Info-cultural Networks.

Or, The Pluralization of Voices.

Nodi e reti della comunicazione.
Indeterminazione dei centri di radiamento informativi culturali

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Introduction

This paper argues critically against those socio-cultural models that claim superiority status against the peripheral realities over which they irradiate their influence. That is, the idea that peripheries are only passive recipients of the light centers emanates. It will be discussed how the concept of network is a much more adequate analytical understand to understand the relationship between the two terms, today.

The need to experiment ways in which *differences* can coexist is a cogent problem of cultural policy making worldwide. Migratory flows from the South of the globe continue to force the West to review legal structures at different levels. This impacts Nation States (also referred to as "Nations", or "Countries" along this essay) internally as well as the international relations amongst each other.

The social and cultural complexity triggered by such dynamics generates a twofold need.

1) Adopting adequate conceptual frameworks to comprehend processes of change, in order to 2) find solutions to facilitate the co-existence of different cultural patrimonies.

The legal, political, economic, social and cultural arenas are all facets of one same problem. Each is connected to the other both from an intra-specific national point of view, and from an international one. Local and global levels interlace indissolubly.

Local movements and sentiments surface and weave together with the globalization trends of economy, mass media, and information technologies. The invigoration of distinctive identities interconnects with parallel global processes and gives life to a mobile, differentiated and delicate dialectic.

Interestingly, as Hannerz (1990) points out, the decisive element that makes the phenomenon of globalization problematic is not the moving of human and economic capitals from a distinctive culture to others, since this always occurred in history. What is unique is rather that multiple distinctive cultural features can coexist in one individual experience (see also Martella, 1994). Even the life of one individual loses its 'centre', its equilibrium around a firm fulcrum.

This requires analytical categories to be redefined. Conceptual tools that were effective for long time are no longer such if applied to the contemporary times.

The ingrained power of communication and media (not necessarily only mass media) monopolies are "weapons" that can now be more noxious than others.

What conceptual tools shall be used to elaborate mitigating strategies to this type of power? Is it enough to simply transfer already existing explanatory principles and paradigms to the new "object" of analysis?

Scientists who do not believe in a successful plain transfer of theoretical premises and methods from one discipline to another are too many to mention, with thinkers and scholars in the hard sciences ranking high in that list.

History is a process that demands *historicizing approaches to problems*.

Asynchronously evolving analytical methods or lack thereof on one side, and fast *reality-scape* changes call for innovating such tools. It seems to me that Cultural anthropology finds itself in a privileged position to foster experimenting how *differences can co-exist*.

This is especially important today that the concept of *development*, as it has been constructed, practiced, promoted and often "exported" (e.g. imposed) by the West, is revealing its flaws and weaknesses.

Dialogue, in the widest sense of the term, is one of the most valid instruments towards inter-cultural ensembles. Dialogue as basic unit of communication, as *listening*

practice along with the *talking* practice, as opening and suspending value judgments. In other words, *dialogue as method* on small and large scale.

In the light of the above, dialogical approach was at the roots of the second international conference on "Memories and Identities. Perspectives of Change" coordinated by Tullio Tentori in Italy - Courmayeur (December 1995), organized by CNDPS (National Center of Social Prevention and Security) and promoted by UNESCO. As member of the organization staff and panelist I can testify for the merit of the event in gathering academic multidisciplinary contributors as well as professional experts. Below I employ some interesting themes emerged during that event, given their relevance to the objectives of this essay.

1. The (Hi)stories within (Hi)story.
   Steps towards a Cultural Policy of Communication

In this perspective, it is helpful to preliminarily point out some anthropological changes stemming from considerable yet irreversible historical mutations.

I refer to self-criticisms of academic disciplines dealing with understanding culture. As a paradox, the epicentres of these critical processes have been Great Britain and United States, two countries that in past did not hesitate to use support from Social/Cultural Anthropologists for their colonialist and imperialistic policies.

A discipline's *ability to change*, to put in question its epistemological corpus in order to maintain efficacy and lively connection with historical events, is an indicator of the degree of responsibility of the practitioners of that discipline.

I now outline historical facts and signs of the western "critical consciousness" which contributed to trigger the *relativisation* and deconstruction of the West self-appointed hegemonic role — using the Gramsci meaning for "hegemony" —.

However, I do not examine the decolonization process historically from the Second World War onwards and the diversified modalities in which it occurred in different areas. My objective is in fact to highlight some points that characterized this initial phase of crucial change.

Reaching independence from colonizers has always been a very difficult and painful process, in some cases not yet completed at today's date. The process itself had — and keeps on having — many and serious consequences on the historical courses of ex-colonized so-defined "new States".

In parallel, and symmetrically to the self-determination right of each people, promoted and ratified by the Charter of United Nations, the same peoples rebelled against being considered as "objects" at every level. That is to say, they refused to be considered "objects of study". The shift from political "object" to political "subject" implied the affirmation of their sovereign subjectivity in many ways: political, social, cultural, and economic.

Ultimately, this meant claiming independent identity, and this is the reason why so many revitalization movements arose in the first place.

Two points must be underscored:

1) Contacts of human beings and cultures existed since prehistoric age: massive waves of migratory flows, exoduses (moving of human masses), commercial trades and exchanges, battles for domination: none of these are recent (Bastide, 1971). Moreover, during the colonialist and imperialistic ages there has always been (forced) contact of cultures.

2) Imperialistic goals have often been tried to be awkwardly disguised, in ideological evolutionist modes, behind the good will of "civilizing savages" and generously leading them to that luminescent development model that the West had created.

Quick observation from these two considerations is that in truth there are no "savages": neither good (á la Rousseau) nor bad savages — as characterized by the western centric dialectic of "demonization" —. Ironically, following Callari Galli (1979), also woodlands and forests disappeared for the most. The "savage" left them to move to urban centers of Africa, Asia and South America, but also of Europe and United States. Thus, the savage is African and Asian as well as English, Turkish and Yugoslav. If initially the migrated groups could be easily identified by their distinguishable lifestyles, safter few generations ethnic-cultural boundaries become increasingly weak (Canevacci, 1992).

Ticineto Clough argues that "in the ethnography (...) the ethnographer is not the only subject of the research. [In fact] his story stages other stories, those of the subjects of the research. But their stories are also oedipally organized around their efforts to realize themselves as subjects of knowledge" (1992: 18).

This is connected with what just illustrated, because often times our subjects-objects of knowledge are indirect. They reach us — or we reach them — through the filter of a medium that may be either a written or a visual text. Text created by one or

more human beings: the author gathers, selects, and composes those which to our eyes appear to be "objective facts". The author does this unconsciously at the best, using filters organized in layers. These "filters" are nothing else but psycho-cultural and/or contingent categories of interpretation.

Such remark applies to the knowledge of cultures different from ours too. The ethnographic narration (story) provides for the presence of only one subject, instead of two; the second one is the "object" of knowledge acquired by the first.

As well, the same argument is applicable in general for History.

The critique to the West and the categories used (or at times ab-used) in time, as particularly valued in the modern thought, forces to re-consider *History* itself. History is a written *corpus* of events and facts that has mainly been written by the West. History as it is taught in schools, inevitably fraught with value judgments like any other written text, reveals all its relative quality.

More than one (hi)story exists, such that the one considered as THE History for centuries is simply one of them: one narration of facts from a specific point of view, whose only merit was to be considered the only and true one.

Talking about plurality of "(hi)stories", J. H. Steward (1955) was one of the first theorists of cultural change to envision the possibility that the evolution of social and cultural systems had "multilinear" course(s), in opposition to the unilinear evolutionist idea which for so long permeated the modern thought.

Certainly, Steward is amenable to criticisms. Nonetheless, the pioneer quality of his thought is largely acknowledged. Moreover, the same Steward has been one of the forerunners of the critique to the "national character" theories, which he defines as "national culture". The "lowest common denominator" at the basis of what is referred to as national culture is attained through research techniques that either ignore and/or elude the importance of social and cultural fragmentation. So, various typologies of cultural orientations are just obscured and ignored by this compact definition (Steward, 1977). And it goes without saying the close tie and known transition that extends meanings and values from national character models to stereotypes in everyday life.

This is far truer in the extremely heterogeneous modern society, where even the "common denominator" of generalized behavior is composite.

Indeed, considering that the studies of Steward date back to the fifties, and considering that the current "landscape" is even more diversified and fragmented

today than it was then, there are no bases to extrapolate a common denominator that holds any epistemological legitimacy.

Thus, transposing what just reasoned on a larger scale, I agree with Panikkar when he underscores that the use of words like "culture", "multiculture" calls for reflection and thinking. It is essential to historicize concepts in order to respect the diachronicity that makes them relative and changing. Panikkar also suggests to replace the prefix "inter-" to multi-", in order to avoid ambiguous interpretations slipping towards a globalizing meaning intended as homogenizing.

Such linguistic aspect is not to be underestimated. Language is alive and is a double-entry system: it produces and receives sense (meaning) at the same time. As in scientific meta-languages, in which specific shared codes nullified distinctive differences and "curves" of lateral information, the same risk arises in the question of cultural identities. Panikkar emphasizes it is not a Byzantine distinction that which leads us to opt for *interculture,* insofar that this term stresses on (re)search for open dialogue between cultures.

Only through a radical self-criticism the West can realize the absence of universal values and that every value is relative to its context.

Already M. Weber, and more recently many philosophers and scientists (G. Bateson; E. Morin; I. Prigogine; I. Stengers amongst others) drastically relativized technocracy and "scientification" as peculiar western "myths".

During colonial, neo-colonial and imperialistic times, a certain idea of *development* formed into the specific context of the western world. Transferring and applying this concept of development to other cultures caused irreversible damages on a short and a long run. Besides, the same concept of development as 'value' is deadening even wherein had been generated. It is showing its fallibility and weaknesses to the extent that studies on sustainable development concentrate on environmental disasters more or less directly generated by *"developing"* some geographical areas, pursuing that very concept.

The order of reasons why so many projects in the South of the globe failed has been widely understood by most important agencies involved in multilateral and international projects of cooperation. I am referring in particular to the United Nations as one of the most authoritative multilateral cooperative actions.

Currently the main goal is to recognize as much as possible the specificity of the context for which the project of cooperation is designed. The active involvement of the people and culture of the geographical area where the project takes place is now

considered essential for its success. This variable is injected in every stage of the project: from its ideation to its planning to its realization and criteria based on which results are evaluated and progress tracked (UNESCO, 1995).

Pluralizing (hi)stories does not mean to create or invent many of them: it means to recognize that historical processes modify sense and meaning according to the "voice" who reports them in form of *discourse* (information). From an epistemological point of view, it means to recognize the existence of many more subjectivities instead of only one around which others gravitate as objectual satellites. And this awareness may be called *invention* or *discovery,* like Bateson (1972: 39) well exemplified through the metaphor of Newton and the force of gravity. Indeed, things start to exist for us from the moment our eye sees them. In this sense everything is invented.

2. Dichotomy vs. Open Dialectics:
   ## Communication and The Analysis of Socio-Cultural Dynamics.

Seeking *connections,* rather than dualisms, between differences — conceptual differences as well as cultural ones — is a key concern in contemporary debates around worldwide development. On the other hand, we must be on guard against a discourse leading to a "monoculture". The focus of attention thus goes to the kind of relation between forces, which divaricate and move in antithetic directions. The theoretical position is important because is strictly connected with its pragmatic counterpart.

The ways in which we "read" (interpret) the world are intrinsically linked to the ways we relate to- and exist in- the world.

Below I select some keys to read some social and cultural dynamics, and I discuss the necessary changes they have to undergo for them to become applicable in the contemporary reality.

They have to shift from a *dichotomic* conceptual conformation to a *relational* one.

On close inspection, *the dichotomic principle* itself, although present in a few other cultures, is indeed typical of the western culture(s). By saying this, I mean that only in western culture(s) this has been taken to its extreme consequences[1].

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[1]Not all psycho-cultural dichotomies will be examined in this paper, although several of them (i.e. form vs. substance, emotion vs. rational, mind vs. body) are intimately related to those which will be considered (i.e. social and cultural dichotomies).

As anticipated earlier, the dread of a cultural homologation has progressively increased. Interestingly, localisms and local movements as re-affirmation of distinctive identities increased as well.

The centrifugal force towards heterogeneity on one hand, and the centripetal force — enhancement of homologation, globalization — on the other hand, prefigure a worldwide complex configuration. "The focus on the globe is to suggest that a new level of conceptualization is necessary. Yet the conception of culture as having escaped the bounded nation-state society also points to a limit, the image of the globe as a single place, the generative frame of unity within which the diversity can take place (Featherstone, 1990: 2).

Simultaneously, recalling Hannerz (1990) from the Introduction to this article, there is another element that makes globalization unique, and this is the possibility for different cultural features to coexist in the same individual.

This is a critical change that cannot be undervalued. The direct consequence of what Hannerz argues is that the strong link between culture and territory *(strictu sensu)* is vanishing. Such "transnational" character, hence *transterritorial* character, escapes the borders of the nation-state intended as territorial and political unit. "Hybrid" cultural identities take form. They very often remain in dynamic tension with a parallel centrifugal force pulling towards distinctive identity[2].

As Appadurai puts it, ultimately "the central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization" (1990: 295). The new global cultural economy has to be conceived as a complex order created on *disjunctions* of explicative models based on dualisms or dichotomies, and on their replacement with new open-endless models that contemplate communication and dialogue between parts within a same system.

More clearly, all this claims the inefficacy of univocal and unidirectional relations between elements.

The link between a given culture and a given territory is not obvious anymore, as showed above, as well as the relation center-periphery is not. Put in semiotics terms, this is to say that the univocal and sole relation between signifier and signified is invalidated.

As a chain reaction, extending the implications of such a statement, the relation between infrastructure and superstructure, as linearly formulated by traditional

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[2]Suffice is to think to immigrant communities in big cities, that cling to their specific traditions forming somewhat closed "enclaves" and resisting to the intense energies of the variegated metropolitan environment.

Marxist approaches, loses operative efficacy. Sahlins, as anthropologist, provided a decisive contribution by arguing that "there is no material logic apart from the practical interest, and the practical interest of men in production is symbolically constituted. The finalities as well as the modalities of production come from the cultural side: the material means of the cultural organization as well as the organization of the material means" (1976: 207). Sahlins proposed the abrogation of the traditional sectorialization of subsystems composing a social-cultural system — economy, society, ideology. Or, in other terms, infra-structure and super-structure. Such a statement, no orthodox at all if one considers the dominant analytical thought, increasingly found large credit amidst social scientists, cultural commentators and economists. This is because of the failed attempts in finding a part of culture that behaved as independent variable in relation to which all the other parts behaved as dependent variables.

It must be concluded that the type of relation subsisting among the diverse parts constituting culture, reading culture as a system, is that of a formal, substantial, and functional circularity (Bateson, 1972).

Turning the attention to the West, it results that the "peculiarity of western culture is the institutionalization of the process in and as the production of goods" (Sahlins, 1976: 211). Which means, in this case, admitting culture as "rationalization" (Tentori, 1987).

Yet, foundations of these positions that see the infra-structure as part of the super-structure are not so recent. I refer to K. Polanyi, whose most important work, *The Great Transformation,* dates back to 1944. The initiated debate in economic theories between substantivists and formalists – i.e. between those who agreed and those who disagreed from the analytical perspective of Polanyi - reverberated in diverse disciplinary areas of social sciences.

Featherstone sheds light on a further inadequate corollary of the relation infra-structure and super-structure, from the formalist perspective.

This is about the pre-fixed gender imagery and the role coupled with the masculine and feminine genders. The infra-structure, the production sphere is usually associated to a masculine role; the super-structure is somewhat derived, secondary: feminine. Further, another univocal cause-effect chain crumbles along with the ones above: that of the relation between "aulic" (high) culture and popular (low) culture. It is no longer the former to determine the latter. Very often today the process goes in the opposite direction (Featherstone, 1990b).

All the above induces everyone to perceive life, at a personal as well as at social level, like a whirl. As Berman says (1982), it leads to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air (345).

That is why new lenses to read our times are necessary. Analytical frames need to be refreshed both from theoretical, and from methodological and operative perspectives, in order to properly read the "newness".

I find the Appadurai's suggestion pertinent, because it focuses on the communication between those several dimensions and stresses how weak the boundaries of each of those are: "An elementary fieldwork for exploring such disjunctures [between economy, culture and politics] is to look at the relationship between five dimensions of global cultural flow which can be termed: a) ethnoscape; b) mediascapes; c) technoscapes; d) finanscapes and e) ideoscapes". (1990: 296). The suffix -scape is to signify that those are theoretical constructions that need to be heuristically modulated each time according to the localized context. The same suffix is also to render the lack of clearly defined boundaries between one dimension and the other for which all dimensions are to be considered strongly interacting and influencing each other.[3]

3. Spatial-temporal displacement:
   ## The Semiotic Form of the Contemporary Metropolis

Contemporary metropolises are privileged *topics* – in the double sense from the Greek *"topos"= theme and place* - to explore social and cultural complexity. The metropolis can thus be looked at either as physical place or as symbolic place. It is where cultural processes happen in more piercing and acute ways.

Conflictual dynamics and strategies of hybridization between different cultural patrimonies result in syncretic identities. The unique intersections between global and

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[3]The ethnic dimension is the "configuration" shaped by flows of individuals and human groups in motion" (tourists, immigrants, refugees, workers or occasional professionals hosted by a different culture from the one they belong to). In the technoscape Appadurai includes the curious distribution and diffusion of high and low technologies on a global level, which has blurred boundaries earlier thought as ultimate and definite. In a similar fashion, economic capitals are now distributed in the world in unprecedented and unpredicted ways. The dimensions of media and of ideas are intrinsically related, because ideas circulate through media. These two last dimensions are of innervated in the other dimensions (Appadurai, 1990, pp. 297-298).

local levels — differentiated in diverse micro-cultural contexts —, are more evident in metropolitan contexts. The fluid mixes of aulic culture and popular culture, but also the contradictions and contrasts are more frequent and extreme. The metropolis makes more "visible", emphasizes, the interlacing of the five dimensions that Appadurai outlined as lenses through which to observe complexity.

Production and circulation of ideas, economic sphere and ethnic dimension reach the largest range of possible combinations.

For its understanding, the metropolis requires breaking up with every pre-ordered model of interpretation. The lifestyles the metropolis creates, and from which it nourishes itself at the same time, are based on open-endless dialectical models. Here, dichotomic models are just not effective.

The dynamics portrayed above, which make every pre-fixed axiom relative, also impact space and time: two main pillars of individual and group identities.

The categories of space and time re-conquer their psycho-cultural relative qualities in the metropolis. Both space and time resist to a coherent and systematic reading approach, which expects a sign to be linked to only one specific meaning and one function.

Western rationality unveils its weaknesses in large metropolitan realities. Here, no western cultural assets and principles are more successful ways to *experience*.

"In the archetypical urban space of modernity we live in a world in which sense, meaning and value — nothing — is given; wherein everything has to be realized in function of, where, under and against the pre-ordered sign of the exchange value; *human* "authentic" values have to be re-invented on a new terrain: they have to be re-territorialized, reappraised" (Hebdige, 1988).

Today's metropolis radically differentiates itself from the typical western industrial age metropolises - the end of XIX century style - . Today's one is no representable and no measurable by using Euclidean logics (Grispigni, 1990).

The labyrinth is an inadequate metaphor for it.

Furthermore, today we live in a synchronic temporal dimension – versus a diachronic one. This takes directly to Jameson's point (1984): our everyday life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages are more spatially governed than temporally. I add, our communication revolves around visual, rather than textual, modes. This reflects over an architectonic-urbanistic reading. A building organism, or another "emergence" of the urban tissue — following K. Lynch (1960), for example the railway station — is also a morpheme, this in addition to serving concrete

functions (Borghini, 1994). Any element of the urban tissue is a *sign open* to potentially infinite values and symbolic functions.

Both values and symbolic functions are fluidly changing results of the "real life" of the "emergence", and these can greatly differ from the ones originally planned. This is a contemporary application to urban signs of R. Barthes' assumptions regarding the semantics of signification[4].

"When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains. (...) But the essential point in all this is that the form does not suppress the meaning, it puts it at a distance, it holds it at one's disposal. (...) The meaning will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness, which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation" (Barthes, 1980: 117-118).

Here we find what Jameson defined "the crumbling of the significative chain", borrowing this expression from Lacan.

Lacan, in fact, describes this as a double entry dynamics: produced both by a malfunctioning communication, and by identity desegregation, which he identifies with the schizophrenic syndrome.

In this syndrome there is a split between signfier and signified, which produces, as Bateson would call is an "*unlabeled metaphor*" (1972: 205).

The unlabeled metaphor portrays a situation in which the communicative level of form is no connected to any, or to an inappropriate (according to given cultural conventions) content level.

Similarly, the urban sign systematization crumbles as a whole.

By far considered the only viable one, the western model of city center-periphery applies less and less to the contemporary metropolis. The hierarchy of spaces and order of functions is invalidated. The periphery invades the center provoking a new type of dis-organization in the arrangement of functions (Varricchio, 1990). The formerly immediately recognizable arrangement of functions is just not there anymore. Diverse urban areas acquire multiple and mobile functions and values.

Sense of community and human relations follow new spatial parameters.

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[4]The studies usually defined as "semantics of signification" — of which R. Barthes is the most popular representative — stem directly from the semiological school resting on de-saussurian bases. This is confirmed by Jameson (1989) when he comments that the possible "dissociation" of the relation between signifier and signified (subsisting between the materiality of language, a word, a noun and its referent or concept) is one of the most valuable findings of linguistic structuralism of De Saussure.

If "sense of community" was earlier strongly associated with a space *(strictu sensu)*, now it may well be associated with a symbolic space (Maffesoli, 1993). The metropolis consists of a series of "sublime" *loci* (places), in the religious sense of the term, where several cults with strong aesthetic-ethic coefficient are celebrated.

I would elaborate on this thought and say that the changes of the space-place category reverberate on the concept of identity.

In the metropolitan context the "lived space" is the basis from which explorations commence. These, juxtaposed, compose a whole new experience of sociality.

Indeed, like Maffesoli clarifies, if modernity is classically defined by assigning a fixed residence — the individual belongs to a work, to a sex, to an ideology, to a social class — in a short time s/he possesses ONE identity and ONE address, and all these elements determine a rationalized, mechanized, linear social realm. If that is true for the modernity age, today's sociality is far more confused, heterogeneous and mobile than that.

Gender undifferentiation, introduced by youth cultures in the late sixties/early seventies, the ideological syncretism and the labor market mobility describe the new spirit of times.

Maffesoli and Barthes both see Tokyo as the ideal-type of metropolis.

Tokyo announces the pattern of urban and social aggregation-structure for the next decades. Maffesoli describes Tokyo as "sensible" city — in the Greek sense of *áesthetis),* because is essentially *relational.* Its meeting points, its sensations, its odors, its noises constitute an everyday theatrical performance, which radically transforms the city itself into a living object: materiality endowed with life[5].

Tokyo does not have a center and is not classified: names do not define places. Tokyo reminds us that the rational one is only one of the many possible ways to conceive reality.

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[5]This idea of metropolis is intimately connected with discourses on the aesthetization of everyday life, commodities, and their consumption in what has been redefined consumer culture by cultural commentators.

These debates marked a neat overcoming of the former theorizations about culture industry and mass society, organically enucleated by some exponents of the Frankfurt School — T.W. Adorno and H. Marcuse —.

The railway station is, as a paradox, the reference point in a neighborhood, stripping away the sacred quality we give to major landmarks of western cities.

As another contrast to the western model of metropolis, Tokyo extends its body also vertically, not just horizontally: the underground swarms of shopping malls, bars, and pullulating meeting points. The metropolitan rhythm pulses underneath the ground level as well. (Barthes, 1991: 33, 39).

Finally, the absence of one sole residence, depicted by Maffesoli, is exemplarily realized in this city. The concept of *home,* as the most basic character defining the residence, is different.

In Tokyo the home place is extremely mobile. It does not have a specific *locus* that characterizes it. There is no object based on which the body can elevate itself as *subject of a space.* The concept of center is also refused; the habitat is indoor and outdoor, inside and outside the metropolitan "borders". *Dwelling and city* are relative images of the individual, and of his/her *formae mentis,* according to the conventions dictated by the context (Illuminati, 1992).

The city, and overall the metropolis, does not have borders or boundaries that makes it the opposite to a no-city area. Boundaries are more internal to the metropolitan area. The center innervated by the periphery, the game of offering and taking away protection, the comfort-threaten ambiguity, and the combination order-disorder: all these are typical qualities of the metropolitan experience.

4. Conclusions: The Qualities of The Change.

During the international symposium in Courmayeur, Callari Galli suggested the term *deterritorialization*, in its literal and figurative senses, to indicate one of the most important features of the current cultural change.

I highlighted how the *territory* and its related conceptualizations changed and are still changing, especially if referred to urban and metropolitan contexts. The univocal link between space *(strictu sensu)* and identity — as a solid anthropological category — is threatened by global communication paths. The newly weak link between cultural identity and territory is reflected in the boundaries of nations, challenged by new international hybrid personal and sub-cultural identities. Historicizing and adjusting the interpretative categories implies that concepts of "border", "boundary" are poor tools to understand the current global reality.

Growing cultural syncretisms initiated by migratory flows on one hand, telecommunication and information technologies on the other hand, accelerate the

movement of cultural features from one place to another. The idea of "place", changes.

Consequently, the category of "space" conquers back its psycho-cultural relativity. The semantic fields expand: from its attachment to physicality, | space | detaches and becomes symbolic, immaterial. Put it differently, "territory" loses its old center of signification, becoming polysemic, de-centred. The most diverse origins of cultural information indicate that a fluid dialectic between center and periphery is taking place. Because of this, assigning different values to each of the two terms makes no sense.

Other hierarchic scales undergo similar sort: the once secondary periphery now shines its own light. The satellite periphery interacts and influences the center in the vest of active subject. Dialogue rather than monologue becomes a necessity for all the parts of the system are equally interdependent from one another.

Making the metropolis a metaphor for *change*, or realizing how the West is not the center of a rest-of-the-world periphery compel to start thinking differently about that which once was obvious common sense.

Other points of view, now more economically powerful subjects, refuse their objectuality. Other visions of the same facts and history forced to relativize the supremacy of one "center". The old center is on its way to surrender to an unpredicted reality that defeated the illusion of its absolute power.

The aesthetic-ethic paradigm proposed for the metropolis well illustrates the need for different perspectives from the Western one(s), which excluded emotions, and sensoriality from the strictly rational logics. No culture is closed or static: culture is an open system, fluidly affected by intentional and subliminal information exchanges with other cultures.

Concepts of oneness and compactness give way to those of multiplicity, multifacetedness.

The form glo*cal,* that Canevacci suggested (1995), does justice to the infinite possibilities of "grafts" between centripetal and centrifugal forces. The dialectical relation between global and local levels shapes the current cultural landscapes the way a surrelistic-like *collage* does (Martella, 1993). This is reassuring against the risk of a global "monoculture", and changes the terms between those who send and those who receive information. Now they both are *two* active subjects alternating positions and synergically taking part in the production of a new product-message absolutely different from any other formerly seen. As sustained by some schools of cultural

communication (Lotman, 1985; Bakhtine in Todorov, 1984), dialogue is the supreme mode of production of meaning. Dialogue brings *alteration,* which runs parallel to *interaction.* The interaction, the dialogue, which alters the identities of the two subjects, is at the core of the challenge played at micro and macro levels, both equally important. The *fil rouge* runs in fact from the most specific — the intra-individual level — to the most general levels, like the institutional and international ones.

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