people as "strong and kind" and expressing the respect they had for how those people coped with the disaster. The citizens-activists found this statement disingenuous because, while publically praising the Aquilani people, those politicians were treating them unfairly in terms of tax breaks during the emergency. Comparing their fiscal situation (at the time defined as "temporary tax suspension") to the treatment received by the people from Irpinia and Umbria, where other emergencies happened in the past, the Aquilani realized that the government was adopting a very different fiscal approach in managing L'Aquila's emergency. In the cases of Umbria and Irpinia, in effect, the evacuees received a 40% state tax break during the emergency

period, with the remaining 60% to be reimbursed to the state in installments after the end

of the state of emergency and over the course of ten years, with no interests added.[138]

Therefore, in order to demand equal fiscal relief, the activists wanted to convey the idea

that people from L'Aquila might indeed be "strong and kind" -- and very resilient --

surviving in the precarious conditions of camping for months, and under the strict

surveillance of the CPA. However, they wanted to make it clear that they were not

"dumb" enough to be deceived by an unfair fiscal treatment.

Figure 25. and 26. Activists, wearing the "Forti e Gentili" T-Shirt during the G8 protests.
Photo by terraproject.net[139]

[138]"A Roma La Rabbia Dei Terremotati 'Ci Sentiamo Umiliati E Traditi' - Cronaca - Repubblica.it," accessed June 19, 2014, http://www.repubblica.it/2009/05/sezioni/cronaca/sisma-aquila-11/proteste-parlamento/proteste-parlamento.html.
[139]"2009 G8 Summit," accessed June 21, 2014, http://www.terraproject.net/en/collective-works/g8.

Figure 27. and 28. The Aquilani protesting for "fair" fiscal relief in cases of emergency.
Photo by www.corriere.it and http://donneinnero.blogspot.com

The state taxes in L'Aquila were initially only suspended, and a total repayment with the accumulated interests was expected to be reimbursed in installments distributed in 24 months after the end of the state of the emergency. The "Strong & Kind Yes, Dumb No" T-shirts launched during the "Yes We Camp!" demonstration became a must-wear for the Aquilani advocating for the improvement of the local economy and the rebirth of L'Aquila. Since the "Yes We Camp!" protest, the taxation issue became one of the topics discussed consistently during the citizens' assemblies, and one of the catalysts for some of the other major protest rallies organized by the Aquilani in the next couple of years, such as the rallies in Rome in July 2010 and the occupation of the L'Aquila-Roma highway.

Figure 29. Occupying the A24 Highway that connects L'Aquila to Rome.
Photo by www.shoot4change.net.

Overall, the "Yes We Camp!" counter-spectacle was considered successful by the activists, as news reports covered it at a national as well at an international level. By early evening, even *The New York Times* reported the protest and interviewed one of the activists.[140] As the Aquilani citizen-activists constituted themselves as an active counterpublic, the first period of mobilizations was characterized by spectacular modalities of protest that sought to attract attention and public visibility after a period of denied citizenship. The activists recognized the media screens "as the contemporary shape of the public sphere, and the image event designed for mass media dissemination as an important contemporary form of citizen participation."[141] They endeavored to exploit the mainstream media in order to re-appropriate their citizenship, as they lucidly state in the interviews discussing the "Yes We Camp!" provocation. They managed to make strategic use of the mass media coverage of the G8, and they also realized that they could disseminate those images themselves, via alternative media outlets. In fact, they started filming and photographing all of their activities to distribute via alternative and social media, on Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and via an online thematic news channel (l'aquila99TV.it). This specific protest action and its dissemination in the local and national public screens mobilized a much larger base of citizens by opening up the conversation about fair taxation and fiscal relief for L'Aquila, the local socio-economical emergency, and the future reconstruction. Ultimately, after two years of protests in L'Aquila and in Rome, the Aquilani succeeded in having the government reconsider the taxation plan.

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[140]Padovani, "Citizens' Communication and the 2009 G8 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy," 431.

[141]DeLuca and Peeples, "From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the 'Violence' of Seattle."

The Berlusconi government approved a new plan that granted the Aquilani the same fiscal treatment that had been applied to previous situations of emergency in Italy, namely a 40% tax break and a delayed reimbursement over the course of a few years. This was a hard-won accomplishment for the Aquilani, and it came after several assemblies, protests, rallies --some even involving state violence against the Aquilani[142] -- interventions, and efforts of the citizens-activists. In brief, the modes of protest enacted by the Aquilani produced a productive political outcome for the local community, which after almost two years of citizenship engagement and intense activism in the post-earthquake situation, managed to accomplish the first concrete results: in this case obtaining a fair fiscal treatment for the period of post-disaster emergency.

Figure 30 Rome rally. Banner reading "Strong, Kind, and Really Pissed off." Photo by Repubblica.it
Figure 31. One of the two Aquilani activists clubbed during the Rome rally. Photo by direttanews.it

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[142]"Terremotati Aquilani, Manifestazione a Roma Fra Sangue E Manganellate | Video Shock," *Direttanews.it*, accessed June 21, 2014, http://www.direttanews.it/2010/07/07/terremotati-aquilani-manifestazione-a-roma-fra-sangue-e-manganellate/.

The Last Ladies March

"Yes We Camp!" was not the only counter-spectacle in the days of the G8. Parallel protests and events were organized to enhance local public visibility and support the No-G8 march that gathered activists from all over the world. The Citizens' Committees, for instance, also organized "The Last Ladies March"[143] (image 32-35) and "L'Aquila Social Forums." "The Last Ladies March" (images 34-37) was the counter-event to the G8 event in which the First Ladies of world leaders were treated to a guided tour of the red zone in downtown L'Aquila (image 32). The First Ladies' tour even included a mechanized earthquake simulator, making L'Aquila's disaster zone something of a tourist attraction, complete with a thrill ride (image 33).

Figures 32. And 33. The First Ladies' tour of the rubbles in downtown L'Aquila & The First Ladies experiencing the L'Aquila earthquake-simulator, situated in the Finanza Compound. Photos by www.protezionecivile.org

The march aimed to highlight the gap between the attention granted by the Italian government to the First Ladies, hosted in anti-seismic residences and escorted in the red zone, and the women of L'Aquila who had lost everything and had been living in tents

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[143] *Yes We Camp and The Last Ladies*, 2009,
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVUub4Ww-LA&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

for months, and were prohibited to enter in their own houses in the red zone. The women activists marched chanting slogans in Italian and in Aquilano dialect such as "Michele, Carla, venite nelle tende! Le donne Abruzzesi vi aspettano in mutande!" meaning: "Michele (Obama), Carla (Sarkozy), come to our tents! The Abruzzo women are waiting for you in their underwear!" Those who felt like doing it, marched in their underwear (images 35-36) to symbolize that L'Aquila citizens had been stripped of everything.

Figure 34., 35., 36., 37. The Last Ladies March. L'Aquila, 2009. Photo by www.corriere.it

Protestors also carried the plastic food trays (image 37) used in the tent camps to distribute the meals to the Aquilani to ironically underscore the difference between the pre-cooked meals of the Aquilani in the tents (the evacuees were even prohibited to cook their own meals, allegedly for safety reasons) and the fine dining offered to the first ladies who were enjoying a special menu cooked by Niko Romito, 3-star-Michelin Chef

and local culinary celebrity. More seriously, the plastic trays of the Last Ladies March were there to signify, in the words of citizen-activist Sara, a 32 year old woman from the 3e32 citizens' committee:

> A plastic tray to symbolize that we do not want to be fed, or 'managed.' We want autonomy, meaning that we would like to finally go back to a real form of housing. There are empty, immediately available unoccupied houses in L'Aquila. This morning we symbolically broke into and occupied one of these houses that have not been damaged by the earthquake. There are alternative solutions to that of keeping us in tent camps for months, deprived of privacy and independence. There are alternatives to the construction of permanent houses in cement, which will devastate our environment, the urban tissue, and the social fabric of our town.[144]

Sara's words echoed a widely shared preoccupation of the Aquilani with the politics of reconstruction that the government adopted in order to resolve the housing emergency in Abruzzo. The Berlusconi government decided to build anti-seismic new towns, called "Progetto C.A.S.E."[145] -- namely "Project Houses" -- in the suburbs of L'Aquila, a series of brand-new and permanent housing complexes to host the evacuees. This decision preoccupied the Aquilani, who advocated instead for a reconstruction of the old town and its city center, and favored instead the assemblage of cheaper, more sustainable, and removable housing options to use temporarily. They opposed the construction of the extremely expensive[146] and invasive new towns, in particular, because they believed that "Project Houses" would cause a "landscape ruin"[147] around L'Aquila, and the creation of

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[144]Ibid.

[145] Also an acronym for "Complessi Antisismici Sostenibili Eco-compatitibili," meaning "Anti-seismic Sustainable and Eco-compatible Complexes."

[146] The CPA statistics assessed that "Project Houses" costed the government an average of 2700 Euros per square meter, an exceptionally high cost for the location and the type of housing realized.

[147]A.C., 2012.

"dorm-neighborhoods"[148] that lacked integration with the urban tissue of the town that the Aquilani hoped to see rebuilt for the future.

The People of the Wheelbarrows

Months after the G8, during winter 2010, the controversial "Progetto C.A.S.E"[149] was completed, and for Berlusconi its materialization signified the ultimate confirmation of "miraculous recovery" of L'Aquila. The daily news on TV covered the materialization of the "miracle" by showing the images of the 19 new-towns built in the suburbs of L'Aquila, including the inside of the furnished apartments and some of the families as they moved in, each welcomed by a bottle of sparkling wine and cake in their new apartments. However, the realization of this project generated serious concerns and discontent among the Aquilani.

The new complexes of temporary accommodations could host only 15,000 people, though this only represented only 1/3 of those in need of homes. As well, according to the local activists, these homes were much more expensive and less environmentally sustainable than alternatives such as wooden removable temporary houses or containers. Moreover, this urbanization of the rural areas around L'Aquila also changed the territory by "ruining the beautiful mountain landscapes of Abruzzo,"[150] and "neglecting to plan the integration of the new towns with the reconstruction of the 'old'

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[148] A.C, S.V., A.T., 2012.

[149]"Dettaglio Dossier | Dipartimento Protezione Civile," accessed June 19, 2014,
    http://www.protezionecivile.gov.it/jcms/it/view_dossier.wp%3Bjsessionid=C5F16321
    ADD939698B27AF215A8869A3?contentId=DOS274.

[150] A. C., 2013.

L'Aquila,"[151] as strongly advocated by Aquilani, and "ignoring the need of new

infrastructure that would make the new towns livable."[152] In addition, the Aquilani

pointed out that, in order to resolve the local emergency a parallel "RE-construction"

(restoration and recovery) of the city's damaged but recoverable buildings, and of the

historic city center was also necessary.

The Aquilani protested peacefully to express these concerns and their perspectives

about the future of the city. Notably, on February 21, 2009, they enacted the symbolic

protest of the "1,000 Keys to re-open the city" (images 38 and 39). In this protest, the

citizens who used to live in downtown L'Aquila gathered around the barriers and fences

that block the red zone to hang the keys of their homes there, to convey the message that

they wanted their city back.[153]
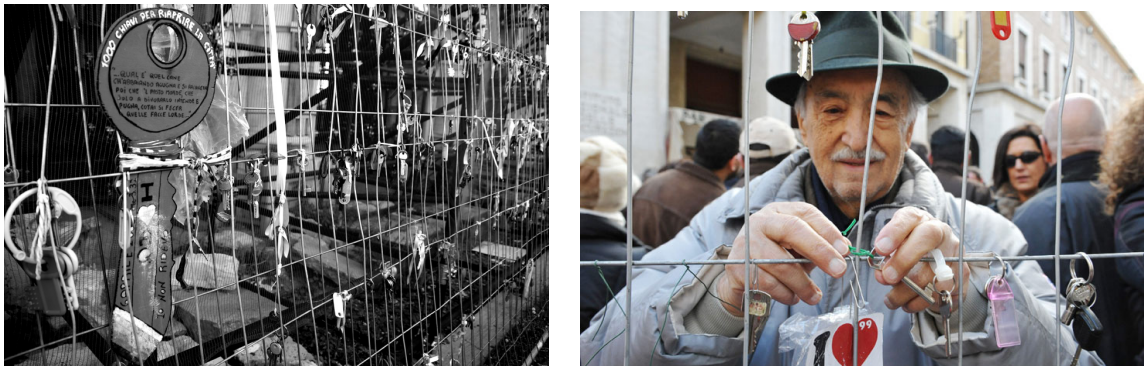
Figure 38. and 39. 1000 Keys To Re-open the City, Red Zone Fences, Downtown L'Aquila, 2010.
Photo by Giulia Riccobono (www.flckr.com) and www.tg24.sky.it

The protest was again organized online, and the slogan "Riprendiamoci la città," "Let's

take back our city," together with the symbolic act of hanging the keys of the destroyed

houses in the zed zone to the fences in downtown L'Aquila, was designed to bring the

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[151] A. T., 2013.

[152] M. L., 2013.

[153] *Manifestazione 1000 Chiavi in Centro Storico L'Aquila*, 2010,
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A77tAbfkZM0&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

attention to the problem of the rubble in downtown L'Aquila that materially impeded the "re-construction" of the old town, as advocated by the local residents.

The symbolic act of hanging the keys of the destroyed houses to the fences that locked the residents out of their neighborhood is particularly powerful because it highlights the importance of the dimensions of materiality and locality for post-earthquake L'Aquila activism. The residents, hanging their keys, conveyed their futility in the post-earthquake context. Those keys, useless for its original purpose of locking one's house (the broken houses damaged by the earthquake lacked structural integrity and were fully permeable), once hung to the red zone fences, came to signify more than what they usually represent. Rather than a tool to unlock a single door, they became, in its collectivity, a symbol that urged the authorities to "unlock" the city. The Aquilani wanted the old city back, and wanted to participate in the decisions concerning the local reconstruction. In this context, giving up the keys of their individual broken houses, the Aquilani started demanding the prompt removal of the mountains of debris as a first step towards a collective, communal, and participatory recovery of the old city center and of the communal and social life that used to take place there.

The concerns about the "Progetto C.A.S.E." and the frustration for the lack of attention to the city center turned into rage when a corruption scandal involving the Chief of the CPA, Guido Bertolaso, made the headlines of national newspapers. Bertolaso, the hero of the emergency management and of the "miraculous recovery," was placed under investigation for a sex/corruption scandal concerning illegal assignments of contracts. Allegedly, the illicit contracts that Bertolaso granted in exchange for bribes and sexual favors revolved around the management of "big events" and emergencies, including the

G8 and the reconstruction of L'Aquila. According to Judge Rosario Lupo, the judge in

charge of preliminary investigations, phone tapping revealed that the entrepreneurs

involved in the scandal with Bertolaso described themselves, among their circles, as a

"gelatinous system of corruption," a "task force of bandits," or a "ring" capable to "steal

the stealable."[154]

The Aquilani's outrage and disconcert only intensified when a phone-tapped[155]

conversation between two of the entrepreneurs under investigation was published in

every national newspaper on February 18, 2010. The two entrepreneurs Francesco De

Vito Piscicelli and Pierfrancesco Gagliardi were recorded during the night of April 6,

while they were talking about the huge amount of money that they could make exploiting

the "opportunity" of the earthquake. Specifically, they chatted about "smiling in

happiness" in their beds at 3:30am when thinking about the business generated by the

post-earthquake reconstruction. They also encouraged each other to act fast to get the

most out of this opportunity.[156] The Aquilani were furious and shocked upon hearing this

news, and they reacted with equal outrage online and in the streets. They created several

Facebook groups, and one of them, "Quelli che alle 3e32 non ridevano," "Those who

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[154]"Balducci E I Suoi Amici, La Cricca Degli Appalti Ville, Escort, Assunzioni E Auto
  Di Lusso - Repubblica.it," accessed June 19, 2014,
  http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/02/11/news/il_grande_regno_dell_emergenza_
  il_personaggio-2254417/index.html?ref=search.

[155] Phone-tapping private conversation in cases of public investigations is a legal and
  common practice in the Italian judicial system. Its use is regulated in the articles 266
  and 103 section 5 of the Italian penal code.

[156]"Le Mani Della Cricca Su L'Aquila Appalti Tre Giorni Dopo Il Sisma -
  Repubblica.it," accessed June 19, 2014,
  http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2010/02/18/news/le_mani_della_cricca_su_l_aquila_
  appalti_tre_giorni_dopo_il_sisma-2340435/index.html?ref=search.

were not smiling at 3:32am,"[157] became central to spreading the word to organize the next rally. Gathering several thousands of members at the time, this group launched the idea of a new mass protest in the red zone in order to express:

1. the refusal of corruption and of the "ring" in the reconstruction of L'Aquila, conveyed by the slogan "Il Gran Rifiuto Della Cricca," meaning "The great refusal of the Criminal Ring";

2. the disillusionment towards the state institutions, which were still neglecting the rubble in downtown L'Aquila, delaying the reconstruction;

3. the need for "transparency and participation"[158] in the reconstruction.

The Aquilani, at this point, were more determined than ever to re-appropriate their city. They decided that the most effective way of recalling attention to this problem was by showing that they wanted and needed to be a part of the solution of the problems of the post-earthquake reconstruction. In addition to the Internet messages, on February 28, 2010, the Sunday morning of the protest, a text message in Aquilano dialect spread virally around the mobile phones of the citizens of L'Aquila. The text read "Sveglia, rizzete, e vè a lavorà con noi pè sgombrà L'Aquila dalle macerie!" meaning: "Wake up and come work with us to remove the rubble from downtown!" That day, the Aquilani gathered around the borders of the red zone in overalls, carrying wheelbarrows, yellow security helmets, shovels, and trash containers.[159] They carried banners reading "Smaltiamo I Commissari, Ricicliamo le Macerie," namely "Let's dispose of Officers,

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[157]"Quelli Che a L'Aquila Alle 3:32 Non Ridevano," accessed June 19, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/groups/302288078330/#_=_.

[158] L.B., G.P., 2010.

[159]"Foto L'Aquila, Arriva Il Popolo Delle Carriole - Tg24 - Sky.it," February 28, 2010, http://tg24.sky.it/tg24/cronaca/photogallery/2010/02/28/l_aquila_carriole.html.

and Recycle the Rubble" (image 40) to protest against the alleged corruption of the government officials in charge of managing the reconstruction.

Figure 40. The People of the Wheelbarrows protesting alleged corruption scandals in downtown L'Aquila. Photo by www.repubblica.it

The *"People of the Wheelbarrows,"* as the media began to call the protestors, broke into the red zone and started working to clean up the rubble that was lying abandoned on the streets, sorting out the recyclable materials and starting to carry the waste material out of downtown L'Aquila (image 41 and 42). They invented a neologism to describe their Sunday activity: they called it "scarriolare" -- "wheelbarrowing" -- a verb coined from the word "carriola" (wheelbarrow), that soon became the symbol of the protest.

Figure 41. and 42. The People of the Wheelbarrows: "scarriolata" protests in downtown L'Aquila.
Photos by www.pasquinoweb.wordpress.com and www.tg24.skytv.it

The people of the wheelbarrows decided to meet every Sunday to do communal work moving the rubble away from the city center, as a means to sensitize the authorities about the necessity of putting an effective plan into action in order to rescue the city center that had been left abandoned after the earthquake. The people of the wheelbarrows, wearing overalls, security helmets, and carrying wheelbarrows, materially took back the red zone. Whereas Berlusconi donned a hard hat for publicity purposes, the people of the wheelbarrows used them because they intended to do the necessary labor for the recovery of L'Aquila. The people of the wheelbarrows, thus, rhetorically subverted Berlusconi's spectacular imagery of the miraculous recovery by materially occupying the red zone, and by showing the necessity of doing material labor as opposed to the "empty spectacles"[160] that circulated in the mainstream media after the earthquake.

The rallies of the people of the wheelbarrows, who communally mobilized to start clearing rubble, and physically moving stone, debris, etc. away from downtown L'Aquila, materially demonstrated the need for an intervention in the red zone, and contributed to deconstruct Berlusconi's rhetoric of the miraculous recovery. The people

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[160] G.P., G. DG., 2010.

of the wheelbarrows, with their rallies, also demonstrated the significance of embodiment and rhetorical emplacement in the sites of protest: by "showing up" and occupying the red zone, by pushing the wheelbarrows and doing the material work of mobilizing the rubble, they showcased a mode of citizenship engagement that is only possible within a locality setting, and only effective because of its rhetorical engagement with the materiality of the place, their physical presence, and their strategic use of the network of meanings circulating in that specific context.

Figure 43. and 44. Scarriolate Protests; Banner: "Reconstruction Participated & Transparent."
Photos by www.tg24.skytv.it

In the ensuing months the people of the wheelbarrows became more and more involved in the organization of actions and rallies that could bring back media attention in a crucial moment for the future of the city. Their "scarriolate" (image 43-45) had been able, for the first time, to show Abruzzo's situation to the national public and to gather national support and solidarity to lobby the government for fiscal relief.

Figure 45. Carriole, downtown L'Aquila.
Photo by www.sanpaolo.org

Last, but not least, the "People of the Wheelbarrows" organized a series of events to take

place over the summer 2010, in downtown L'Aquila, with the aim of gradually re-

appropriating the social spaces of the city and of denouncing the situation of the several

monuments, churches and piazze by showing directly to the rest of Italy the state of

abandonment and negligence toward a place that used to be considered one of the historic

and artistic jewels in central Italy.

L'Aquila calls Italy: Rubbles of Democracy

The latest rally organized by the "People of the Wheelbarrows" took place on

November 20, 2010. Despite the adverse weather conditions, 26,000 people from all over

Italy participated, responding to the plea of the Aquilani that had been disseminated via

the Internet asking the Italian people to go to L'Aquila and symbolically bring a yellow

hard hat to participate "in removing the rubble of democracy."[161]

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[161]*L'Aquila Chiama Italia - 20 Novembre 2010 - Manifestazione Nazionale*, 2010,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6T1HmUtKNes&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Figure 46., 47., 48., 49. "L'Aquila calls Italy-Rubble of Democracy," rally in the red zone, November 2010.
Photos by www.lagramigna.blogspot.com

The rally "L'Aquila calls Italy – Rubbles of Democracy," (images 46-49) was organized

to promote the reconstruction of L'Aquila by collecting the signatures necessary to

present a popular initiative of law, written by the Aquilani, to the Parliament. Moreover,

the rally was organized to gather national solidarity in L'Aquila and to expose what the

activists defined the "rubble of Italian democracy." The activists from 3e32 and the other

Citizens' Committees used the metaphor of L'Aquila as the "epicenter of an Italy in a

constant State of emergency, environmental, legal, occupational,"[162] and the debris of

L'Aquila as a metaphoric materialization of the "rubble of the Italian democracy."[163]

Figure 50 National Rally, Rubble of Democracy. Photo by "MediaCrew Casematte," on www.3e32.org

The rally also called for a national participation to expose the "deceit of the

miraculous recovery of L'Aquila."[164] Among the round of speeches delivered by the

Aquilani and by other activists, one deserves particular attention because of its topic and

its peculiar style. Antonello Ciccozzi, an anthropologist at the University of L'Aquila,

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[162] *L'Aquila Chiama Italia - Macerie Di Democrazia - Corteo*, 2010,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_lld5iDpJw&feature=youtube_gdata_player.
[163] *L'Aquila Chiama Italia - 20 Novembre 2010 - Manifestazione Nazionale*; *L'Aquila Chiama Italia - Macerie Di Democrazia - Corteo*.
[164] A. C., 2013.

delivered a protest speech called "Miracles and Tele-magicians."[165] The video of the

speech has been circulating widely on Facebook, published on the websites of the

Citizens' Committees, and transcribed by its author on his blog "La città nascosta" (The

hidden city).[166] "Miracles and Tele-magicians" is a speech that used irony to reverse the

images associated with the Prime Minister's metaphor of the miraculous recovery. The

speech is divided into two parts that illustrate the "extraordinary miracles" realized in

L'Aquila after the earthquake. According to Ciccozzi, the first one, a "truly incredible

and notable miracle,"[167] had been that of having instantly forgotten about the 309 victims

of the earthquake, and of the responsibility of the Major Risk Committee for the deaths of

those citizens. I will talk extensively about this topic in the next chapter. At the time of

this rally, however, the Committee of scientists had been temporarily placed under

investigation for having reassured the Aquilani. Subsequently, and "miraculously,"

suggests Ciccozzi, the accusations were dropped and the investigation closed (only to be

re-opened later on, because of the pressing demands for clarifications on part of the

citizens' committees).[168] The other miracle, the symbol of the realization of the of the

"miraculous recovery of L'Aquila," according to Ciccozzi was indeed the "Project

Houses":

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[165]"La Manifestazione, Il Senatore Berlusconiano E Un Aquilano - Cronaca L'Aquila - Abruzzo24ore.tv," accessed June 27, 2014, http://www.abruzzo24ore.tv/news/La-manifestazione-il-senatore--berlusconiano-e-un-aquilano/20059.htm.

[166]"LA CITTA' NASCOSTA," accessed June 19, 2014, http://lacittanascosta.blogspot.com/search?updated-min=2010-01-01T00%3A00%3A00%2B01%3A00&updated-max=2011-01-01T00%3A00%3A00%2B01%3A00&max-results=21.

[167]"La Manifestazione, Il Senatore Berlusconiano E Un Aquilano - Cronaca L'Aquila - Abruzzo24ore.tv."

[168] For a detailed analysis of the trial to the Major Risk Committee, see next chapter.

Berlusconi's "Project Houses" is a miracle because in a situation of huge economic crisis, groups of national entrepreneurs have been able to operate in miraculous conditions: making huge profits, not having to respect the rules (because of the state of emergency), and exploiting masses of underpaid workers. Built with huge costs, the Project Houses is barely hosting the half of the people in need of an accommodation, and the miracle is that the other half has been hidden, leaving our city abandoned, and producing a landscape ruin in our territory. I think this has been truly a miracle, and a miracle in the miracle has been that of making this choice appear to be necessary by hiding the many other possibilities of housing, hugely more sustainable, hugely less expensive and equally comfortable, only to grant to that "ring" of entrepreneurs a 300-400% profit. On our disaster.[169]

Ciccozzi's speech, along with the organization of the national rally into the red zone, contributed to shatter, for the national audience, the image of the miraculous recovery of L'Aquila. As of today, the Aquilani activists believe that "this is the first step in order to start a path of real recovery, less miraculous perhaps, but supported by the rest of Italy and by the participation of us citizens."[170]

Conclusion: Towards a Material and Social Re-construction

In this chapter, I illustrated how the Aquilani activists, in their mobilizations, leveraged the local material destruction to disseminate local narratives and perspectives about life in the post-earthquake plight. Such narratives -- and the related protests of the Aquilani emerging from the local experience of the disaster -- served the purposes of recreating the sense of community shattered by the earthquake, contrasting the mainstream media portrayals of L'Aquila's situation in the national and international media, and voicing the citizens' political stances about the need of a local reconstruction.

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[169] The original video was removed from Youtube, but an annotated speech transcription is still available at: "LA CITTA' NASCOSTA."

[170] A. C., 2013.

By exposing the contradictions and difficulties that characterized the experience of living in the seismic crater, and by re-telling their stories in the post-quake emergency focusing on the possibilities for the future reconstruction, the Aquilani "re-wrote the meanings" that were ascribed to their situation by the mainstream media and the Berlusconi government. They "broke the semantic glass" that was negatively affecting the local politics of the reconstruction and that portrayed the local situation as "a miracle" realized. Through public modalities of citizenship engagement that creatively[171] mobilized the locality to hijack the institutional and mainstream media representations of post-earthquake L'Aquila, the Aquilani were able to re-inscribe their own meanings to their experience of the earthquake, ultimately disseminating the local perspective on the reality of life in the seismic crater, and managing to contribute to the dialogue about the reconstruction of both the material town, and the sense of community that had been damaged by the earthquake.

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[171]Pietrucci, "'Poetic' Publics."

CHAPTER THREE

Voices from the Seismic Crater in the

Trial of the Major Risks Committee in L'Aquila

> ... In this trial everybody lost. We are at a loss, because we lost our homes and loved
> ones. The State is at a loss, because this episode showed that the State is not capable of
> acting to protect its citizens… we're all at a loss.
>
> *Giustino Parisse,* Earthquake survivor
> (Personal communication--August 2013)

The Major Risk Committee Trial in L'Aquila

Three years after the earthquake in L'Aquila, a new and different wave of shock

hit the Italian town. On October 22, 2012, surrounded by journalists and media from all

over the world, the Italian Judge Marco Billi read the verdict concluding the controversial

trial of the members of the "National Committee for the Forecast and Prevention of

Major Risks." Bernardo De Bernardinis, engineer and former vice-president of the Civil

Protection Agency (CPA), and the six scientists who were members of the Major Risks

Committee (MRC) were found guilty of multiple-manslaughter and all sentenced to six

years in jail by the court in L'Aquila.[172]The verdict was immediately received as

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[172]Among the six condemned scientists are: Enzo Boschi, former President of the
National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology (INGV) in Rome; Giulio Selvaggi,
former Director of the INGV's National Earthquake Centre in Rome; Claudio Eva, a
Professor of Earth Physics at the University of Genoa; Franco Barberi, a volcanologist
at the University of Rome "Roma Tre" and former President of the CPA and vice-
President of the MRC at the time of the facts; Mauro Dolce, Head of the seismic-risk

shocking, not only because the seven defendants were found guilty of manslaughter and

thus considered responsible for the deaths of some of the quake victims, but also because

the judge decided to increase the length of the sentence by one third: from the four years

requested by the prosecutors, to a total of six years.

The jail sentence immediately generated outrage and instantly mobilized the

international scientific community to protest the implications of the

verdict.[173]Commentators have often labeled the trial as a "witch hunt,"[174]casting the

citizens committee of Aquilani that pushed for the investigation and the prosecutors in

L'Aquila as superstitious, pre-scientific, and ignorant as opposed to the enlightened

scientific community. The sentence was quickly interpreted as an "attack on science,"

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office of the CPA in Rome; and Gian Michele Calvi, Director of the European Centre
for Training and Research in Earthquake Engineering in Pavia.

[173]Giancarlo Sturloni, "A Lesson from L'Aquila: The Risks of Science
(mis)communication," *JCOM: Journal of Science Communication* 11, no. 4
(December 2012): 1–2.

[174] For examples, both on national Italian press and on International coverage of the trial
see: "The Verdict of the l'Aquila Earthquake Trial Sends the Wrong Message |
Science Blogs | WIRED," accessed July 15, 2014, http://www.wired.com/2012/10/the-
verdict-of-the-laquila-earthquake-trial-sends-the-wrong-message/; "Processo Breve, a
Rischio I Dibattimenti per I Crolli all'Aquila. 'Ingiusto per I Morti E I Vivi' - Il Fatto
Quotidiano," accessed July 15, 2014,
http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/04/10/processo-breve-a-rischio-i-processi-per-i-
crolli-allaquila-una-norma-ingiusta-per-i-morti-e-per-i-vivi/103519/; "Earthquake
Scientists Jailed Over 'Inexact' Statements Preceding 2009 L'Aquila Quake
(VIDEO)," accessed October 16, 2013,
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/22/earthquake-scientists-jail-conviction-
italy_n_2002848.html; "Disaster Planning and Emergency Management: L'Aquila
Sentence - Trial or Witch-Hunt?," accessed July 15, 2014, http://emergency-
planning.blogspot.com/2012/10/laquila-sentence-trial-or-witch-hunt.html; "L'Aquila,
Indagine per Mancato Allarme Protezione Civile: 'E' Incomprensibile' -
Repubblica.it," accessed October 20, 2013,
http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/06/03/news/prot_civ-4538445/; "Terremoto
dell'Aquila: La Scienza in Tribunale," accessed July 15, 2014,
http://daily.wired.it/news/scienza/2011/09/15/processo-terremoto-aquila-scienziati-
14457.html; Antonello Ciccozzi, *Parola di scienza: il terremoto dell'Aquila e la
Commissione Grandi rischi : un'analisi antropologica* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2013).

because according to those commentators the scientists were being penalized for not accurately predicting the earthquake and for failing to alert the local population.[175] The narrative comparing the trial in L'Aquila to a "medieval trial," an "attack on science," and a "witch hunt" was widely present in both Italian and international mainstream media in the immediate aftermath of the verdict. However, in this chapter I show that such a narrative was generated from a fundamental misunderstanding of the motivations for the verdict and from a flawed interpretation of the accusations at the center of the trial.

The main misunderstanding revolved around the representation of the prosecutors' accusations as a charge of "missed alarm."[176]An oversimplification of the

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[175]In Italy, Corrado Clini, a former Minister of the Environment, went as far as comparing the MRC trial to the one that Galileo Galilei had to stand centuries ago.[175] Internationally, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), wrote a letter of protest to Giorgio Napolitano, the President of the Republic of Italy, to "express concern over the recent indictments of six scientists and a government official by a prosecutor in L'Aquila," judging the charges against the scientists both "unfair and naïve." See: And "AAAS Protests Charges Against Scientists Who Failed to Predict Earthquake," accessed February 28, 2014, http://www.aaas.org/news/aaas-protests-charges-against-scientists-who-failed-predict-earthquake.

[176] For examples see: «Ci Fu Mancato Allarme Prima Del Terremoto» Grandi Rischi Indagata - Il Sole 24 ORE," accessed October 20, 2013, http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2010-06-04/mancato-allarme-prima-terremoto-080400.shtml?uuid=AYioEmvB; "Grandi Rischi, Mancato Allarme: Spunta Un Documento Che Inchioda La Regione - Le Inchieste Giudiziarie L'Aquila - Abruzzo24ore.tv," accessed October 20, 2013, http://www.abruzzo24ore.tv/news/Grandi-Rischi-mancato-allarme-spunta-un-documento-che-inchioda-la-Regione/80484.htm; "L-Aquila, Grandi Rischi E Mancato Allarme Sisma Boschi Rompe Il Silenzio: Non Ho Mai Rassicurato - Cronaca - Il Centro," accessed October 20, 2013, http://ilcentro.gelocal.it/laquila/cronaca/2013/08/01/news/l-aquila-grandi-rischi-e-mancato-allarme-sisma-boschi-rompe-il-silenzio-non-ho-mai-rassicurato-1.7512261; "L'Aquila, Mancato Allarme per Il Terremoto: 7 Indagati," accessed October 20, 2013, http://www.rainews24.rai.it/it/news.php?newsid=141588; "Mancato Allarme a L'Aquila: Indagata La 'Grandi Rischi' - Corriere Della Sera," accessed October 20, 2013, http://www.corriere.it/cronache/10_giugno_03/terremoto-abruzzo-indagati_66046824-6f04-11df-bfef-00144f02aabe.shtml; "'Mancato Allarme a L'Aquila' Indagata La Protezione Civile - LASTAMPA.it," accessed October 20,

motivations of the verdict, in effect, contributed to generating and consolidating the

inaccurate narrative of the scientists being sentenced for not having predicted the

earthquake, a task that is known to be scientifically impossible, as the American

Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) also accurately highlighted in their

protest letter to Giorgio Napolitano, the President of the Italian Republic:

> Years of research, much of it conducted by distinguished seismologists in your own country, have demonstrated that there is no accepted scientific method for earthquake prediction that can be reliably used to warn citizens of an impending disaster. To expect more of science at this time is unreasonable. It is manifestly unfair for scientists to be criminally charged for failing to act on information that the international scientific community would consider inadequate as a basis for issuing a warning. Moreover, we worry that subjecting scientists to criminal charges for adhering to accepted scientific practices may have a chilling effect on researchers, thereby impending the free exchange of ideas necessary for progress in science and discouraging them from participating in matters of great public importance.[177]

The "witch hunt" narrative also ridiculed the trial, demeaning the seriousness of its

context and aims, and portraying it as an attempt to scapegoat the scientists for the effects

of a natural catastrophe that obviously they could not have predicted. Most importantly,

this portrayal of the trial as a fundamentally flawed institutional process and an

embarrassing episode for the Italian judicial system in front of an appalled international

scientific community, silenced the voices of the citizens of L'Aquila and the families of

the victims that requested the investigation in the hopes of clarifying the messages of the

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2013,
http://www1.lastampa.it/redazione/cmsSezioni/cronache/201006articoli/55607girata.a
sp; "Mancato Allarme a L'Aquila: Indagata La 'Grandi Rischi' - Corriere Della Sera";
"Mancato Allarme L'aquila - Cerca Con Google," accessed October 20, 2013,
https://www.google.com/search?q=mancato+allarme+l%27aquila&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-
8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a.
[177]"AAAS Protests Charges Against Scientists Who Failed to Predict Earthquake."

MRC on March 31, 2009, that deeply influenced their behaviors in the days immediately preceding the earthquake.

The aim of this essay is to suggest a different reading of the events that took place in L'Aquila, by illustrating the divergent narratives about the MRC meeting produced by the main parties involved in the trial. Such a reading pays close attention to the local discourse around the trial, and foregrounds the perspective of the Aquilani living in the "seismic crater" that has been under-represented in national and international coverage of the trial. Before delving into the polarized narratives associated with this trial, I will contextualize the theoretical problems arising from this study from a rhetoric of science perspective.

Integrating Citizens' Expertise and Scientific Citizenry

During the last decade, environmental scholars have increasingly called for the democratization of science and expertise, developing an array of proposals aiming to redefine science-policy-public relations. Such proposals generally advocate for inclusive strategies to foster a new kind of relation between science and citizens. In these proposals, the citizens are no longer considered passive receivers of scientific knowledge, becoming involved in the processes of knowledge-production, partnering with scientists that in turn become more open to different kinds of expertise, and more transparent about their own values and assumptions. According to this perspective, the demarcation between science and lay-people "should be transgressed through a democratization of

science and a scientization of citizenry."[178] Democratizing science is important,

according to these scholars, because it can allow other kinds of expertise, observations,

and data into the knowledge production process, thus improving scientific knowledge and

opening up spaces for public inclusion. Some of the best-known proposals are the "New

Production of Knowledge,"[179] "Post-normal Science,"[180] "Citizen Science,"[181] and

"Community Science."[182]

In environmental scholarship several studies describe instances in which scientific

findings and recommendations have been shown to be wrong or irrelevant and,

conversely, lay people's ways of understanding or managing a situation have proved

more productive or adequate than those from the experts.[183] One of the best-known cases

is Brian Wynne's study of Chernobyl's radioactive fallout in West Cumbria.[184] Wynne

studied the relationships between scientists and sheep farmers after the Chernobyl

radioactive fallout that contaminated the Cumbrian fells. He argues that the scientists of

the UK Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries (MAFF) should not have ignored

sheep farmers' expertise. Because the MAFF scientists ignored the farmers' knowledge

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[178] Rolf Lidskog, "Scientised Citizens and Democratised Science. Re-Assessing the Expert-Lay Divide," *Journal of RiskResearch* 11, no. 1/2 (January 2008): 71.

[179] Michael Gibbons, *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1994).

[180] Silvio O. Funtowicz and Jerome R. Ravetz, "Science for the Post-Normal Age," *Futures* 25, no. 7 (September 1993): 739–55.

[181] Alan Irwin, *Citizen Science: A Study of People, Expertise, and Sustainable Development* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995).

[182] Anna J L Carr, "Policy Reviews and Essays," *Society & Natural Resources* 17, no. 9 (2004): 841–49.

[183] Lidskog, "Scientised Citizens and Democratised Science. Re-Assessing the Expert-Lay Divide," 70.

[184] Brian Wynne, "Sheepfarming after Chernobyl: A Case Study in Communicating Scientific Information," *Environment.* - 312 (1989): 10–15.

about the ecology of the sheep, such as the prevailing winds and the behavior of the rainwater on the pasture land, they missed an opportunity for a relevant discussion of how the sheep should have been treated to minimize the impact of the radioactive contamination. Instead, they ended up misinterpreting the consequences of the fallout. This study shows how the local community proved more reflexive and knowledgeable than the scientific one, thus suggesting the importance of implementing a new and more productive relationship between science and public.

Michael Gibbons, in *The New Production of Knowledge* identifies one possible way to implement a better integration between science and citizens by shifting the focus from science to the production of knowledge.[185] Whereas science is characterized by strict disciplinary borders and hierarchical structures, the new production of knowledge is defined as heterogeneous, non hierarchic, and open to forms of knowledge different from those of science, thus favoring the socialization and contextualization of knowledge production. This shift allows for the emergence of context-sensitive science in which well-educated citizens are allowed to participate.[186] Silvio Funtowicz and Jerome Ravets radicalized the call for public inclusion in their conception of "post-normal science," opening the space of discussion not only to the well-educated, but to all kinds of categories of people and organization that can participate in the production of knowledge, such as citizens, environmental movements, or political organizations. In their contextualization, local knowledge is granted particular consideration because of its contextual relevance, which can often prove more productive than abstract, and context-

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[185]Gibbons, *The New Production of Knowledge*.
[186]Lidskog, "Scientised Citizens and Democratised Science. Re-Assessing the Expert-Lay Divide," 75.

independent scientific statements, as is also shown by Wynne's study of the Chernobyl fallout in Cumbria. Post-normal science favors a broad approach that not only calls for more public inclusion, but also for a broad array of contributions to knowledge production, including public testimonies.[187] A critique of post-normal science is that although it does encourage a broader inclusion in the knowledge-production process, it also limits the tasks of the included people to one of support for traditional scientific knowledge. Alan Irwin, in *Citizen Science,* elaborated a more productive relationship model between science and citizens, addressing in particular the clash between science's universal and decontextualized character and citizens' situated local knowledge. Irwin suggests that we adopt a symmetrical understanding of different kinds of knowledges, and he urges us to consider the public understanding of a problem as the departure point, instead of a science-centered perspective that can alienate the publics at stake. The aim is to create an arena in which science and the public can produce different knowledge claims that can meet on equal grounds, establish a dialogue, and dialectically cross-fertilize each other.[188] Anna Carr offers a similar model in her call for a "community science," which she defines as "the interaction between conventional and community-based scientific knowledge systems,"[189] that is needed because it is "complimentary to conventional science."[190]

All these calls for a reformulation of the relationship between science and the public are not rooted in the need for scientific democracy in and of itself. The reasons for advocating public inclusion, and for re-imagining the science-lay people divide into a

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[187]Ibid., 77.
[188]Ibid., 78.
[189]Carr, "Policy Reviews and Essays," 843.
[190]Ibid., 846.

productive space for dialogue between a "scientized public" and a "democratized

science," are primarily matters of generating knowledge. In addition, the arguments for

the democratization of the modes of doing science postulate the necessity of public

participation because of the increasing complexity and uncertainty of scientific questions,

which require scientists to consider not only facts, but also values in the decision-making

process.[191] "Local knowledges"[192] and "lay expertise"[193] are keywords in the calls for

public inclusion and democratization of science, and stress the importance of

understanding how lay people can meaningfully contribute in processes of knowledge

production, especially in contexts of high uncertainty and imperceptible risks:

> Because human beings are knowledgeable actors, public inclusion
> provides them with new possibilities for creating relevant and trusted
> knowledge. To do that is to create spaces for interaction between citizens
> and science… Thus science and the public should not be severed from
> each other, with risk communication serving to bridge the gulf between
> them. Instead, a new social contract between science and citizens should
> be established, one which does not build on traditional risk-management
> with its linear model of science-policy-public debate.[194]

In short, all these calls aim at moving from a 'deficit model'[195] of public understanding of

science, to one of dialogue, contribution, and public inclusion. According to the deficit

model, knowledge is created by scientists, and then disseminated to the public, which in

many cases is seen as not equipped to understand science properly. This model has been

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[191]Michael S. Carolan, "Science, Expertise, and the Democratization of the Decision-Making Process," *Society & Natural Resources* 19, no. 7 (2006): 662.

[192]Frank Fischer, *Citizens, Experts, and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

[193]Wynne, "Sheepfarming after Chernobyl."

[194]Lidskog, "Scientised Citizens and Democratised Science. Re-Assessing the Expert-Lay Divide," 80.

[195]Alan Irwin and Brian Wynne, *Misunderstanding Science?: The Public Reconstruction of Science and Technology* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

heavily criticized for its anti-democratic values as well as for its limited perspective towards knowledge.[196] Citizens have the critical ability to contest and evaluate the limitations of expert knowledge, and in order to reformulate the relationship between the public and science it is crucial to create spaces for dialogue and deliberation across institutionalized boundaries.[197] As Rolf Lidskog notes, however, the solution to bridge the gap between science and the public cannot be reduced to "substituting scientism with populism."[198] Rather it means creating spaces for dialogue and deliberation between science and the public: spaces for exchange, evaluation, and contestation of science.

Transitioning from a deficit model of science to a model of dialogue is productive insofar as it enriches processes of knowledge production, helping to generate better relationships between scientists, publics, and politicians. This is particularly important when dealing with situations of high uncertainty or involving imperceptible risks. Integrating different kinds of knowledge claims in decision making-processes that affect local communities in situations of risk and uncertainty can be productive not only because of the potential of those knowledges to contribute meaningfully to assessing reasonable modes to deal with risks, but also because favoring the exchange and dialogue between science, policy, and publics can make the public communication of risks more transparent and immediate for the affected communities. Transitioning from the deficit model of science to one of dialogue and inclusion also involves transforming risk communication "from a means of distributing information to a vehicle for mutual

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[196]Steven Yearley, *Making Sense of Science: Understanding the Social Study of Science* (London: SAGE, 2005).

[197]Lidskog, "Scientised Citizens and Democratised Science. Re-Assessing the Expert-Lay Divide," 82.

[198]Ibid.

learning and deliberation where all involved parties influence each other, leading to a

changed and broader understanding."[199] Social scientific research from different

disciplines supports this vision of an integrated approach to risk management and risk

communication, which encourages inclusion, participation, deliberation, and transparency

in the processes of risk assessment and its communication to the interested publics.[200]

Failing to implement a model of dialogue and integration between science, public,

and policy has proved problematic in many cases. Bryan Wynne's study of the

radioactive fallout in Cumbria is only one among the many cautionary tales that can

illustrate the significance of the implementation of more democratic and inclusive

relations between scientists, citizens, and politicians. Some potential limiting factors of

the deficit model include the processes of knowledge production, risk governance, and

also the communication of science and risk.

The case of seven Italian scientists sentenced to jail for the events related to the

meeting of the Major Risks Committee in March 2009 in L'Aquila is exemplary in

illustrating the negative implications of maintaining a deficit model of science and of a

top-down political approach to risk management and risk communication. The case of

"L'Aquila seven," when carefully analyzed, powerfully demonstrates the downsides of a

lack of integration in the relations of the science-public-policy debate. First, it shows that

neglecting local knowledge in risk assessment and risk management processes can have

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[199]Ibid., 73.

[200]Ortwin Renn, "The Need for Integration: Risk Policies Require the Input from Experts, Stakeholders and the Public at Large," *Reliability Engineering & System Safety* 72, no. 2 (May 2001): 131–35; Ortwin Renn, *Risk Governance Coping with Uncertainty in a Complex World* (London; Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2008), http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=430168; Lidskog, "Scientised Citizens and Democratised Science. Re-Assessing the Expert-Lay Divide."

dangerous, even deadly, consequences. Such local expertise is often rooted in the experience of specific communities and it encompasses an array of knowledges that is not available to institutionalized science, and that can prove useful and reasonable when dealing with risk and uncertainty management. Secondly, this case exemplifies a debacle in communicating risks clearly and efficiently to a concerned public. Finally, it also speaks to the necessity of a better relationship not only between scientists and citizens, but also between scientists and politicians. The lack of integration and coordination between the government officials and the scientific advisors of the MRC created a situation that favored the dissemination of scientifically flawed information to the public in L'Aquila. Furthermore, the Civil Protection Agency top-down approach in managing the situation of public alert in L'Aquila, not only made an improper use of the scientists' ethos to placate the public's perception of seismic risk in Abruzzo, but it also scapegoated the scientists during the trial, shifting to them the blame for the miscommunication of risk to the Aquilani.

In the rest of this chapter, I will trace the emergence of polarized narratives during the trial. By contextualizing the events related to the trial in the local situation of alarm for the seismic swarm in 2009, I will map the narrative of the Aquilani and the one of the scientists, reconstructing their relations and contradictions contextualized in the larger discourse about the trial.

This chapter is organized in three thematic parts. This first one reconstructs the events related to the trial and contextualizes their scholarly significance. The second part explores the perspectives at stake in the trial and contextualizes them in the local situation of alert in L'Aquila. The third part, finally, maps the narratives of the Aquilani (also

including transcription of some oral histories from relatives of earthquake victims and

activists involved in the trial) and that of the scientists.

A Local Approach: Taking a Close Look at the Trial

In this chapter, I will read the discourses about the MRC trial by foregrounding

the interpretation of the local events by the people closely affected by the earthquake.

These local voices have often been silenced, not only by the earthquake itself, but also

from the waves of shock and outrage that emerged in response to the conviction of the

MRC experts. Thus far in this dissertation I have highlighted the modalities in which the

material devastation in the aftermath of L'Aquila earthquake mobilized the residents to

protest against a top-down management of the emergency, and at the same time, the

residents capitalized on the material devastation of the seismic crater in order to make

statements about their perspective on the post-earthquake reconstruction practices. This

dialectic of mobilization produced a series of local narratives rooted in the lived

experience of the earthquake, which served the purposes of recreating community and

redefining life in the new spaces and places of the L'Aquila's post-disaster situation.

Those narratives of the lived experience in seismic L'Aquila, which both re-invent and

are shaped by life in the crater, also represent a useful lens to approach the different

interpretations of the MRC trial. Foregrounding the local narratives in the analysis of the

MRC trial helps to generate an accurate understanding of the events related to the

condemnation of the Italian scientists.

In this chapter, I will consider texts from: the local, national, and international

coverage of the MCR trial; the court documents concerning the trial publicly released by

the Judge Marco Billi in January 2013 (the verdict and the prosecutors' memo)[201]; the

minutes of the MRC meeting held in L'Aquila on March 31, produced by the MRC

experts; the anthropologic consultation for the public prosecutors produced by Dr.

Antonello Ciccozzi, an anthropologist at the University of L'Aquila; and finally a series

of oral histories collected in L'Aquila from relatives of the victims and local activists, or

retrievable in the court documents. Taking a closer look at these texts reveals divergent

narratives about the trial, circulating among different publics and audiences. The

narrative of the Aquilani, picked up by the prosecutors, is grounded in the local

experience of the crater's residents. This narrative highlights how the fear of continuous

earthquakes and the traditional local practice common among the Aquilani to get out of

their houses for a few hours after medium intensity tremors were overrun by the effects

of the reassuring messages communicated to the Aquilani by the CPA, the local

authorities, and the local media reporting on the institutional activities about the

assessment of risks in the period of the seismic swarm. In particular, the MRC meeting

came to represent, for the local public, a peak validation of an institutional "rhetoric of

reassurance" circulating in L'Aquila, which contributed to bringing upon disastrous

consequences for the residents of the seismic crater.

The narrative of the MRC experts, however, reveals how those reassurances

communicated to the residents of L'Aquila did not express the official opinions of the

scientists and experts who participated in the meeting, and most importantly they did not

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[201] I am citing from the official court documents released to the public by the court of
L'Aquila (Tribunale dell'Aquila), retrievable by the number: n. 253/10 R.G.N.R.; n.
1497/10 R.G.G.I.P.
n. 448/11 R.G. Dib.; n. 380/12 R. Sent. From now on, I will refer to them simply by their
pdf document name: "Sentenza_grandi_rischi.pdf," n.d.; "Memoria_picuti.pdf," n.d.

accurately represent the contents of that MRC meeting. In the following sections, therefore, I will trace the public emergence of those controversial "reassurances" by mapping and contextualizing the experts' and the local residents' discourses in the local socio-political and material contexts.

Risk Communication in L'Aquila: March 31, 2009

On March 31, the MRC experts concluded their meeting to assess the current seismic risks in Abruzzo in less than one hour, without immediately filing an official report -- as reported by the defendants during the trial, the report was only filed after the quake of April 6, and postdated -- and without directly talking to the press. Bernardo De Bernardinis, in his capacity as vice-President of the CPA, acted as a spokesperson for the MRC during the press conference held after the meeting on March 31. On the same day, he also released a video interview with the local media, communicating to the Aquilani a message that it is possible to sum up as follows: according to the experts, essentially there was nothing exceptional or new to worry about.[202] In fact, he reported that the scientists saw the seismic swarm as indicative of a "favorable situation" because it signaled a gradual "discharge" of seismic energy, and that there was "no danger." That afternoon, De Bernardinis talked to a journalist from the local channel TVUNO, who asked him about his Abruzzo origins and the potential danger of the ongoing seismic swarm. De Bernardinis declared:

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[202]"Quando De Bernardinis Disse: Beviamoci Un Bicchiere Di Montepulciano'' - Repubblica Tv - La Repubblica.it," accessed October 20, 2013, http://video.repubblica.it/dossier/terremoto-in-abruzzo/quando-de-bernardinis-disse-beviamoci-un-bicchiere-di-montepulciano/108566/106951.

…there is no danger, I told to the Mayor of Sulmona that the scientific community keeps confirming me that, on the contrary, this is a favorable situation because there is a continuous discharge of energy…thus we did see some serious events, but they're not too intense, and in fact so far we have had just minor damages.[203]

Because of this link between the seismic swarm shocks and a favorable situation insinuated by De Bernardinis, many citizens started interpreting the continued shocks as positive signs. The Aquilani received with relief that flawed interpretation, especially after having been waiting anxiously to hear what all the experts had to say about their precarious situation in that period. On the afternoon of March 31, the Aquilani literally heard that the more seismic energy released through small and medium intensity shocks, the more a destructive quake was to be considered unlikely. None of the experts that attended the MRC meeting rectified or publicly denied De Bernardinis's claims of that day, not before, during, or after the press conference. None of the scientists intervened to correct the information that was being communicated to the public by De Bernardinis and the local authorities, not even when prompted by a TV journalist, De Bernardinis suggested that the locals consider the situation normal, and drink a glass of good Montepulciano:

> Journalist: And in the meantime, shall we drink a good glass of wine from Ofena?
> De Bernardinis: Absolutely, absolutely: have a glass of D.O.C. Montepulciano, this is important![204]

As Ciccozzi explained in his anthropological consultation for the prosecutors, the "reassuring diagnosis" of the situation communicated during the press conference held

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[203]"Memoria_picuti.pdf," 43. From the court documents deposited by the prosecution, see the transcription of the passage De Bernardinis's interview with TVUNO released and televised on March 31, 2009.

[204]"Quando De Bernardinis Disse: Beviamoci Un Bicchiere Di Montepulciano'' - Repubblica Tv - La Repubblica.it."

after the MRC meeting, and the related interviews, had been framed as the official

communication of the MRC's findings during their gathering in L'Aquila. Furthermore,

De Bernardinis's "reassuring diagnosis" produced information that conflicted with the

precautionary prescriptions sedimented in the local popular culture through the

experience of past earthquakes that hit the town. Ciccozzi noted: "It is important to

highlight that such a diagnosis, leading to a diminished perception of risk, generated an

increase of the vulnerability of the place, thus representing a factor of co-cause of the

disastrous effects of the earthquake."[205]

The local anthropologist and activist, in his consultation for the prosecution,

explains that from a cultural anthropology perspective studying the effects of the modes

of institutional communication of risk that preceded a disaster involves relating such

communication with the local culture of the place affected by the disaster. This local

culture includes the array of shared knowledge from which the peculiar conceptions of

risk present in a given community, which influence people's behaviors in case of a

perceived risk, originate. Ciccozzi argues that it is important to consider these factors in

order to rectify the errors of those who take a "techno-centric perspective on the

evaluation of disasters, which tend to attribute the damage caused by a calamity uniquely

to the relations among agents of impact and socio-material characteristics of the places

affected by the disaster."[206] According to this perspective, vulnerability depends also on

the modalities by which the objective danger of a situation is culturally translated and

represented in terms of risk "through processes of construction of common-sense in

which collectivities define what is perceived as a threat for their safety, and what instead

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[205]Ciccozzi, *Parola di scienza*.
[206]Ibid., 37.

is not."[207] In sum, Ciccozzi argues that having an accurate conception of risk involves having the cultural tools for identifying and distinguishing a threat from what is instead harmless, thus diminishing exposure to danger. In this sense, the anthropology of disasters has to account for the "local conceptions of risk"[208] and their relations to institutional risk communication.

It follows -- according to Ciccozzi and the prosecution -- that the communication from the MRC meeting aggravated the effects of the disaster by providing a reassuring diagnosis of the seismic situation to the local population. Such diagnosis contributed to the confusion of the local perception of risk, misinforming the Aquilani and persuading many that it was safe to stay inside their vulnerable houses despite significant shocks and the increasing magnitude of the tremors.

That "reassuring diagnosis" also helped to persuade many Aquilani that their reactions to the fear of earthquakes along with the traditional cultural practice of going outside after serious shocks not only was unmotivated, but also superstitious. The official remarks released to the local media on March 31 by De Bernardinis and Stati (as CPA officials) and the local authorities (Mayor of L'Aquila Massimo Cialente), reinforced by the presence of three of the six experts involved in the MRC meeting (Barberi, Calvi, and Dolce), convinced the local public that it was wiser and more reasonable to remain indoors despite the known vulnerability of the buildings and the ongoing seismic swarm. Thus, the messages conveyed to the public on that occasion, according to the prosecution, contributed with other factors to "causing" some of the casualties of the L'Aquila earthquake.

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[207]Ibid.
[208]Ibid.

In the following sections, I will illustrate in more detail the Aquilani's experience of what in their interpretation can be defined as an institutional rhetoric of "disastrous reassurance."[209] Along with the interpretation of the Aquilani, I will also analyze the narrative of the scientists, whose accounts of the MRC meeting during the trial provide yet another perspective on the events of March 31, different from that of the Aquilani but also from that communicated to the public during the official press conference and coverage by the local media on that day. I will put these two perspectives in dialogue by reading the court documents in which the judge justifies the verdict against the seven MRC members who attended the meeting in L'Aquila. In order to foreground the local narrative, I will also incorporate in the analysis textual evidence from Ciccozzi's anthropologic consultation for the prosecution, and the oral accounts of relatives of the victims and local activists that I have collected in L'Aquila during summer 2013. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with a consideration of the implications of this case for rhetoric of science broadly, and for the communication of risk specifically.

Understanding the Local Context

One of the main issues in the controversy about the MRC trial is related to the different conceptions held by different publics about the role of the MRC scientists. Carolyn Miller talks about the origins of risk analysis in the United States and its original codification that helped define what we consider the standard division between "risk assessment" and "risk management," two phases of risk analysis, in which the first is a

[209]Ciccozzi, *Parola di scienza*.

scientific task that has to be carried out by experts, and the latter concerns politicians only, being a process that builds on the results of risk assessment but also involves "social, economic, and political concerns" in order to "weigh policy alternatives and select the most appropriate regulatory action."[210] This clear demarcation of tasks, according to the prosecution, is not explicitly regulated in Italian laws and it is a central issue in the debates around the responsibilities of the MRC scientists during the trial. The scientists and experts claimed that they did what they were supposed to do, namely assessing risks. However, the prosecution argued that the inaccurate communication of risks to the public in L'Aquila and the lack of deliberation about guidelines for the public and procedural advice for the local authorities represented serious negligence on part of the MRC.

The MRC experts (and the international scientific community) argued that their tasks regarded exclusively the risk assessment phase, which involved providing the CPA with a scientific consultation about the situation of seismic risk in L'Aquila. According to this perspective, their responsibilities were limited to the assessment of seismic risks in Abruzzo, but did not include the management or the communication of risks to the citizens, those were instead tasks exclusively attributed to the CPA officials. Thus, the blame for the miscommunication following the MRC meeting in L'Aquila, according to the experts, had to be placed exclusively on the CPA officials and the local authorities for having misrepresented what had been discussed during the meeting, and for having communicated inaccurate information to the local media and to the Aquilani.

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[210]Carolyn R Miller, "The Presumptions of Expertise: The Role of Ethos in Risk Analysis," *Configurations: A Journal of Literature, Science, and Technology Configurations: A Journal of Literature, Science, and Technology* 11, no. 2 (2003): 166.

However, the prosecution built a case that demonstrated how this distinction of tasks cannot be applied to the MRC, which as a department of the CPA is legally required to follow the same laws that regulate the tasks of any other CPA official, which also include: (1) the task of communicating to the public, and (2) that of deliberating to suggest actions aimed at minimizing the citizens' exposure to risks and hazards. Furthermore, according to the prosecution, this distinction could not subsist in the case of the MRC meeting in L'Aquila specifically, because it was an emergency meeting called for the explicitly stated reason of "providing the citizens of Abruzzo with all the information available to the scientific community about the ongoing seismic activity of the last few weeks,"[211] as expressed in the official press release of the CPA that announced the exceptional meeting of the MRC in L'Aquila in the afternoon of March 31, 2009. By closely reading the Italian laws that regulate the MRC, the prosecutors argued that the MRC members were required by law to fulfill the obligations of "clear and accurate" communication of risks to the public, and to the deliberation and implementation of actions aimed at minimizing the citizens' exposure to risks, namely risk management.

In the prosecutors' memo, one full section is dedicated to reading the current Italian laws that regulate the functions of the MRC, with specific attention to the MRC's duty to inform the public.[212] The prosecution argued that there is an "institutional

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[211]"Memoria_picuti.pdf," 15.
[212]In particular, the prosecution read the Italian laws n.225 of February 24, 1992 (that establishes the foundations of the CPA) and n.401 of November 9, 2001 (that regulates the coordination of the Civil Protection structures) to establish the "relation of homogeneity, coordination, and integration" between the functions/duties of the CPA and those of the MRC. The "reciprocal osmosis," between MRC and CPA is also reinforced, according to the prosecution, by the Prime Minister's Decree dated July

osmosis" between the CPA and MRC for what regards their ultimate goals and the

specific functions to further those goals as regulated by the Italian law. The MRC, being

a Department of the CPA specifically established to carry out to risk "forecast" and

"prevention," as it is also explicitly stated in its description on the official CPA

Institutional website[213], in their perspective, was required not only to carry out the risk-

assessment activities but also those of risk-prevention, that could potentially encompass

not only risk communication, but also meaningful contribution to the risk-management

phase.

On these foundations, the prosecution elaborated its charges of negligence against

the MRC experts, accusing the 6 scientists and the CPA official De Bernardinis of the

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31, 2008, which specifies that the CPA "acts to support the activities of the MRC." In brief, the prosecutors explained that on March 31, 2009, the current laws regulating the functions of the CPA, and by extension the MRC as a Department of the CPA instituted as its consulting organ and precisely called "National Committee for the Forecast and Prevention of Major Risks," established: According to the article 5 of the Law n.401 dated November 9, 2001, the activities of civil protection involve those that are,*"Finalized to protect the life, the properties, the settlements and the environment from damages or hazards deriving from natural catastrophes or other major events that cause situation of major risks";* Furthermore,*"The CPA promotes the execution of periodic exercises, of coordination with the Italian Regions and the local authorities, and of information of the interested population.* According to the articles 2 and 3 of the Law n.225 dated February 24, 1992, *-The CPA's functions are defined as those aimed at the forecast and prevention of various hypothesis of risk, at helping the people affected by situations of emergency, and at enacting every other activity necessary to overcome those emergencies.*

-The forecast of risks consists in all the activities aimed at the study and determination of the causes of catastrophic events, to the identification of risks, and of the zones of our territories potentially affected by those risks.

-The prevention consists in all the activities aimed at avoiding or reducing to the minimum the possibilities of damages deriving from situations of risk and emergency, on the basis of the knowledge acquired with the activities of forecast (emphasis in original).

[213]"Commissione Nazionale Grandi Rischi | Dipartimento Protezione Civile," accessed November 7, 2013, http://www.protezionecivile.gov.it/jcms/it/commissione_grandi_rischi.wp.

same violations. In order to further support their argument, the prosecutors cited other

articles (5.4 and 7bis) from the law n.401/2001 that emphasizes the duty of informing the

public in all the cases in which the CPA intervention is relevant and useful. Furthermore,

they read the law n.150/2000 that regulates the duties of information and communication

of the public administration and the Decree 54/2000 that establishes the duties of the

local authorities in cases of public danger and emergencies, giving them the power to

intervene by coordinating public activities aimed to minimize the risk for the people.

According to the prosecution, the MRC meeting has to be interpreted as a meeting

coordinated by the local authorities and the CPA in order to analyze the situation of local

alert and emergency deriving from the Abruzzo seismic swarm of 2009. In this context,

the MRC, defined as the CPA Department in charge of "risk forecasts and prevention"

was called to L'Aquila for an urgent meeting to assess the local seismic situation, and to

provide the CPA and the local authorities with "clear and accurate" information to

communicate to the public in L'Aquila. The reason for calling an exceptional meeting in

L'Aquila, specifically, was exactly that of making the necessary information regarding

the forecast and prevention of risk available immediately to the local authorities and the

residents of the town. This public commitment was also stated and reinforced in the

minutes of the MRC meeting, where it is possible to read: "all the major scientific

authorities of the seismic sector participate in this meeting in order to produce the most

reliable and up-to-date account of what is going on in L'Aquila."[214]

To summarize, the prosecution stressed that the MRC should have provided

"correct, clear, and complete information" to the local authorities, to the CPA officials,

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[214]"Memoria_picuti.pdf," 15.

and by proxy to the public, in order to enact its goal of risk forecast and prevention. The MRC, according to the prosecutors, failed to provide this "clear and accurate" information to the Mayor of L'Aquila and to the local CPA official, making it possible, for them and De Bernardinis, to communicate to the public inaccurate and contradictory information that ended up reassuring the Aquilani, and ultimately increasing their exposure to the seismic risk.

Because of the obligations prescribed by the law cited in their memo, the prosecutors framed all the MRC participants as equally responsible for the same charges, namely the six scientists as MRC experts, and De Bernardinis as government official (CPA vice-President). The prosecution's case, in fact, is grounded on the idea that the communication that was passed to the public during the press conference held in L'Aquila on March 31, along with the lack of the release of any guideline on how to deal with a situation of potential seismic risk in Abruzzo, demonstrated serious negligence on part of the MRC experts and the CPA officials alike.

Furthermore, the alleged "negligent" behavior of all the seven participants in the MRC meeting, according to the prosecution, contributed heavily in augmenting, rather than diminishing, the citizens' exposure to seismic risk. The reassuring messages issued by De Bernardinis and the local authorities, before and during the press conference held after the MRC meeting -- along with the fact that none of the experts refuted or corrected those inaccurate messages -- persuaded the Aquilani that they were overreacting to the seismic swarm's potential danger.

The ethos attributed to the scientists that participated in the MRC meeting validated the institutional reassurances issued on that day, thus convincing the Aquilani

that their perception of risk was exaggerated, and that their cautionary habit of getting out of their houses after a shock was an over-reaction and as such not a reasonable response to the ongoing seismic swarm. As it is highlighted in the trial statements of the many Aquilani who trusted the experts and the institutions, after March 31 many decided that it was more reasonable to remain indoors even after strong tremors because they perceived this recommendation to come directly from by the experts of MRC, the most reliable scientific source to which they had access.

Understanding the Perspectives at Stake in the MRC Trial

According to the official court documents, the scientists were prosecuted for "having carried out an approximate, generic, and inefficient evaluation of the risks related to the seismic activity in the territory of L'Aquila."[215] Furthermore, they were accused of "having released incomplete, imprecise, and contradictory information about the nature, the causes, and the dangers of the ongoing seismic activity to the following people: the CPA, the CPA's Abruzzo Officer Stati, the Mayor of L'Aquila Cialente, and the residents of L'Aquila."[216] Lastly, the consequences of these charges were those of "having induced the victims to remain indoors against their consolidated cautionary habits, thus causing their deaths at 3:32am of April 6, 2009."[217] In short, according to the prosecution, the inaccurate communication of the seismic risk to the Aquilani had been the MRC's fatal mistake: it induced many people, who had trusted the words of the experts, to sleep in

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[215]"Sentenza_grandi_rischi.pdf."
[216]Ibid.
[217]Ibid.

their homes during the night of the earthquake, thus ignoring their usual precautions, such as sleeping outside, which could have saved their lives.

The kind of communication circulating in L'Aquila after the MRC meeting, according to the Aquilani and the prosecution, produced an effect that is exactly the opposite of the intended aims of the CPA in general and the MRC specifically, as it increased the citizens' exposure to seismic risk instead of protecting them from potential hazards. Ultimately, according to the prosecution, the MRC's negligence contributed, along with other factors, to "causing" the deaths of several citizens who trusted the opinions of the experts and of the institutions. The prosecutors, in order to support this argument, were able to highlight during the trial the "causal relation" between the behavior of the victims on the night of April 5 and the communication that they had received after the MRC meeting, as verified through the oral accounts of the relatives of the deceased victims.

During the trial debates, however, the scientists and their lawyers insisted on the fact that they had never issued public reassurances to the Aquilani. In fact, they argued, the minutes of the MRC meeting strongly emphasize uncertainty about the seismic situation in L'Aquila, and the document, albeit short, represents accurately the discussion held in L'Aquila during the meeting of March 31.

According to the scientists, their conversation during the MRC meeting of March 31 could not, in any way, be represented as reassuring. They claimed, in fact, that the reassuring messages mentioned by the Aquilani were the result of a misunderstanding of the experts' conversations by the CPA officials and local authorities that attended the MRC meeting and then spoke to the public during the press conference (De Bernardinis,

Stati, Cialente), and of an unfortunate amplification of the misunderstood information by the local media. Some of the experts (Boschi, Selvaggi, Eva) also claimed they were not invited to the press conference, and disassociated themselves completely from the statements that De Bernardinis released to the local media on March 31.

Several questions arise from these polarized perspectives of the two main parties involved in the trial: If the scientists did not reassure the local public directly and did not say anything reassuring during their meeting, why did the public end up receiving inaccurate and even "scientifically flawed" (in the words of Boschi and Selvaggi) information? And what is the significance of the local context that generated the necessity for the exceptional meeting of the MRC in L'Aquila on March 31, 2009? In the following sections I will address these questions by foregrounding the necessity to situate the meeting in the local context in order to better understand the origin of the controversies about this trial.

At a general level, this case also deserves closer attention because it very powerfully demonstrates that communication matters in fundamental ways. Through this case, rhetoric, communication, and risk communication in particular, reveal themselves as social processes capable of determining matters of life and death. Paraphrasing Michael McGee in his call for a materialist model of rhetoric, it is possible to identify the materiality of communication in its intrinsic capability to produce consequences: "to say that we study rhetoric in a material way is not to claim that rhetoric is material because it is a sensible discourse I may handle and manipulate like rock. Rather, discourse is *part* of

a material phenomenon particularly useful because it is residual and persistent."[218]

Moreover, adopting a materialist conception of rhetoric allows critics to study rhetoric and its consequences in a relational way. As McGee suggests, it is important to understand rhetoric in context; by paying attention to the relations among different discourses circulating about the event, it is possible to accurately reconstruct the macro-rhetorical experience of L'Aquila's MRC trial.[219] Rhetoric, as McGee conceives it, is larger than discourse and manifests itself in complex interactions of discourses and audiences in specific occasions, thus producing changes in context.[220] This study aims, in particular, to explain how different discourses originating from the same macro-rhetorical context of the MRC trial circulated and found support almost exclusively among different publics, thus producing different interpretations and perspectives on the MRC case in different publics: the local one, by the crater's residents, and the scientists' one, also circulating in the national and international public and technical spheres.

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[218]Barbara A. Biesecker and John Louis Lucaites, *Rhetoric, Materiality, & Politics* (Peter Lang, 2009), 32.

[219] See McGee's illustration of the relationship between rhetoric and discourse: "We can reconstruct the nature, scope, and consequence of a nuclear explosion by analyzing its residue when the raw matter and even the energy inherent in its occurrence have dissipated. Thus it is possible to reconstruct the nature, scope, and consequence of rhetoric by analyzing "speech" even when "speaker," "audience," "occasion," and "change" dissipate into half-remembered history. Reconstruction of *the whole phenomenon*, it seems to me, is a *prius* to an accounting of the rhetorical, for it is the whole of "speaker/ speech/ audience/ occasion/change" which impinges on us: to confuse rhetoric with a discourse is the same error as confounding fallout with nuclear explosion."

[220]Biesecker and Lucaites, *Rhetoric, Materiality, & Politics*, 32.

Understanding the MRC Meeting as CPA's Intervention to Disprove

Giuliani

During the last week of March 2009, the reassuring diagnosis that followed the MRC meeting was sharing the local headlines with the news regarding the failure of a prediction of a "disastrous" earthquake that, according to Giampaolo Giuliani, the retired lab technician of the National Physics Labs of the Gran Sasso (INFN) and a local self-professed seismic "expert," should have occurred in Sulmona (a town 40 miles away from L'Aquila) on the afternoon of March 29, 2009. Giuliani had communicated his prediction through a personal phone call to the Mayor of Sulmona who talked to the local media, generating a situation of alarm among the residents of the town. The "disastrous" earthquake never happened in Sulmona, but Giampaolo Giuliani was sued for having "generated a false alarm" and he was severely reprimanded by the CPA.[221] In the meantime, the local media in L'Aquila covered the story, contributing to catalyzing the public's attention on Giuliani's pseudo-scientific "predictions."

Giuliani, who does not hold any scientific degree and has never completed any official scientific training, claimed that he could "predict" earthquakes through the measurement of radon gas variations underground, specifying that he could make those predictions between 6 and 24 hours before the event, and with a probability of accuracy of 80%. However, Giuliani's method is not his own discovery. The radon gas variation measurement is an earthquake prediction method well known to the international

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[221]"L'esperto Denunciato per Il Suo Allarme «Confermo: Lo Si Poteva Prevedere» - Corriere Della Sera," accessed November 22, 2013, http://www.corriere.it/cronache/09_aprile_06/previsioni_terremoto_giuliani_aac2c71e -2273-11de-9ce1-00144f02aabc.shtml?fr=box_primopiano.

scientific community, but considered of very low reliability.[222] Giuliani monitored the

radon variations during the months of the seismic swarm, and he spoke to the local

newspaper *Il Centro* on February 18, 2009 predicting two shocks of low magnitude,

which despite the constant seismic activity of those days, never happened. However, in

less than a month, and before the episode of the failed prediction of a quake in Sulmona,

he became a local celebrity. The interest around his "predictions," that he spread locally

via word of mouth and social media, even after having being sued and encouraged to

remain silent after March 29, grew proportionally with the increased frequency and

magnitude of the seismic swarm.[223]

After the earthquake of April 6, 2009, he was often portrayed as a local "prophet"

who had predicted the earthquake, but had not been listened to by the authorities.

Giuliani's neighbors, friends, and Facebook followers claimed to have survived the

earthquake because he encouraged them to remain safe outdoors and sleep in their cars on

April 6. Other people claimed that Giuliani adjusted his prediction only after the

disastrous earthquake of April 6 had already happened, and consider him a local

charlatan.

In this context, regardless of the local divergent opinions on Giuliani's persona, it

is important to highlight that his visibility in the local media during the pre-earthquake

period, along with his continuous announcements, had a serious impact on the framing of

the institutional communication of risks to the people in L'Aquila. As Giuseppe

Zamberletti -- founder and former President of the CPA and current President Emeritus

of the MRC -- declared during an interview for *Il Manifesto* on March 29, 2010: "In order

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[222]Ciccozzi, *Parola di scienza*.
[223]Ibid.

to disprove the alarms spread by Giuliani, they (MRC/CPA) improperly ended up communicating reassurances to the population."[224] Ciccozzi also supports this interpretation in his consultation:

> In a town where since four months the residents were exposed to a daily bombardment of small shocks and to the messages of a sort of a "scientific diviner" who claimed to be able to predict those shocks, like a meteorologist who informs us that tomorrow it will rain, it's easy to realize that the MRC meeting was framed more as a delegitimization of the inconvenient character, who was making predictions outside of the scientific institutions surrounded by an almost mystical general attention, than as a meeting aimed at providing information about the probability of risk and on recommending behaviors to adopt in case of potential danger.[225]

This background on the MRC meeting, emerging from the local context of public attention for Giuliani's questionable predictions, is relevant insofar as it contributed to frame the meeting as a debate between the MRC experts representing the side of mainstream science, and Giuliani, the local earthquake-prophet portrayed by official scientists as a charlatan, or in Bertolaso's words as "an imbecile who has fun spreading false alarms."[226]

The CPA's attitude towards Giuliani and the controversy frame that arose in the media in the days before the meeting also portrayed him as a local celebrity, focusing even more attention on Giuliani's announcements in the days immediately preceding the earthquake. As sometimes happens in the cases of manufactured scientific controversies analyzed by Leah Ceccarelli, "the narrative of controversy thus produced identifies skeptics as heroes in an unfolding scientific revolution, oppressed by mainstream

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[224]Ibid., 131.
[225]Ibid.
[226]"L'esperto Denunciato per Il Suo Allarme «Confermo: Lo Si Poteva Prevedere» - Corriere Della Sera."

scientists who are ideologically deaf to their appeals and who try to silence them so that others are not exposed to their heresy."[227] In the case of Giuliani, however, contrarily to what happens in the manufactured controversies studied by Ceccarelli, where the skeptics promote uncertainty and the mainstream scientists argue for certainty, the mainstream scientists in this case found themselves defending uncertainty in earthquake predictions in the face of the deterministic pseudo-scientific predictions of the local self-professed expert. The scientists, during the MRC meeting of March 31, focused on defending their stance about the impossibility of predicting earthquakes against Giuliani's alleged ability to make reliable quake predictions with a margin of a few hours of anticipation of a seismic event.

In brief, it is important to highlight this metalogue between mainstream science and Giampaolo Giuliani that was weaved into the discussions of the experts during MRC meeting of March 31. Because of the frame arising from the context of Giuliani's popularity and the alarm that his predictions were spreading among the Aquilani, the MRC meeting became a venue to defend the authority of the experts in terms of evaluation of seismic risk, against Giuliani's outdated method based on radon measurement. However, as Zamberletti noted in the interview cited above, in order to disprove Giuliani's statements and damage his credibility among the Aquilani, the CPA ended up disproving not only Giuliani's method of earthquake prediction, and the very scientific possibility of such an endeavor, but also the scenario that Giuliani had been forecasting in the days before the meeting, namely the possibility of a disastrous earthquake.

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[227]Leah Ceccarelli, "Manufactured Scientific Controversy: Science, Rhetoric, and Public Debate," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 14, no. 2 (2011): 4.

The consequences arising from this argumentative mode are serious, precisely because, in order to discredit Giuliani, after the MRC meeting the CPA communicated to the public a misleading message that ended up being interpreted by the Aquilani as a strong reassurance. The messages that the public received concerned not only the impossibility of predicting earthquakes (to refute and delegitimize Giuliani), but also the idea that a "disastrous earthquake" (that was the object of the alarms spread by Giuliani) was to be considered out of the question. This intrinsically contradictory message concerning the impossibility of predicting earthquakes, accompanied by the implicit "prediction" that a disastrous earthquake was not going to happen, ended up assuming a strong reassuring connotation in the eyes of the local public. Ciccozzi also explained this dynamic in his trial consultation:

> In order to delegitimize the "unfair competition" of a "non-typical expert" that was stoking the fire of the alarm, the institutions ended up throwing water on it, extinguishing not only the risk of public psychosis, but also the possibility of shedding light on the actual dangers of the situation. If Giuliani's attempts were amplifying the perception of risk, the communication following the MRC meeting not only sedated that perception, but it also leveraged it to discredit Giuliani: the reassuring representation of the situation is not the consequence of Giuliani's "delegitimization," rather Giuliani's "delegitimization" was only possible by issuing reassurances.[228]

In other words, the implicit need to delegitimize Giuliani generated an argumentative mode in which the negation of Giuliani's authority in terms of earthquake predictions was made possible by the negation of the scenario that Giuliani was forecasting in those days, namely that of a potentially destructive earthquake.

The argumentative strategy employed in the institutional communication to the public after the MRC meeting, generated a paradoxical message that: (1) denied the

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[228]Ciccozzi, *Parola di scienza*, 132.

possibility of making earthquake predictions, but at the same time, (2) provided an equally scientifically flawed "forecast" suggesting the practical impossibility of the disastrous event by arguing that the constant release of seismic energy was a favorable sign, and that, in fact, there was "no danger." This dissonance, interestingly, was not immediately obvious to the Aquilani who felt reassured by the institutional communications of March 31. The cognitive gap arising from this conceptual tension: "predicting earthquakes is impossible + a destructive earthquake is not going to happen in L'Aquila" was likely resolved by the local public by understanding these claims as contextualized in their local reality. Reading these statements from a local perspective, the impossibility of predicting earthquakes is interpreted as a direct reference to Giuliani's method. Thus, for the Aquilani, this claim translated as "Giuliani cannot predict earthquakes," resolving the cognitive dissonance with the second claim by inferring that although no one can predict earthquakes, there was no reason to worry, "no danger," according to the "real" experts, because of the gradual ongoing "release" of energy through the seismic swarm. The ethos of the official experts, who were believed to be the sources of this message, also helped to resolve, for the public, the intrinsic contradiction that was being communicated on that occasion.

Understanding the MRC Meeting as CPA's Intervention to Reassure the Public

There is more to be said about the framing of the MRC meeting in relation to Giuliani's case and the local context of public alarm. In particular, after having explored how Giuliani's alleged predictions influenced both the framing of the institutional

communication to the public, and the experts' conversations during that meeting, it is also worth exploring how the idea of organizing the meeting in L'Aquila was conceived by Guido Bertolaso, President of the CPA at the time, and later Extraordinary Chief in charge of managing the post-earthquake emergency in L'Aquila.

Bertolaso, during a conversation with Daniela Stati on March 30, 2009, described the upcoming MRC meeting as a strategic way to reassure the public through a "media operation" in which the experts' ethos was instrumental to placating the local public alarm in Abruzzo. The phone-tapped dialogue, published by the national newspaper *La Repubblica* during the MRC trial proceedings, caused an investigation into Bertolaso's role, and another trial related to the MRC meeting. The charges against Bertolaso have recently been archived because none of the MRC experts declared that they were influenced by the CPA's President before the meeting in L'Aquila. Regardless, it is salient here to note how Bertolaso's statements about the meeting turned out to be strikingly consistent with the events of March 31, and especially with the declarations released by De Bernardinis during the press conference and his interview of March 31. Bertolaso called Daniela Stati in the evening of March 30, 2009, to announce the extraordinary MRC meeting planned for the next day, saying:

> Bertolaso: Listen, De Bernardinis will call you soon, my vice-President, because I told him to organize a meeting there in L'Aquila, tomorrow, about this ongoing seismic swarm, so that we can silence any imbecile and placate any illation or worry….
> Stati: thank you, Guido, thanks a lot.
> Bertolaso: But, you have to tell to your team to avoid press releases in which they say there won't be any more earthquake shocks…because that's bullshit, and we should never say such things when we talk about earthquakes…
> Stati: Okay, good.
> Bertolaso: I was told that that a news agency is reporting that we "do not predict any more quakes"…but we should never say such things, Daniela!!

Not even under torture…

Stati: I apologize for them Guido, I did not know, I'm just out of a council meeting…I will try to block the release…

Betolaso: No problem, no worries. However, tell them that when they have to make a press release, they must speak to my media team…they have a *honoris causa* degree in communication in cases of emergency, they know how to behave in these cases in order to avoid boomerang effects…because, let's say we have an earthquake shock in two hours, then what are we going to say? Do you understand? Earthquakes are a minefield, we need to be very cautious…Anyway, we will fix this thing…now De Bernardinis will call you to decide where you want to host the meeting…I'm not coming, but Zamberletti, Barberi, Boschi, all of the best Italian experts in seismology will be there. I'll have them come to L'Aquila, you decide where to meet, I don't really care… this meeting is organized as more of a media operation, you understand?

Stati: Yes, yes.

Bertolaso: So, the best experts in earthquakes will say …it is a normal situation, those phenomena happen, it's better to have 100 shocks of 4 degrees Richter magnitude than silence…because 100 shocks will release energy and there never will be the big quake, the one that hurts, do you understand?

Stati: Okay.

Bertolaso: Okay, you and De Bernardinis please decide where to hold the meeting, and make sure that everyone knows that this meeting is not happening because we are scared or worried, but it is happening because we want to reassure the people…and you know, instead of having me or you speaking, we will have the best scientists in the field of seismology speak for us. [229]

This phone-tapped conversation between Bertolaso and Stati is significant because it reveals what seems to be the main motivation behind the need for a special meeting of the MRC in L'Aquila, namely silencing any "imbecile," and placating the worries and the alarms spread by Giuliani among the local residents. It is also worth noting that Bertolaso described the future MRC meeting as a mere "media operation," rather than as a serious gathering of experts called to thoroughly assess the risks related to the seismic swarm in Abruzzo. In Bertolaso's description, in short, the gathering of experts was portrayed as

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[229]"GRANDI RISCHI: INTERCETTAZIONE SHOCK! BERTOLASO: TRANQUILLIZZIAMO LA GENTE - YouTube," accessed November 26, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rROgB5QMgHs.

instrumental to reassuring the Abruzzo residents and to placate the unnecessary alarm generated by Giuliani, the "imbecile" to whom he refers at the very beginning of the phone call. Even more interestingly, Bertolaso communicated with full confidence to Stati what he expected the experts to say at the end of their meeting. He informed Stati that the scientists would announce that the seismic swarm was a normal phenomenon for the Abruzzo region, and that the many shocks could be considered as a favorable sign because through the release of seismic energy they would prevent a big quake -- the destructive quake allegedly predicted by Giuliani -- the "one that hurts," from "ever" happening.

Tracing this theme in the phone tapped conversation is meaningful to better understand the communication dynamics that followed the MRC meeting, because it makes it possible to identify a possible source for the controversial information that was communicated to the Aquilani on the following day by Bernardo De Bernardinis. In fact, as it emerges from their accounts and from the meeting's minutes, the scientists did not frame directly the seismic swarm as favorable or unfavorable, and never suggested that the release of seismic energy was a positive sign that could make it possible to rule out the possibility of a big quake. Bertolaso, however, did mention this specific interpretation, that was later repeated by De Bernardinis during his infamous interview. During the trial, Bertolaso pleaded ignorance in seismology and claimed that he expressed this interpretation in various conversations with the seismologists, specifying that none of them ever told him that it was scientifically flawed or even just inaccurate.[230]

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[230]"Video Rai.TV - Presa Diretta - Irresponsabili - Presa Diretta Del 20/01/2013," min. 24, accessed October 20, 2013,

During the proceedings of the MRC-related trial of Bertolaso, other phone-tapped

conversations were published in the Italian magazine *L'Espresso*. Those conversations

did not frame Bertolaso as guilty of having orchestrated the "media operation" by using

the experts' credibility, but they highlighted, once again, the main preoccupation that

catalyzed the MRC meeting in L'Aquila: refuting Giuliani's predictions that were

causing alarm in the public. This problem seemed to represent the CPA's main and

biggest concern, and seemed to have been given priority, and almost exclusive attention,

over the assessment of seismic risks in Abruzzo, as we can also infer from the

conversations between Bertolaso and some of the MRC experts. Just after the end of the

MRC meeting and the following press conference, Franco Barberi called Bertolaso,

saying:

> Hello Guido, this is Franco Barberi. I'm with De Bernardinis, and we just
> left L'Aquila. I think we did what we needed to do… Stating clearly that it
> is impossible to predict earthquakes, and that the messages that are
> circulating in L'Aquila completely lack credibility…and then also an
> evaluation of the situation for what it is possible at the moment…in brief I
> think everything went well.[231]

A similar report about the meeting emerges from the phone call that the defendant Dolce

made on the same occasion, in order to update Bertolaso after the meeting and the press

conference:

> Hello Guido, this is Mauro Dolce. I just wanted to give you a few updates
> about the MRC meeting in L'Aquila. I was with Barberi, Boschi, Calvi,
> and Eva. De Bernardinis was there, too…I think it went really well. There
> was the local CPA officer Daniela Stati and the Mayor of L'Aquila…We

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http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-f91d8def-b397-41cc-86ff-7b52c24a2dbd.html.

[231]"Barberi Chiama Bertolaso: 'Quello Che Dovevamo Fare Abbiamo Fatto' - Video l'Espresso," accessed November 25, 2013, http://video.espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/barberi-chiama-bertolaso-quello-che-dovevamo-fare-abbiamo-fatto/1229/1229.

insisted quite a bit on the fact that there are no instruments to make predictions, and Stati was very happy about hearing that…Afterwards, there was the press conference. In short, everything went well.[232]

A different perspective on the meeting and the subsequent press conference emerged from the accounts of Enzo Boschi, and of the INGV scientists. Differently from Barberi and Dolce, Boschi did not attend the press conference after the meeting, and he claimed to not have been invited to participate. Boschi released a video interview for *Presa Diretta*, a TV program of investigative reporting on Rai3, a public Italian TV channel, in which he openly and harshly criticized Bertolaso, also providing his resistive perspective on the meeting of March 31. It is worth, in this context, reporting the full transcription of his interview:

> Journalist: Why did you go to L'Aquila?
> Boschi: I went to do my duty, to respond to questions. We initially talked about the issue of Abruzzo's situation of seismicity, and then we talked about the issue of predicting earthquakes. Only then, I understood that the meeting was organized to refute…I mean…to formally say: "it is impossible to predict quakes."
> Journalist: You didn't know that after that meeting a reassurance was communicated to the Aquilani?
> Boschi: No, I didn't know anything. I discovered about the "media operation" months after, a while ago. Probably Bertolaso was even in good faith…I know him, he's not stupid and he's not a criminal… but the President of the CPA, after a bit, starts feeling like…
> Journalist: Like a God?
> Boschi: …close. I noticed even with his predecessors… this feeling of having the people waiting for you, waiting to know information…or, the two or three helicopters they have available, the planes…it's dangerous. A man that does that job needs to have a strong sense of dimensions…and in cases like this one might arrive to think, in his subconscious…you know, "earthquakes will happen when I have the time, cause now I'm busy"…
> Journalist: Did you ever take orders from Bertolaso?
> Boschi: I do not consider Bertolaso capable of influencing me.

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[232]"Dolce Telefona a Bertolaso: 'Non Ci Sono Strumenti per La Previsione' - Video l'Espresso," accessed November 25, 2013, http://video.espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/dolce-telefona-a-bertolaso-non-ci-sono-strumenti-per-la-previsione/1230/1230.

> Journalist: Don't you think that the risk analysis was carried out in a superficial way?
> Boschi: No, no, I don't think so.
> Journalist: A bit hasty?
> Boschi: Yes. The meeting was hasty. But the very serious and appalling thing was not what we said during the meeting…it's what came out in the public communications after the meeting. If we had to organize the information for the people, good information, we would have needed hours or days.
> Journalist: What did you think after the meeting, when you left?
> Boschi: I thought: why did we even come here anyway? I was with Selvaggi, and we guessed that it must have been for the Giuliani problem.
> Journalist: But…thus…was the meeting a farce?
> Boschi: You can say that, but I'm not saying it.[233]

Boschi, in fact, stated during the trial that he did not know about the press conference, and that he was shocked to discover about it only after April 6, 2009. Specifically, he said that he was caught off guard by "what was being communicated to the journalists," and by the "modalities and contents of the communication to the media," especially because those contents and modalities "had not mutually been agreed upon, in any way, during the meeting."[234]

Boschi also reported that he was surprised by the fact that the meeting had been closed without a "unanimous final deliberation" and that there were several people not belonging to the MRC attending the meeting.[235] Similarly, Eva, who also did not participate in the press conference, said that he didn't know about it, and that if he would have been invited, he would have strongly contested the content of the communications to the media:

> Eva: If I were there I would have contested the content of the information being communicated. I would have dissented, or at least I would have brought up some scientific corrections. I dissent strongly with the idea that

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[233]"Video Rai.TV - Presa Diretta - Irresponsabili - Presa Diretta Del 20/01/2013."
[234]"Memoria_picuti.pdf," 221.
[235]Ibid.

the seismic sequence was releasing seismic energy and thus it could be interpreted as a favorable sign. That proposition is scientifically flawed.[236]

The only other attendee that participated in the meeting, but not in the press conference, Selvaggi, also strongly contested the content of the information communicated to the local public. He said that he was not an official member of the MRC, and that he participated only because invited by Boschi, his boss at the INGV. He also declared to not know anything about the press conference:

> Selvaggi: I did not know about the press conference, and I did not contribute, in any way, to what has been communicated during that conference. I am extraneous to those public declarations. Regarding what had been said, I dissent strongly from the concept that the seismic sequence released energy and that it was to be considered as a favorable sign: I never supported such an interpretation, and this theme was never mentioned during the meeting. […] I also want to add that I dissent on the opinion according to which that seismic sequence could be considered normal, because we cannot express a judgment of what is the norm for the numerous seismic sequences that happen in the Appennines.[237]

Finally, about the press conference, engineer Calvi, who attended the event with the other defendant Dolce, when interrogated about his presence declared that he had no memories of it, and that he could say that he was there only because he was visible on the video of that event: "I did not actively participate in the press conference, from the point of view of communicating information. I can tell that I was there, obviously, because I'm visible in the video."[238]

From this reading/mapping of the accounts of the several MRC experts from the court documents, the phone-tapped conversations, and their interviews, we can notice a

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[236]"Video Rai.TV - Presa Diretta - Irresponsabili - Presa Diretta Del 20/01/2013," 219.
[237]"Memoria_picuti.pdf," 214.
[238]"Video Rai.TV - Presa Diretta - Irresponsabili - Presa Diretta Del 20/01/2013."

clear demarcation for what regards the involvement in the production of messages and public communication of risks that followed the MRC meeting. To summarize: Bertolaso organized the meeting that in his vision was meant to be a "media operation" to carry out in L'Aquila. He invited the best experts in the field of seismology, confident that they would reassure the citizens, interpreting the seismic swarm as a positive sign that would prevent the "big one" from happening. This media operation had the function of debunking the local pseudo-scientific predictions spread by Giuliani. The day after, the experts did meet in L'Aquila, for less than one hour, and De Bernardinis communicated to the people that there was "no danger" and that the seismic swarm was not only "normal" but also indicative of a "favorable situation," because it released the seismic energy and prevented a worst kind of earthquake from happening. Barberi, President of the MRC and volcanologist, participated in the press conference with De Bernardinis without intervening to rectify the information that was being communicated. Calvi, eingeneer and Director of the European Research Center in Earthquake Eingeneering, and Dolce, Head of the CPA seismic-risk office, attended the conference without actively participating or intervening in the dialogue with the media and the local authorities. Boschi, Selvaggi, and Eva, all scientists of the INGV, were not invited and did not participate in the press conference. They all strongly dissented on the content on the public communication released for the public.

It is significant to acknowledge these different positions emerging from the investigations of the MRC trials. First, there is evidence that some of the MRC attendees were more aware than others of the main but unofficial aim of the meeting (namely the necessity to disprove Giuliani to restore public order in L'Aquila), as shown by the

phone-tapped conversations of Barberi and Dolce with Bertolaso. Secondly, it is possible to establish a connection between Bertolaso's interpretation of the seismic swarm, and De Bernardinis's public account of it after the MRC meeting. The idea that the seismic swarm was positive in its alleged release of seismic energy had not been proposed or supported by any expert, and the only evidence that we can find to trace the source of this interpretation comes from the phone-tapped conversation between Bertolaso and Stati. Finally, the INGV scientists were not invited to participate in the press conference, and did not contribute to the communication activities of the MRC in any way.

Thus, this mapping of the discourses around the meeting and the press conference shows that the closer the MRC members were to Bertolaso (De Bernardinis, Barberi, Dolce, Calvi) and to the CPA in a continuum that goes from the world of the CPA to the world of science (represented in the meeting by the INGV scientists), the more aware they were of the aim of carrying out a "media operation" in L'Aquila. Although these nuances of involvement might not be considered relevant for the trial, because the same laws apply to all the seven MRC members, it is still relevant to contextualize them to better understand the discourses circulating about the meeting. In fact, this reconstruction shows that the closer some of the MRC experts were to the CPA, the more their perspective on the meeting was aligned to Bertolaso's one.

In conclusion, it is evident that the Aquilani told stories about having been reassured by the "scientists," the "seismologists" of the MRC, because they only had access to the public communication released to the media during the press conference or before and after the meeting, but not to what was said during the meeting itself. Those messages, furthermore, were framed as an official communication of what was said by

the expert during the MRC discussion. Thus, regardless of what was said in the meeting, a major problem has to be identified in the fact that those conversations were never communicated to the citizens who were exposed, instead, to a "scientifically flawed" interpretation of the seismic situation of Abruzzo, and to a contradictory information that ended up being received by the local public as a reassuring diagnosis. Interestingly, thus, not only does the content of the public communication of March 31 not correspond to that produced by the scientists during their meeting, but also those contents had not been communicated by the scientists or on behalf of the scientists. Rather, it seems that the reassuring but flawed messages that were passed to the Aquilani have to be attributed directly to the CPA.

Understanding the Local "Earthquake-Culture"

One final contextualization is necessary in order to understand the emplaced consequences of the public communication that circulated in L'Aquila before the 2009 quake. It regards the "earthquake-culture" mentioned several times throughout this analysis: namely the local popular knowledge about Abruzzo's seismicity that influences the local conceptions of seismic risk of the residents of L'Aquila.

In his anthropological consultation, Ciccozzi notes that the local "earthquake culture" in L'Aquila, according to the historian Alessandro Clementi, has to be interpreted anthropologically as an array of traditional local knowledge and practices, sedimented throughout the centuries as a popular rationalization of the experience of the past destructive earthquakes, and passed on orally through time. Ciccozzi interprets this local culture as "folklore," a set of conceptions about living in the world that is not

systematic, and usually handed down orally from a generation to the next. The folkloric

knowledge can be understood as a cultural reflection of the material conditions of life

within a community, and usually it consists in a set of fragmented, scattered, and multiple

knowledges about every day life.[239]

Among the Aquilani, one of these folkloric conceptions translated to a local

method for reducing the risk of dying under one's house rubble after a catastrophic

earthquake: the cautionary precaution of remaining outdoors for a few hours or even a

night after medium-intensity earthquake shocks. Ciccozzi defines it as "a collective latent

custom, deeply sedimented in the *genius loci* aquilano, which becomes active throughout

the years when a threatening earthquake shock happens, a rare but periodically recurring

event."[240]

According to Ciccozzi, this local "earthquake-culture" is like a "shadow," a

"subterranean knowledge" that during normal times almost represents a cause of shame,

as it is assimilated to a kind of inappropriate paranoia. In fact, Ciccozzi explains that this

is a peculiar kind of knowledge, rooted in the specific locale of L'Aquila and almost

unique in its dynamics:

> …that is latent in the local culture, because the need for normality
> determines the human instinct of removal of catastrophes, but it becomes
> manifest when the terror for a highly unlikely event, like those that in the
> past devastated the city of L'Aquila, generates the tension between two
> irreconcilable adaptive strategies: knowing when to be afraid, because not
> understanding the terror means dying, and forgetting that fear during
> everyday life, because it's not possible to always live in fear.[241]

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[239]Ciccozzi, *Parola di scienza*, 134.
[240]Ibid.
[241]Ibid.

Ciccozzi tells that historically, since the foundation of the town, the inhabitants of L'Aquila have experienced the periodic fury of earthquakes: Throughout the 700 years of history of the town, the population of L'Aquila has been decimated several times, causing overall more than 7000 deaths.

In 1348 a strong earthquake killed almost 1000 people, or 10% of the residents of the time. The emergence of the local earthquake-culture can be traced back historically to the seismic swarm of 1462, the first after the 1348 quake. Reading the medieval accounts of Francesco di Angeluccio di Bazzano, historians of L'Aquila have discovered that in 1462 a seismic swarm caused the enactment of a series of precautionary habits among the resident of L'Aquila that limited the victims of the violent earthquake of that year. In 1462, in fact, Cardinal Agnifili ordered the closure of the churches and decided to erect temporary altars outdoors, in the town squares. Temporary wooden barracks were built around the town market of Campo di Fossa, and in the empty spaces within the city walls. Because the 1348 earthquake was still fresh in the local memory, the enactment of those precautions saved many people in 1462. Another major earthquake struck L'Aquila again in 1703, anticipated by a seismic swarm, as well. In that case, however, the destruction of the previous catastrophe was too far in the past to be remembered, and no precautions were enacted. The 1703 quake caused more than 6000 victims, and since that mass slaughter, the residents of L'Aquila enacted the strategy of remembering the catastrophe, and understanding the seismic danger of their town. The collective memory of that local tragedy was symbolically sealed by changing the colors of the coat of arms of the town from white and red, into black and green: black for death and mourning, and green for hope. The Church of Santa Maria del Suffragio in the main Duomo Square was dedicated

to the 6000 victims of the 1703 earthquake, and it became known to the Aquilani as "Church of the Holy Souls" in memory of the quake victims.[242] Since then, the "earthquake-culture," understood as the cautionary habit of going outdoor in cases of seismic danger, started to be enacted collectively in every case of perceived serious seismic risk.

This collective reaction to seismic risk was triggered again by the earthquake of 4.1 Richter magnitude of March 30, when the local alarm in L'Aquila reached its peak during the seismic swarm of 2009, also calling the attention of the local authorities and the CPA. However, in his anthropologic consultation Ciccozzi underlined that this collective reaction, significantly, was not triggered as usual by the two heavy shocks on the night of April 5, which preceded the destructive quake happened at 3:32am of April 6. If before March 31 the Aquilani always followed their folkloric habit of spending a few hours or a night outdoors after a big tremor, on the night between April 5 and 6, despite two heavy earthquake shocks many people decided to remain indoors.

From the oral accounts of the relatives of the victims, and those of many survivors of the earthquakes, it is possible to understand that they did so because they had been deeply influenced by the public communication to which they had been exposed after the meeting of the MRC, as many of the Aquilani lucidly declared during the trial to the MRC, and as many others who were fortunately enough to not die that night remember in the stories that they tell about the night of the catastrophe. In the following sections, I will illustrate the local narrative of the Aquilani, in their own words and by telling their own stories. These stories come from oral accounts collected in L'Aquila during summer

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[242]Ibid., 135.

2013, and from some of the accounts of the relatives of the quake victims released in court during the MRC trial, or from Ciccozzi's anthropological consultation.

Divergent Narratives

This story does not hide any attack to science. On the contrary, this is the demonstration of the high regard the civil society has for the opinion of experts.

Giancarlo Sturloni, *A lesson from L'Aquila*[243]

The Narrative of the Aquilani

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, during the days of the victims' count, and the search for the last survivors to dig out of the rubble, a feeling of betrayal and disappointment started emerging among the survivors of the earthquake in L'Aquila. Ciccozzi, in his consultation, draws attention to one among the many amateur videos from the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, recorded during the night of April 6, 2009. In this short recording, three young men, most likely students, are escaping their house in downtown L'Aquila nearby Piazza Duomo, which was slowly getting crowded with quake survivors after the 3:32am earthquake. As we can assume from the damage visible in the house on the verge of collapsing, the building's doors must have been stuck, thus the three students escaped from a window, by climbing down using bed sheets as a rope.[244] In this video, later included in Sabina Guzzanti's documentary *Draquila*[245]*,* one

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[243]Sturloni, "A Lesson from L'Aquila."
[244]"Video Rai.TV - Presa Diretta - Irresponsabili - Presa Diretta Del 20/01/2013."
[245]"Draquila-L'Italia Che Trema. Il Nuovo Film Di Sabina Guzzanti," accessed October 25, 2013, http://www.draquila-ilfilm.it/; "▶ Draquila.L.Italia.Che.Trema.2010.iTALiAN.DVDRip.XviD-EgL[gogt].avi -

of the three terrified young men screams while running away from his house: "gotta tell it to the seismologists…those fools! There's nothing to worry about, uh?!"[246]

Ciccozzi notes that this spontaneous imprecation, coming from a man who had just escaped death, illustrates in a nutshell the significance of the claims made by the prosecution in the trial. In this video, the first words from a quake survivor immediately after having escaped death are precisely a scream against the reassuring messages that they attributed to the "seismologists," or the experts of the MRC. This video shows a genuine expression of disappointment and sense of betrayal related to the information that the citizens had been exposed to after the MRC meeting. According to Ciccozzi, it also shows that the "amplification of the exposure to risk produced from the experts was not a collectively and spontaneously manufactured interpretation in the process of scapegoating the scientists during the trial,"[247] rather, it was the actual effect of the persuasiveness of the reassuring messages that the people in L'Aquila received after the MRC meeting, as the spontaneous episode captured in the video illustrated.

Ciccozzi also reports that immediately after the earthquake tragedy the sense of betrayal and disappointment expressed by the young man in the video had become a shared feeling among the residents of L'Aquila. In their conversations, however, this sense of disappointment and betrayal about what they had been told by the scientists before the earthquake started to be translated into the idea of a "missed alarm." They started using the expression "missed alarm" to define the mistake that they were attributing to the MRC and the CPA.

YouTube," accessed October 25, 2013,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXjvpZYqP-M.
[246]Ciccozzi, *Parola di scienza*, 175.
[247]Ibid.

Four months after the earthquake, with the beginning of the investigations concerning the responsibilities of the experts, the idea of a "missed alarm" consolidated as the explanation for what had gone wrong in L'Aquila before the earthquake. This way of defining the responsibilities of the experts that circulated initially among the local residents, emerged as a conceptual shortcut to identify something that they felt had been managed in the wrong way, and then from the local common sense quickly migrated in the national media coverage of the post-earthquake situation.

The narrative of the "missed alarm" became dominant during the course of the trial on the mainstream media coverage of the event, generating in part the larger misunderstanding that I have discussed in the introduction. Ciccozzi, noted that in the aftermath of the verdict on Google.it the sentence "mancato allarme L'Aquila" was returning 582,000 results, and Google.it suggested the phrase "mancato allarme L'Aquila" as its first option from the typing of the letter "r" of "mancato allarme." In brief, this means that in the days after the sentence in terms of relevance of use online "mancato allarme L'Aquila" had overcome its hypernym "mancato allarme."[248] However, during the proceedings of the MRC trial, the Aquilani started realizing that the MRC's responsibilities were of a different nature, and did not consist in having failed to alarm the people, but rather they regarded having provided, or letting stand without correction, misleading information.

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[248]Ibid., 151.

A Rhetoric of Disastrous Reassurance: "Reassurance-ism"

One year after the earthquake, the public attorney Fabio Picuti deposited the first prosecution's memo to the court, thus making official the charges against the experts. The prosecution's official charges against the experts did *not* regard a missed alarm. Rather, they had to do with having reassured the people, and with having provided reassurances that turned out to be disastrous for the many Aquilani who had trusted what the institutions communicated to them on March 31, 2009. According to Ciccozzi and the prosecution, the cultural perception of risk can increase or diminish the local vulnerability of a place. Ciccozzi explains that:

> …when defining the human responsibilities of a physical disaster, an unmotivated reassurance has the same weight of a building that is not built respecting the current anti-seismic security norms, because it augments the exposure to danger, and it amplifies the disastrous effects of a catastrophic event. In L'Aquila, people died for the unfortunate combination of 3 causes: (1) because an earthquake of magnitude 6.3 struck the town with surgical precision; (2) because some houses were not resistant enough to bear the shocks of the earthquake; (3) because many people believed to the unsubstantiated reassurances deriving from the information communicated after the MRC meeting about the alleged innocuous nature of the seismic swarm, reassurances that, it has to be highlighted, diminished the local perception of risk and increased the vulnerability of the place. Because it ended up increasing the vulnerability of the place, I define the reassuring diagnosis of the MRC a "disastrous reassurance," namely a destructive agent. [249]

Ciccozzi also explains what he and the prosecution meant with the term "disastrous reassurance," specifying that a disastrous reassurance is also fundamentally different from a "missed alarm," the formula that both the Aquilani and the media had been using to indicate the responsibilities of the MRC while its members were under investigation before the trial, and that also ended up generating the misunderstanding of representing

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[249]Ibid., 139.

the scientists as having been sentenced for not having been able to "predict the

earthquake:"

> A missed alarm is a crossroads without traffic lights (absence of
> information in presence of risk), a disastrous reassurance is a green traffic
> light that should instead be red (wrong information in presence of risk);
> conversely, a substantiated reassurance is like a traffic light that is green in
> the appropriate moment (accurate information when there is no risk);
> while un unnecessary alarm is a red light when there is no crossroads
> (wrong information in absence of risk). Similarly, a missed alarm is the
> absence of a sign that indicates "non-potable water" on a poisonous
> fountain; a disastrous reassurance is like a sign that says "potable water"
> on a poisonous fountain; a founded reassurance says "potable water" on a
> good fountain; and a false alarm says "non-potable water" on a good
> fountain. To sum up: *we have a disastrous reassurance when to a
> dangerous situation we associate a reassuring message* (emphasis in
> original).[250]

According to Ciccozzi and the prosecution, talking about a missed alarm, as it had

happened at the local, national, and international media levels, was inaccurate and it

generated the misunderstanding of what had happened in L'Aquila between the end of

March and the beginning of April 2009.

Following the prosecution's reasoning, we can infer that a missed alarm happens

when a disastrous event is not predicted or predictable. Thus a missed alarm is

fundamentally different from predicting that a disastrous event will not happen, as it had

been suggested by the reassuring messages issued by De Bernardinis and the local

authorities after the MRC meeting. If a missed alarm is often associated with the lack of

capability or will to provide the relevant information, a disastrous reassurance instead can

be associated with a mistake, or a deception.

Ciccozzi also notes that while we have a term that expresses the presence of an

unnecessary alarm (such as that generated by Giuliani in Sulmona) – "alarmism" -- we do

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[250]Ibid., 142.

not have the complimentary term to indicate an unfounded reassurance. Ciccozzi believes

that it is because of this lack of a defining term in the Italian vocabulary that the Aquilani

had initially described the responsibilities of the MRC in term of missed alarm. Having

no word in Italian to denote an "unmotivated signal of normality" as opposed to the

"unmotivated signal of alarm" that is expressed by the term alarmism, the Aquilani used

the approximation of the missed alarm, which was the closest concept to refer to the

disastrous consequences of the pre-earthquake institutional communication. A missed

alarm indicates that something went wrong. If we think about words like "reassurance" or

"calming," instead, we realize that they do not have a connotation of "groundlessness."

The connotation of lack of motivation in the composite term "alarm-ism," is given by the

suffix "ism" added to the neutral word alarm.

Ciccozzi, therefore, suggested the neologism "rassicurazionismo" -- that could be

translated in the English to "reassurance-ism" -- to better define the disastrous

reassurance that he and the prosecution claimed that had been communicated to the

Aquilani after the MRC meeting:

> "Reassurance-ism" is the only term that can fully describe the
> unprecedented communicative performance of the CPA and the INGV,
> which had its persuasive peak with the MRC meeting. Throughout that
> ceremonial ostentation of authority, they issued a disastrous reassurance
> according to which the seismic swarm was slowly, but innocuously,
> exhausting itself through a gradual and positive release of seismic
> energy.[251]

In brief, according to Ciccozzi, a disastrous reassurance happens when a reassuring

connotation is associated to a potentially dangerous situation. Therefore, according to the

prosecution, it is necessary to distinguish a missed alarm, which consists in not providing

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[251]Ibid., 141.

information, from a disastrous reassurance, that in this case consisted in providing inaccurate and misleading information. According to Ciccozzi this distinction is necessary in order to understand the responsibilities of the MRC: "it was a disastrous reassurance because the MRC informed the residents of L'Aquila in a way that was superficial, (for what regards the risk analysis carried out), flawed (scientifically), misleading (for what regards the possibility of danger), and deadly (for what regards its consequences), saying that a catastrophe would not happen in those circumstances. In addition, explains Ciccozzi, not saying 'be careful' is the opposite of saying 'be calm,' which not only implies not saying 'be careful' (i.e. not prescribing cautionary behaviors) but it also amplifies it (prescribing imprudent behaviors)."[252]

In brief, according to the prosecution, the responsibilities of the MRC have to be identified not only in the lack of production of a meaningful message to communicate to the residents of L'Aquila, but also in their failure to correct misinformation that influenced the Aquilani to change their traditional behaviors in cases of perceived seismic danger. By reassuring people and defining the situation "normal," and even "favorable," the discourse of the CPA convinced many to ignore their consolidated cautionary habits in times of seismic risk, and unfortunately it persuaded many to stay inside in their houses on the night of April 6.

The earthquake has surely been a necessary condition of death for many Aquilani, but it was not a sufficient one: many people died because during the night between April 5 and 6 they decided to remain indoors, contrary to their local cautionary habits of going outside. Even after the two medium intensity shocks that preceded the deadly earthquake

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[252]Ibid., 142.

at 3:32am, and that usually would have triggered the reaction of spending the night outdoors or in their cars, many Aquilani stayed indoors because they trusted the reassuring diagnosis that had been communicated to them by the CPA and the local authorities on March 31.

In the appendix to this chapter, I will report a few oral accounts from relatives of the quake victims. Some of these accounts can be found in the official court documents, some others, I have collected in L'Aquila during summer 2013. I have selected just a few, to illustrate the narrative of the Aquilani through their own personal stories. However, it is possible to retrieve many other similar stories in the court documents, or just spending some time in L'Aquila asking about the people's memories of the days before the earthquake. The stories below are among the most dramatic, and they are from some of the civil parties involved in the trial. Nevertheless, it is worth noting, that even in considerably less dramatic cases, this narrative of the disastrous reassurance emerges constantly among the earthquake survivors. It emerges among people whose experiences of the earthquake, in terms of damages and loss, have been different, yet the commonality among the many tales can be found in the sigh of relief caused by the messages of March 31, and from the reasoning dynamics that those messages generated among the Aquilani, and that convinced many that the best response to the seismic swarm was the "rational" decision to sleep indoors, and to stay calm and inside, despite the increased magnitude of the tremors.

The Scientists' Narrative

The accounts of the experts regarding their discussion during the MRC meeting, and those of the citizens of L'Aquila who told in court the stories of how the information that they heard framed as the "outcome" of the MRC meeting influenced their behaviors in the night of the earthquake, produced two very different narratives during the trial proceedings. The residents of L'Aquila told their stories in court, linking their behavior on the night of the earthquake to the "disastrous reassurance" that they had received from the institutions after the meeting of the MRC in L'Aquila. The experts, however, claimed throughout the trial that the disastrous reassurances that were communicated to the public were not an accurate representation of what they said during the meeting. In this section, I will discuss the MRC minutes and the controversy about their unofficial draft. I will then conclude by pinpointing how, until recently, some scientists' statements have contributed to exacerbating some of the misunderstanding about the trial.

The MRC Minutes

The content of the official minutes of the MRC meeting in L'Aquila – not signed and made official until after the disastrous earthquake had already happened -- does not present a reassuring portrayal of the seismic situation in Abruzzo. On the contrary, the short minutes contain mostly hedged statements and emphasize uncertainty, in opposition to the concept of earthquake prediction that was proposed by Giuliani, and to which the scientists were called to respond during the meeting. A close reading of the minutes reveals the presence of several statements that emphasize uncertainty about the seismicity of Abruzzo.

Boschi, INGV President at the time, stated: "It is improbable that there will be an earthquake like the 1703 one in the short term, although we cannot exclude it in absolute."[253] Barberi also highlighted the extreme difficulty of temporal predictions of seismic phenomena and asked the rest of the group whether there were historical testimonies of seismic sequences preceding strong earthquakes. Eva responded that there were limited cases, given that small earthquakes were not recorded in the past. He also added that in the last few years several seismic swarms have been recorded in Italy, however they have not preceded big seismic events, like the swarm in Garfagnana. Eva specified: "obviously, L'Aquila being a seismic zone, it is not possible to state that there won't be earthquakes."[254] Boschi follows up by explaining that several small earthquakes cannot be considered a precursor phenomenon for stronger quakes, and that "it is impossible to make predictions."[255] He also adds: "L'Aquila's territory is in a seismic zone of Level 2, and thus it requires particular attention for the buildings, which need to be reinforced in order to be resistant to earthquakes."[256] At this point Selvaggi and Barberi reinforced the idea that a seismic swarm cannot be considered a precursor to strong earthquakes. Then Barberi, prompted by Stati, the local CPA officer who asked whether they should have paid any attention to the statements of "whoever affirms to be able to make predictions," responded:

> Today we have no instruments to make predictions, and therefore every
> prediction has no scientific credential. The problem, instead, has to be

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[253]di Redazione Il Fatto Quotidiano, "Terremoto dell'Aquila, Il Verbale Integrale Della Riunione Della 'Grandi Rischi,'" *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, accessed April 1, 2014, http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2012/10/22/terremoto-dellaquila-verbale-integrale-della-riunione-della-grandi-rischi/390130/.
[254]Ibid.
[255]Ibid.
[256]Ibid.

seen in general terms, because the only defense against earthquakes has to
be identified in the reinforcement of the buildings that need to be
improved in their ability to withstand earthquakes. Another important
aspect related to the aims of civil protection is the improvement of the
preparation to manage a seismic emergency.[257]

In conclusion, we notice that the short minutes of the MRC meeting can hardly be

interpreted as having a reassuring tone or content. They are a quick report on what was

said on March 31, 2009, and they mostly revolve around two related themes: the

interpretation of the ongoing seismic sequence in Abruzzo as a seismic swarm, and the

reflection about the non-predictability of earthquakes (contra Giuliani) supported by a

quick analysis of seismic swarms, that according to the experts may, or may not precede

a major seismic event.

The official version of the MRC minutes, as reported in court, was drafted by

Dolce, passed to the other experts, and then signed off in L'Aquila on April 6. However,

it is important to note that another version of the minutes circulated during the trial,

contributing to the development of controversies around the negligence of the experts and

of their connivance with the "media-operation" organized by Bertolaso. During the trial,

we get to know that this draft version of the minutes[258] was drafted by Salvatori Lorella, a

CPA employee in charge of taking notes during the meeting and supporting the MRC as a

secretary and a liaison with the press. Salvatori, a member of the CPA Department for the

Management of the Emergencies, testified during the trial and reported that her notes

from that day, which were drafted and revised into provisional minutes of the meeting,

were an accurate report of the conversations of the experts that she witnessed during the

gathering in L'Aquila. Salvatori's draft minutes are considerably longer than the official

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[257]Ibid.
[258]"Sentenza_grandi_rischi.pdf," 100.

ones, consisting of six pages, and they are overall consistent with the version that was summarized and finalized by Dolce. However, one important discrepancy emerges between the draft minutes and the trial debates: in Salvatori's draft, there is a passage that was later omitted in the official version of the minutes, and it regards the key question of the "release of energy" through frequent small earthquake shocks interpreted as a positive sign. Specifically, from Salvatori's account it emerges that during the meeting Barberi posed the question to the other experts in these terms:

> We know that Abruzzo is a high-risk seismic region. In the past earthquakes there have been seismic sequences similar to those that are happening today. What can you say about this? I have heard the Head of the CPA (i.e. Bertolaso) declaring to the press, even if he's not a geophysicist, that when there are frequent seismic sequences there is a release of energy that makes it more possible for a strong shock to not happen. What can you all tell about this?[259]

Interestingly, of the two questions posed by Barberi according to Salvatori's draft minutes, only one was actually addressed by the experts: the first. To that question Eva responded with the observation, which is also included in the official minutes, on the lack of data about the seismic sequences of the past, and on the known seismicity of L'Aquila, that makes it "impossible to state that there won't be earthquakes."[260] The omission of the passage mentioned above in the official minutes was investigated during the trial, along with a lack of a direct response from the experts to Barberi's question of the "release of energy" interpretation suggested by Bartolaso. The accounts of the experts are contradictory about this point: someone remembers the question while others don't; some of them remember considering the question superfluous, not relevant, or just addressed by the subsequent conversation about seismic swarms as not significant precursors of

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[259]Ibid., 101.
[260]Ibid.

strong earthquakes. In any case, it is worth noticing that a simple intervention and clarification from the experts could have prevented the dissemination of flawed information to the public, intervention that nevertheless never happened.

Conclusion: Blame and Responsibilities

In a recent letter published in *Science*[261]*,* Enzo Boschi expressed his frustration about the verdict of L'Aquila. Boschi's short commentary on the trial clearly illustrates and summarizes many of the key themes discussed in this essay. First of all, Boschi's interpretation of the sentence continues to disseminate, for the international scientific public, a flawed perspective on the verdict reached in L'Aquila. He states:

> I have been sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment for failing to give adequate advance warning to the population of L'Aquila, a city in the Abruzzo region of Italy, about the risk of the 6 April 2009 earthquake that led to 309 deaths. I have been found guilty despite illogical charges and accusations that set dangerous precedents for the future of the scientific process.[262]

As I have discussed above, a reading of the court documents shows that the experts have not been sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment for failing to warn the people in L'Aquila. Rather, they have been sentenced for having failed to communicate "clear and accurate information" to the authorities and the public, thus encouraging the imprudent behaviors that led to the deaths of several Aquilani during the night of the earthquake. In this essay I have also discussed the different involvement of some of the experts (including Boschi) in the production of the reassuring messages at the center of the trial's debate. This analysis shows that Boschi did not contribute directly in the production and dissemination

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[261]Enzo Boschi, "L'Aquila's Aftershocks Shake Scientists," *Science* 341, no. 6153 (September 27, 2013): 1451–1451, doi:10.1126/science.341.6153.1451.
[262]Ibid.

of the reassuring messages. However, it also shows that Boschi did not contribute in

debunking the flawed information that was communicated to the public, or in discussing

with the CPA effective procedural strategies to manage and communicate risks to the

local public, thus making it possible for the CPA to spread dangerous messages that

endangered the local public in a situation of risk and general alert. Boschi continues:

> The judge's ruling claims that citizens of L'Aquila would normally rush
> outside upon feeling an earth tremor, but that they did not in 2009 because
> a Major Risk Commission (MRC) meeting in L'Aquila, one week
> beforehand, had given them a false sense of security. However, this
> meeting was run, not by the National Institute of Geophysics and
> Volcanology (INGV), but by an arm of the Prime Minister's office: the
> Civil Protection Agency (CPA). An agreement between the INGV and the
> CPA states that the latter is exclusively responsible for communicating
> any state of risk. The INGV has always scrupulously adhered by that
> regulation. As a former President of the INGV, I never spoke to the media
> about the seismic situation at L'Aquila, and no relative of the victim
> suggested otherwise.[263]

In this passage, Boschi shifts the blame for the questionable institutional communication

practices adopted in L'Aquila exclusively on the CPA. Boschi's perspective, in this

context, is reasonable and understandable, but not fully accurate. The CPA is a political

organ, managed almost directly by the Prime Minister (Silvio Berlusconi at the time of

the events), and the meeting was organized and run by the CPA (Bertolaso, and De

Bernardinis). However, reading the laws that regulate the duties of the CPA and of the

MRC as a Department of the CPA, it is not possible to establish the clear separation of

tasks in the communication and management of risks that Boschi is mentioning and

taking for granted in the passage above. Boschi then concludes:

> In publishing an official map, seismologist have done all they currently
> can to protect society from earthquakes. I can hardly be blamed for the
> poor quality of buildings or for people's failure to conform to anti-seismic

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[263]Ibid.

laws—these are responsibilities of other authorities. The local CPA is
responsible for accurate communication of risk and effective management
of emergency situations. I did not disseminate false or imprudent
information. My question is: what could I do to avoid conviction? I
suppose I should have foreseen the earthquake![264]

This final passage, again, repeats some of the misunderstandings about the trial discussed

at the outset of this essay. While it is not difficult to align with Boschi and his

perspective, which shifts the blame back to the CPA, and advocates for the innocence of

the experts, it is more difficult to sympathize with his argumentative strategy of ridiculing

the trial, a strategy adopted for the sympathetic audience of *Science* magazine.

Boschi's letter generated a response from a group of activists, science journalists,

and scholars from different fields, but this rebuttal was denied publication in *Science*.[265]

In this response to Boschi, published online by science journalist Raniere Salvadorini,

one important theme is highlighted at the end: the problematic relationships between

science and politics in Italy that have contributed to generating the misunderstandings

and mis-communication in the case of "L'Aquila Seven." The group[266] of respondents to

Boschi's commentary originally wrote:

Beyond the judicial interpretation, the elements that demonstrate how a
consolidated logic of compliance with political power marked the tragedy
of L'Aquila are clearly evident. And the sentence reveals a theme: the sick
relationship between science and politics. And it does so in a moment in

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[264]Ibid.

[265]"Sisma a L'Aquila: Science Censura Gli Scienziati Del Dissenso - AMBIENTE,"
accessed April 1, 2014, http://www.lettera43.it/ambiente/l-aquila-sentenza-grandi-
rischi-science-censura-gli-scienziati-del-dissenso_43675119511.htm.

[266] The group includes: the science writers R. Salvatorini, G. Milano, and l. Margottini;
the scholars D. Alexanders, L. Mualchin, M. Buiatti, A. Zamperini, S. De Martino, T.
Crespellani, G. Tognoni, M. Turchetto, M. Grandolfo, A. Stefanini, G. Lo Verso, M.
Menegatto, L. baccaro; the activists of "No Grazie, Pago Io," A. P. Colasacco of the
"Permanent Assembly of L'Aquila Citizens", and P. Adamo of the "Giuristi
Democratici National Association."

which the political sphere is effectively absconding. Regarding this issue a serious reflection has never properly begun.[267]

From the analysis of the array of different texts and testimonies discussed in this chapter, it is possible to pinpoint two different mistakes on the part of the experts, which regard both their relationship with other citizens, and the one with the world of politics. Specifically, this case suggests that a reformulation of the relationships between science, citizens, and politicians is a necessary endeavor. Bridging the gap between science and citizens is productive because it allows specific kinds of local expertise to be taken into account by science, which otherwise would have no access to this community-based kind of knowledge but have proven useful and practical in many cases such as Wynne's study, this one, and many others.[268] Promoting public inclusion in the scientific debate is also necessary and advisable in contexts of potential risk and situations of uncertainty, because public participation can reduce the ambiguity and obscurity that often affect the outcome of the communication of science and risk for the affected communities and the general public.

Most importantly, this study also shows that bridging the gap between science and citizens does not only involve recognizing citizens *as* experts. This case, in fact, shows that it is also necessary to reflect on the other side of this relationship in a new way: it is necessary to start thinking of *experts as citizens*.

In order to fully eliminate the gaps between science, citizens, and politics, the scientists would benefit from learning to think about themselves as connected to the local community, and not artificially separated from it by their professional role. This change

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[267]"Sisma a L'Aquila: Science Censura Gli Scienziati Del Dissenso - AMBIENTE."
[268]Wynne, "Sheepfarming after Chernobyl."

of perspective can make the scientists' more accountable for the ways in which their assessments get turned into management, policies, or recommendations for action in specific settings. Seconding Sturloni's reflections about this case, in my analysis I confirmed that it is important for scientists to feel accountable to their fellow citizens not only through their scientific tasks, but also through clear public communication: "Even scientists should learn how to communicate, firstly because they have an important social responsibility, especially when they are members of technical-scientific commissions having the task of providing the population with information vital for public safety. And secondly because they are the information sources that the citizens trust the most when facing a risk. And in L'Aquila that trust was betrayed."[269] Had the Italian scientists recognized their responsibility as citizens to communicate with their fellow citizens in L'Aquila, rather than imagining themselves as divorced from public communication and decision-making activities, they would have done what Italian law requires in this case -- corrected errors in how their work was being portrayed, and publicly reinforced the point that there was no new information that could offer reassurances of safety to those trying to decide whether to continue their traditional practices of sleeping outside or go back into their homes.

In short, the case of "L'Aquila Seven" shows that the division between risk assessment and risk management is not only artificial, but it can also prove dangerous. This case should teach to scientists and politicians that they need to recognize that the process of risk assessment and the process of risk management are not two distinct

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[269]Sturloni, "A Lesson from L'Aquila," 2.

processes, and that they work best if they go hand in hand, as Carolyn Miller[270] suggests:

"Risk analysis has been separated from risk communication by those who practice both, but my argument in this essay implies that this is a false distinction, that risk analysis is a form of communicating about risk -- in other words, that it has rhetorical import."[271] Scientists, thus, need to be involved in both processes if they are to keep misperceptions about their assessments from driving risk management policies in dangerous directions. They have a responsibility *as experts and as citizens* to ensure that their ethos isn't misused to offer disastrous reassurances to their fellow citizens. Overall, this study suggests that switching to an inclusive, integrated approach in the production of knowledge, communication of science and/or risk, and the management of emergencies could prove productive, at least in avoiding cases like the MRC trial in L'Aquila from happening again.

Appendix: Voices from the Seismic Crater

Giustino Parisse – Journalist

His two children and his father died on April 6, 2009

The magnitude of the seismic swarm's shock was moderate…at least until March 30, 2009, when the 4.1 MI shock happened. That shock represented for everyone a sign that the situation was not normal…that day changed the level of attention of many citizens…even from a journalist's point of view…I noticed that the citizens' interests

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[270]Miller, "The Presumptions of Expertise."
[271]Ibid., 166.

increased considerably, because everybody was afraid that something serious could happen. In fact, our editorial staff was receiving constant calls from readers, friends, and citizens: everybody was worried about the shocks that were becoming constant and increasing of frequency and magnitude.

On March 30, when the 4.1 MI shock happened, I remember that I was alone in my house in Onna, in the kitchen. I felt the shock, and I immediately ran outside, where I found my mother, too, who despite her bad conditions of health, tried to reach me outdoors. I ran to our library, where my daughter was studying. She was there, scared because the shock had made a guitar fall from its wall hanger. […] Outside in the streets I found my neighbors, too, they also ran outdoors scared by the shock. We stayed outside talking, for a bit. Then, after a while and because of the cold, we decided to go back inside. I also called my wife, who was with my son, to check on them. […]

I remember that on March 31, we kept our webpage dedicated to the earthquake news open until we received the news about the conclusion of the MRC meeting, precisely because a lot of people were waiting to hear the news from the experts. A press release arrived from the Region Abruzzo…the message that we received and published, with my editorial staff, was reassuring. I remember in particular the words of De Bernardinis that said that the scientific community confirmed that there was no danger because of a continuous release of seismic energy, and that it represented a favorable situation. After publishing such news, I felt reassured because the information was coming from reliable and official sources. That same evening, I went back home very late, and found my wife still awake. She asked me about the earthquake, and I told her that the MRC's experts said that we could all stay calm, because it was excluded that a stronger shock, compared

to the one we had experienced already, would happen. Also considering that the shock of the previous day did not cause any visible damage to our house, we basically inferred, in light of those reassurances, that we were not in a situation of high danger inside our house. In our family conversations, those days, we rationally discussed about what kind of consequences we could expect from that ongoing seismic swarm, and we concluded that at the worst we could have had some minor damage to our newly-painted walls; the reality of the facts, however, is that we were a little scared, in particular my daughter, Maria Paola. She said, dissimulating her fear with a joke: "If something will happen, remember that I love you!"

On the evening of April 5, we were all home: my wife, my children, and I. We had dinner and around 10pm we went all to bed. Around 11pm, after the first strong shock, we all ran to the kitchen, we turned on our computer and checked on the INGV website the magnitude of the shock. It was a 3.9 magnitude shock. My kids exchanged texts with their friends, but we decided to stay inside instead of going outdoors because after all it was similar to the shocks perceived in the previous days, and considering what the experts told us, we just concluded that it was normal in the context of the ongoing seismic swarm. Around midnight I went back to my room and called back the Editor of my newspaper, confirming with him that there had been a strong shock and that people had perceived it. Around 1pm another shock happened, and I woke up to call the Chief Editor again, to tell him about this second shock. I went outside my room to make this phone call, and found my son up, who told me: "Dad, this earthquake is really getting to my nerves!" I reassured him, and I told him to go back to sleep. I did the same with my

daughter Maria Paola, I went to her room and I told her to stay calm. She responded: "I think we are all going to die!"

Then I went back to sleep, and then everything collapsed, our house collapsed. My children died under the rubble of our house that night. I think that, had I not heard the reassurances of the MRC, perhaps my behavior after those two strong shocks would have been different that night. Even not hearing anything would have been better than hearing those reassurances. (Personal Communication, summer 2013)

Giustino Parisse – On "Il Centro," about the MRC Verdict

I heard the news about the MRC verdictjust after 5pm, from the website of our newspaper. I was in our editorial headquarters. Alone. I decided, a few hours earlier to avoid attending the final concluding moments of the trial. I had the same kind of rejection that I felt when I refused to see my deceased children. For me, everything ended at 3:32am of April 6. What happened and what is happening, to me, does not have precise borders, and I have trouble making sense of it. I cried yesterday. Not tears of satisfaction. It was the same pain exploding in my stomach, preventing me to breathe. I saw again every moment of that night, when our house killed my kids, that scream "Dad, dad!" came back in my mind, invaded my flesh. And nevertheless, even after such a harsh verdict, I can't represent those men, that now risk a jail term, as the killers of my children. In the last few months, even during the trial, I shook hands with some of them, and I didn't find those hands dirty with blood. I saw fragile men perhaps aware of having made a mistake and for that mistake becoming involved in the vortex of a tragedy that ended up sweeping them away as well. No. I don't feel like screaming my rage against

them. That rage, I direct against myself. I am the reason for the death of Maria Paola and Domenico, and I will never forgive myself for that. Yes, I am also responsible for having trusted the MRC, for having trusted the official science, a science that during that meeting stopped behaving as such. This is a first-degree verdict. It's easy to realize that in the next stages of the trial everything can potentially change, melt away like snow in the sun. I will not be sorry for that. In the face of a verdict that will probably soon be archived, I don't feel anything: no satisfaction, no bitterness, nor will of revenge. When you have such a pain inside, all the other feelings do not matter anymore. This trial has been a defeat for everyone. It's the State condemning itself. It is a State that on March 31 renounced its role, that of protecting its citizens, to adapt to the will of the politicians who needed to silence the disturbers. It's for this reason that in L'Aquila we didn't have a trial of science. Rather, we've had a trial of some experts that in front of the will of powerful politicians decided to "turn off" their brains and obey to the necessities of politics. It's not necessary to condemn them today. I'm not doing it, and I hope that their internal torments, too – that is however fundamentally different to those of us who lost everything – could be understood and respected. Verdicts have to be accepted, and I would have accepted it even in case of absolution. To me, even after this very heavy verdict, nothing changes. Now, I will assist to endless debates about science having been condemned for not having predicted the earthquake. I am one of those that asked to start the investigations. I did it because I wanted to have a better account of the meeting of the MRC. Now, in 2012, it's enough to read the CPA's press releases to note even an excess of zeal, like the one from a few days ago, when they predicted the flooding in Rome. It's better. When we have to deal with natural phenomena, especially those that are

unpredictable, it's better to alarm than to reassure. If that had happened in L'Aquila, too, perhaps I would have spent a few nights in the cold, but my children would still be alive. I've seen that in the verdict they speak about compensations. Since the very beginning I said that I don't want any Euro for the death of my kids. There would be only a way to be compensated for what has happened to me: it would be the possibility to hug my kids again. It happened a week ago, but it was a dream. Then I woke up.[272]

Vittorini Vincenzo – Surgeon

His wife and his daughter died on April 6, 2009

I remember that in the days before April 5, 2009, and specifically after the shock of March 30, our concerns about the endless series of quake shock were becoming more serious. After the magnitude 4 shock in the afternoon of March 30, my son Federico called me, scared, and told me: "Dad, this shock was so strong, from our window I saw the building in front trembling and the roof jumping!" My wife was also scared and she confirmed what Federico had just told me. Because she seemed very worried and scared, I told her to get Federico and to go outdoors. I was firm and suggested that she would advice to do so our neighbors, too. They went out, to my in-laws, in the Belvedere neighborhood. That evening we decided to leave our cars parked outside, in the public street, and not in the parking lots of our condo, because we thought—if something happens, at least our cars are already outside. We did the same the day after. On the evening of March 30, I heard on the local TV channels that an urgent meeting was called for the following day, March 31. Claudia and I commented on the reasons for calling

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[272]"Gioire? No, Ho Pianto Pensando Ai Miei Figli - Cronaca," *Il Centro*, accessed November 30, 2013, http://ilcentro.gelocal.it/pescara/cronaca/2012/10/23/news/gioire-no-ho-pianto-pensando-ai-miei-figli-1.5909311.

such a meeting, and we reflected on the hypothesis that perhaps there was a serious situation of immediate risk in town. As many other Aquilani, we were waiting to hear what the experts that participated to that meeting had to say. At the end of that meeting, on the night of March 31, 2009, the local and national TV stations reported on the meeting and showed the interviews released from the technicians and the politicians that had participated to the meeting. I noted a very reassuring tone: we were told that the situation was favorable because there was a constant release of energy and therefore it was absolutely not a situation that could lead to stronger shocks, let alone a devastating quake. Specifically, they said that we could expect shocks similar in intensity to those that had already happened, but not stronger. I remember, in particular, to have listened to the statements of Barberi, De Bernardinis, and Daniela Stati, from the CPA. We were all reassured by the news, me, my family, people that I was meeting daily and that commented on the earthquake situation. We often concluded saying, as a mantra, that at the end of the day, the more energy released, the better, and that a stronger shock than the one we had experienced was out of the question.

Now, that evening of April 5, 2009, my wife Claudia, my daughter Fabrizia, and I were all home. Around 11pm, after the first quake shock, I found Claudia and Fabrizia sitting on the couch, very scared. Claudia looked at me and asked: 'What do we do? Do we go out?' I responded: 'Claudia, but was this stronger than the shock of March 30?' She said: 'But I'm still afraid…what do we do…should we go out?' And again, I told her: 'But Claudia, at this point the release of energy has happened! It's like the experts said, there won't be stronger shocks, so we can stay clam!'

Even my daughter Fabrizia, perceiving our worry, asked me: 'Dad, is this going to collapse?' because at school they did some earthquake prevention exercises. I reassured her with a smile telling her, that for sure, nothing was going to collapse.

Then I looked out of our windows to see if our neighbors were outside, but I did not see anyone, just several lights on in the houses nearby. All of a sudden, I thought about when I was a kid. My father had taught us, in case of earthquake, to respond by running underneath the leading pillar of our house, and then he would ask us to check if the neighbors were outside, and in that case we would go out in the streets, too. We spent the night in our car, with foggy windows, while he stayed outside talking to the neighbors, smoking until dawn. While I was pondering about these memories, our friends called us. Laura and Ottavio asked us what we were going to do. They were afraid, too, but we reasoned together about those considerations reported on the news, that the experts said that the shocks were releasing energy, and that we were not going to have stronger shocks…So we decided to remain indoors, in our houses, and that we would be in touch in case of other shocks.

After all, the fact that the shock around 11pm was of lower intensity of that of March 30, made us consider reliable the predictions of the MRC…we were convinced that no stronger shocks were going to happen. At that time, my brother from Bologna called me and told me that he had seen on TV about a strong shock, and suggested that I go outside with my family. I explained him what I had heard on TV those days, and I repeated to him all of our reasoning about earthquakes. I did not listen to his advice and I decided to remain home. We decided to sleep on the couch fully dressed, leaving our computer on, to monitor the INGV webpage, and the TV on channel TVUNO, where we heard that the

schools were going to be closed on the day after. I didn't even think about taking Claudia's car out of the garage. Before 1am, Claudia and I were woken up by another shock. Fabrizia was still sleeping. Claudia, once again, asked me if we should go outside, and again I looked outside to see if there were people on the streets and I saw no one. Fewer lights were on than after the first shock, and thus I managed to convince Claudia to stay inside: 'Come on Claudia, there's no one outside…Fabrizia is sleeping, let's not wake her up! I guess it should be over for tonight! Let's see what Laura and Ottavio say." We texted our friends, and they had decided to stay home, and to be in touch. My brother called me again from Bologna, because my other brother Stefano called him. I reassured him again, and we all went to sleep in our bed, around 2am. Then at 3:32am there was the big earthquake, and my house collapsed.[273]

Cinque Massimo – Pediatrician

His wife and his two sons died on April 6, 2009

On the night of April 5, 2009, around 11:15pm my wife Daniela called me (I was in Sulmona, working at the hospital that night). She told me about the strong earthquake shock in L'Aquila, and she said that her and the kids were scared, and asked me for advice. I reassured her, telling her to stay calm, to not be afraid, and to stay home and sleep with the kids in our bed, all together. I said those words because of the outcome of the MRC meeting in L'Aquila on March 31, or at least because of what I heard on the media about the outcome of that meeting: that there was no reason for alarm, that the shock represented a constant release of seismic energy, that there was no reason for stronger shocks to happen, because the situation was favorable precisely because of that

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[273]"Memoria_picuti.pdf," 130–4.

constant release through smaller shocks. That was the last time that I talked to my wife. She died with my two boys when our house collapsed that night. (Personal Communication, summer 2013)

Maurizio Cora – Lawyer

His wife and his two daughters died on April 6, 2009

On March 30, 2009, my wife, my daughter Alessandra -- who had a high fever that day – and I, scared by an earthquake shock promptly left our house in Via XX Settembre 79, and we went to the Park of the Castle, where we stayed for a bit before going back home in the evening. In the Park, besides us, there were several other families, for the same reasons: the fear of the earthquake.

After a few days, I came to know about the meeting in L'Aquila, of an important Committee, that came to town to analyze the situation and, I believe, to evaluate possible responses to the ongoing seismic swarm. I came to know that the meeting lasted less than one hour, and it was concluded with a reassuring prognosis communicated to the Aquilani. I remember that, in those days, the local media reported about that reassuring outcome, and I realized that me and my family had to get used to the shocks, and not be afraid, precisely because the seismic phenomena that we were experiencing were defined by the MRC as a simple and not dangerous seismic swarm.

I remember that to these definition they added a description, telling us that similar shocks of the same intensity or of lower intensity to the ones that had already happened were to be expected, however, those kind of shocks were not considered dangerous in any way, not for the people, nor for the buildings.

These reassuring messages coming from the official authorities, also reinforced by specific behaviors and decisions (such as the brief meeting, the kind of messages communicated, the calming attitude of the politicians and local authorities, the lack of organization of an emergency tent to potentially host the people in case of danger, and the lack of communication of specific advice to follow in cases of emergency) were all over the mass media during those days.

On the evening of April 5, 2009, after the shock happened around 11pm, that we assessed as similar, if not lower magnitude of the one happened on March 30, we got a little scared, and started talking about what to do. In particular, we evaluated rationally as serious and reliable (because they were coming from the experts that came in L'Aquila a few days earlier) the numerous reassurances that we had heard on the news. Thus, we decided to change our habit of going outside, convincing each other that we were not in danger, and ultimately deciding to stay indoors and spend the night inside. We made that decision because we were convinced -- and I want to highlight that we were convinced by the reckless messages communicated by the civil authorities -- that the shock we experienced was just another one similar to those that happened in the previous days, and thus not dangerous, as similar shocks had not generated any damage to my house or to any house in town before.

I want to confirm once again that if those reassurances had not been issued, my family and I would have spent the night outside, as we and the other Aquilani have always done, and as our behavior after the shock of March 30 illustrates.[274]

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[274]Ibid., 111.

I remember my wife, saying: 'the MRC is so good, the experts expressed such a precise and timely diagnosis,' so yes, the outcome of the MRC meeting deeply influenced our behaviors. Before, we always instinctively went outside until April 6…That night, unfortunately, we started reasoning, and we reasoned in a way in which we would have never reasoned if it wasn't for the MRC meeting that we had been waiting for, after months of shocks. […] Our behavior changed because we trusted those people that for us represented the official science in Italy. They used positive expressions and talked about a normal seismic swarm, and so our family felt reassured…so much that we encouraged my daughter Antonella, who was in Naples studying, to come back for the Easter break, because there was no danger, as we had been told by the MRC…and unfortunately Antonella came back and she died...she died in a very dramatic way. […] My wife and my daughters were calm and reassured, my wife was a very rational person, and she trusted the MRC, like I did, too. I also always appreciated the CPA and the institutions in each expression and form, but unfortunately we were wrong, we were wrong this time, and we made a fatal mistake.[275]

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[275]Ciccozzi, *Parola di scienza*, 67–69.

AFTERWORD

Reflections on Locality, Topographies, and Citizenship

Throughout the case studies analyzed in this dissertation, I explored the public "mutations" generated by the destructive earthquake in the locality of L'Aquila. As I highlighted in the foreword, those mutations concerned both the material texture of the territory of L'Aquila and, more importantly, the lives and experiences of the Aquilani affected by the disaster.

The earthquake interrupted the emplaced practices of every day life and suspended the routines that gave meaning and constituted normal existence for the local residents by causing massive material, infrastructural, and social destruction of the town, a fact the citizens of L'Aquila realized immediately after the disaster. The semantic vacuum (the gap in meaning that the people had to confront while finding themselves forced to face a sudden, inexplicable, unpredictable, and nullifying catastrophe) caused by the material destruction also generated a series of post-disaster rhetorical "opportunities," which one of the citizen activists cited earlier described as a possibility to "re-write the meanings of many things" through a participatory and communal reconstruction of the material reality, and of the symbolic meanings associated to it, in order to benefit the community.

As Endres and Senda Cook[276] clearly explain in their discussion of the fluid nature of places and the ephemerality of materiality as a rhetorical opportunity for social movements' struggles to re-imagine and rhetorically reconstruct places, the local activists

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[276]Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook, "Location Matters: The Rhetoric of Place in Protest," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 3 (August 2011): 262.

in L'Aquila recognized that it was necessary to fight over the ways in which the spaces and places of post-earthquake L'Aquila, forever altered by the instability of their structure, would be reimagined anew after the disaster.

In post-earthquake L'Aquila, in particular, the permanently altered local reality that resulted from the collapse of the historical city center became one of the issues central to post-earthquake activists' discourses regarding the local policies of the reconstruction and the contestation of the politics of representation of the post-disaster context.

In effect, the "opportunities" for activism generated by the earthquake disaster, as I have argued in Chapter Two, also became immediately obvious to those interested in exploiting them, such as the ring of corrupted entrepreneurs that I mentioned throughout this dissertation,[277] or the political and institutional powers that were then invested in campaigning for the European elections of June 2009 and in managing the emerging sex scandals of the former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, which fully exploded in the ensuing couple of years and contributed to the fall of his government in 2011 and his subsequent ban from holding public office.

In this highly politicized and polarized national context, the L'Aquila earthquake also disrupted the flow of political news on Italian mainstream media and redirected national attention to the national tragedy of the earthquake. The highly spectacularized coverage of post-earthquake L'Aquila during the state of emergency in Abruzzo created a problematic disconnect between local and national publics.

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[277] It has to be noted that there are several closed and ongoing trials and open investigations regarding the illegal activities related to the reconstruction of L'Aquila. I have not discussed those trials in this dissertation, but most corruption scandals over the course of the last five years involve both private entrepreneurs and public officials.

The "mutations" resulting from the earthquake generated polarized narratives from the mainstream media and the government on one side and from the Aquilani on the other side. On the one hand, Berlusconi constantly described the alleged recovery of L'Aquila as a miracle realized by touting his rhetoric of the "miraculous recovery" on national and international media. On the other hand, the citizens-activists, after several rallies and protests to regain public visibility, reached out to the broader Italian public to call for support during a national rally in L'Aquila. The activists described the situation in the seismic crater, and their rationale for asking the Italian people to go to L'Aquila and march on the rubbles of the destroyed town, as one of "immanent disaster" and as a metaphor representing the "rubbles of Italian democracy," a democracy "in a constant state of emergency: environmental, occupational, legal, and economical."[278]

In this dissertation I have explored the emergence of this wide disconnect by foregrounding the local narratives circulating in post-earthquake L'Aquila and by highlighting their productive potential to bring forth political impact in the local context and to re-negotiate the meaning of the new reality of the post-disaster context. The case studies, the conceptualization of the theoretical and methodological orientations, and the in-depth "topographic" analysis of post-disaster activism in L'Aquila explored throughout this dissertation foreground three main themes of broader significance for the study of rhetorics of social resistance, public discourse, and citizenship:

1. the conceptualization of the idea of locality as an "interface" between materiality and symbolicity to study public discourse in context;

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[278]*L'AQUILA Chiama ITALIA - Manifestazione Nazionale - 20 Novembre 2010*, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPGfCEq_iok&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

2. the conception of "rhetorical topographies" as a critical praxis for mapping resistive rhetorics and their impacts within localities;

3. the need to re-think citizenship as a bi-lateral (bottom up & top-down) and integrated performance of inclusion in public discourse. Namely, this dissertation advocates not only for the productivity of grassroots modes of citizenship engagement and public inclusion, but also for the potential benefits of re-thinking political and technical discourses not as a mere management of public issues but as fundamental acts of citizenship engagement themselves.

Locality as an Interface between Materiality and Symbolicity

In Chapter One of this dissertation, I conceptualized the notion of locality as a new heuristic to study rhetorics of social resistance in context. I defined locality as a critical tool to study rhetorics of social resistance that foregrounds the situated character of rhetoric and the emergence of specific "public modalities" within specific contexts of enactment. I suggested that using locality as a heuristic for studying protest rhetoric and citizenship engagement can help highlight the connections between the modes of protest and the inventional resources available to citizens and activists within a specific locale. I also conceptualized locality as a critical lens through which to explore the interactions among bodies and performativity, places and spaces, objects and materiality, and language and mediated images in a relational way. Locality encourages scholars to consider these dimensions holistically as a network of relations to disentangle in order to understand how public rhetorics of social resistance are shaped and in turn contribute to

re-shape and bring forth change within their locale of circulation. Furthermore, I suggested that an approach that foregrounds the locality heuristic is a way to bring together rhetorical criticism with different fieldwork modes such as participant observation and rhetorical ethnography in the study of public discourse in context.

In brief, I have conceptualized locality as an "interface" to engage the study of materiality and symbolicity in context. Materiality and symbolicity, to be clear, are co-present within a locale; they overlap, and they coexist in flux, influencing each other and taking a variety of shapes and configurations. Locality, in the way I conceptualize it, does not just represent a medium between those two dimensions. Rather, as an interface, locality plays an active role because it constitutes the grounds where the two dimensions of materiality and symbolicity meet and interact with each other.

An interface, by definition (Merriam Webster Dictionary Online), is "the place or area at which different things meet and communicate with or affect each other," or "a surface forming a common boundary of two bodies, spaces, or phases," or "the place at which independent and often unrelated systems meet and act on or communicate with each other," or "a point where two systems, subjects, organizations, etc., meet and interact." In brief, an interface is not inert or passive. In fact, it is characterized as the place that makes the encounter, communication, and interaction of different entities or dimensions possible.

This characterization of locality as an active interface that enables the interaction between the entangled dimensions of materiality and symbolicity is significant in this context because it is a connotation that allows scholars to foreground their reciprocal embedded-ness within specific contexts for discourse and the importance of studying

their relations holistically. As such, the idea of locality as an interface and heuristic to study emplaced discourse can potentially be utilized to explore different kinds of rhetoric, and not just those of social resistance. Locality as an interface, in brief, exemplifies a way to think about situated discursive dynamics that can be translated to different contexts and different kinds of discourse.

Rhetorical Topographies as Resistive Representations of Localities

At the end of Chapter One, I also described rhetorical topographies as the result of a critical rhetorical praxis that aims to map the emplaced relationships emerging within a locality. This rhetorical mapping is intended to evoke the material, thick, lively, and textural network of relationships that interact within and through a locality interface. This kind of rhetorical mapping/representing is itself a material process. Rhetorical topographies, in fact, question the binary between the material and representation, and they do so through critical rhetorical practice by "texturalizing" representation, and mediating materiality, working towards a similar aim of the notion of texturality:

> Texturality insists on the depth and specificity and interrelationality of our spatially mediated politics. It replaces the glossiness of the public screen with the granularity of historical practices and their rippling effects. To confront the materiality of mediation is to texturalize the distinctions between this set of practices and those points of relay, between this cluster of expressions and that set of formations, and between this sequence of representations and that field of movements.[279]

Rhetorical topographies are also significant, for this project, and potentially for rhetorical criticism more broadly, because they allow scholars to represent and materialize resistive narratives emerging within localities, thus pinpointing the potential venues and modes for

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[279]Donovan Conley and Greg Dickinson, "Textural Democracy," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27, no. 1 (March 2010): 4.

rhetorical interventions within the network of relations that constitutes their context of circulation and articulation. The many ways in which localities and spaces are represented, in effect, can cause material consequences and can greatly affect the material conditions in which people live, as I have also demonstrated through the case studies explored in this dissertation. Therefore, rhetorical topographies can also be thought of as rhetorical critical interventions.

Finally, like locality, the critical method of tracing rhetorical topographies can be useful to map different kinds of discourse, thus it has the potential to go beyond the case studies analyzed in this project and become a critical methodology for rhetorical studies.

Performing Citizenship, from Below and from Above

Finally, in Chapter Three of this dissertation I traced a rhetorical topography of the polarized narratives that emerged during the trial of the Major Risks Committee in L'Aquila. The trial of the six scientists and one CPA government official led to the controversial guilty verdict and six year jail sentence for the seven defendants, all accused of charges of multiple manslaughter, negligence, and dissemination of inaccurate and unclear information to the public in L'Aquila.

That trial, which started after the investigation requested by the citizens committee constituted in L'Aquila by the relatives of the victims of the earthquake, suggests that the idea of citizenship engagement should not be deployed only when studying processes of engagement from below, such as the study of grassroots activism, or protest.

By mapping the narratives that circulated in L'Aquila regarding the infamous meeting of the Major Risks Committee on March 31, 2009, along side those circulating nationally and internationally in the technical spheres, this case has revealed that it is necessary and productive to think about citizenship engagement also when looking at technical and political discourse in context. In my analysis of the MRC trial, I explored the interdisciplinary and constantly growing body of scholarship that advocates for public inclusion in scientific discourse. These scholarly conversations advance and advocate public inclusion in the discourse of science by proposing concepts such as citizens' science, post-normal science, community science, or lay expertise.

However, the case of "the L'Aquila Seven" demonstrates that it is not sufficient to advocate for public inclusion from below in technical discourses: it is also necessary to encourage scientists and experts to think of themselves and of their role as one that is not detached from the communities they serve. In the case of the MRC meeting in L'Aquila, the gap between the information discussed by the scientists and the information received by the local citizens generated dangerous and deadly consequences.

In brief, in Chapter Three I suggest that bridging the communicative gap between scientists and citizens does not only involve recognizing citizens *as* experts. It also involves recognizing experts *as* citizens. Namely, it is necessary to look at the relationship between citizenry and experts from a perspective that emphasizes community, citizenship, and the necessity of continuity and connection of technical and public discourses. This change of perspective can make the experts accountable for the ways in which their assessments get turned into management, policies, or recommendations for action in specific settings.

From my analysis of the divergent accounts of the MRC meeting from the perspective of the scientists and of that of citizens of L'Aquila, it emerges that the deadly consequences of the flawed information that was passed to the local public in L'Aquila could have been avoided. Had the Italian experts of the MRC recognized their responsibility as citizens to rectify the misleading information that the government officials and the local media were spreading locally in the days immediately preceding the earthquake, some lives could have been saved. Had the scientists communicated clearly with their fellow citizens in L'Aquila, rather than imagining themselves as separated from public communication by their role of scientific advisors, they would have corrected the wrong interpretation of their findings that was communicated to the public (as candidly stated by the experts themselves during the trial proceedings), and they would have clarified for the citizens of L'Aquila that they could offer neither reassurances nor alarms. Had they done so, they would have also followed the Italian law, succeeded at their job of minimizing risk for the community, and also performed an important act of citizenship engagement. This study, by suggesting a new direction in the study of the science - public -policy debate, aims to further an approach that democratizes science by seeing citizens as experts, and engages experts by seeing them as citizens.

In brief, by deploying the concept of locality, I mapped detailed rhetorical topographies of the public discourses circulating in post-earthquake L'Aquila. By taking into account the interactions of discourse and materiality in the post-earthquake reality, I have highlighted how citizenship engagement from below can bring forth productive consequences in context, as I showed analyzing grassroots citizens' activism in L'Aquila. Furthermore, I have also examined the possibilities of thinking about citizenship

engagement from a different perspective, namely from above. Through the "topographic"

analysis of the Trial of the scientists of the Major Risks Committee, I have also found

that the idea of citizenship engagement should be deployed also from a top-bottom

perspective, thus encouraging the realization of an integrated model of citizenship

engagement, that from the bottom up, but also from a top-down perspective.

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