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ГЛОКАЛЬНЫЕ ГОРОДА. СЕМИОТИЧЕСКИЙ ПОДХОД К МЕТРОПОЛИЯМ И ГЛОБАЛИЗАЦИИ©

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Аннотация. В данной статье в контексте культурно-семиотического подхода доказывается, что так называемые «глобальные города» должны быть более правильно определены и мыслиться как «глокальные города». Чтобы аргументировать эту гипотезу, во-первых, анализируются смыслы, заложенные в отношениях между определениями пространственных явлений, таких как «города», «мегаполисы», «мегалополисы». Во-вторых, в тексте утверждается, что ощущение глобальности, связанное с большими городами земного шара, является лишь одним из уровней их реальности. В-третьих, показывается, как города становятся «мирами» в результате процесса, который делает их внутренне глобальными, локализуя их во взаимодействии к другим городам и пространствам. Наконец, эссе фокусируется на глубоких семиотических структурах, которые позволяют сделать глокальность городов мыслимой: это приводит к восприятию сложных взаимоотношений субъективности и поэтики, которые формируются в этих городах и через них.

Ключевые слова: семиотика; города; глокализация; глобализация; пространство.
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Glocalcities. Spaces and subjectivities in contemporary world

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Abstract. Starting from a cultural semiotic point of view, the paper argues that what are generally called «global cities» should be more correctly defined and thought of as «glocal cities». To substantiate this hypothesis, the paper first analyzes the meanings embedded in the relationships between spatial definitions, such as «cities», «metropolises», «megacities». Secondly, the text maintains that the sense of globality associated with the great cities of the globe is only one level of their reality. Third, it shows how cities become «worlds» through a process that makes them internally global while locating them in relation to other cities and spaces. Finally, the essay focuses on the deep semiotic structures that make the glocality of cities conceivable: this leads to the perception of the complex interplay of subjectivity and poetics that takes shape in and through these cities.

Keywords: semiotics; cities; glocalization; globalization; space.
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Introduction[1]

According to the United Nations *World Urbanization Prospect 2018*, more than 55% of the world population now lives in metropolitan contexts. The percentage is estimated to rise to 2050 in 68%. The planet's population growth itself is almost totally concentrated in urban areas. But it is not only the quantitative data that underlines the centrality of cities in our experiences. If we focus on the historical and contemporary imagery, we realize that it is very often made up of cities, or fragments of them. From the Berlin Wall to Tiananmen Square in Beijing, from the Seattle riots to the *Indignados* of Puerta del Sol in Madrid, from the fall of Baghdad to the Arab Spring of Tahrir Square in Cairo, from the Rome government to the one in Brussels, from the Rio Protocol to the Kyoto Protocol, from the power of Wall Street to the occupation of Zuccotti Park in New York, from the murals in Belfast to the Catalan independence demonstration in Barcelona, from a market in Wuhan to the burials in New York City.

[1] The author wish to thank Manuel Cadeddu (University of Cagliari) and Stefano Aroldi (University of Rome «Tor Vergata»).

Names, events, objects of a list that could be endless. A list that evokes cities that are more or less famous, close to us or somewhere far away. A list that reminds us to what extent contemporary common sense is a *glocal common sense*, made of events with global (or at least translocal) significance that happen in specific places, nearly always in cities (often in «parts of cities» maybe even smaller than any village, like squares, streets or parks)[1].

Cities – every time a single city – are the crossroads and junctions for such flows, which are *global* and *local* at the same time. Cities, a favourite place for translating and shaping our world. But not without some explanations, necessary to avoid harmful intellectual and political simplifications.

The first one is that cities do not complete our experience of the world, or the possible ways to experience it, starting from territoriality, from materiality, from the location of our bodies. Events like Brexit or the election of Donald Trump reminded us that the «countryside» matters: that there can be a political subjectivity that fashion itself in contrast to that multicultural, open-minded, liberal subjectivity common sense (sterotipically) associates to the big cities of the globe. So, we must not forget the alternative omnipresence of the countryside, of rural areas, of villages, of non-anthropic spaces, of «nature». The various *others* of city space, those from which, by definition, cities are different and in comparison with which they are defined.

The second one is that cities are not just a breeding-ground for events, images, subjectivities, worlds that are primarily somewhere else. They are active producers of those other dimensions that shapes our life: climate, languages, cultural identities, citizenship, consumption etc. [see Sedda, 2012]. Even more, we can say that from a certain point of view, with an inversion of the lens through which we usually look at cultural reality, cities are events, images, subjectivities, worlds in themselves.

The third one is that their physical and imaginative dimension is in correlation – interpenetration or contention – with other concurrent entities, particularly nations and States. But even with apparently more elusive (and often contested), but nonetheless crucial, dimensions like regions, areas of influence, civilizations, supranational organisations, empires, networks.

[1] For our general point of view on glocal and glocality, see: [Sedda, 2014].

Finally, we should take into account that not all cities are the same, that regardless of their size they can feel more or less global and local, that they are fashioned from time to time on the basis of even conflicting images and values.

Given all this, we will try to explain what substantial and formal elements contribute to the appearance of a glocal common sense that has world cities at its centre and why from a semiotic cultural point of view it is better to talk about *glocal cities* than about *global cities*. Before dealing with more typically semiotic aspects of cities as glocal objects, we concentrate first on some problems relating to the definition of urban space and then on understanding in what ways global cities are to be considered global. Because of previous works and of our personal metropolitan experience, we will often refer to Rome, Dubai and São Paulo.

Do cities exist?

Let us start from a radical question: do cities exist? Or rather, do they *still* exist? It is an apparently paradoxical question if we consider that we have just ascertained the centrality of cities in contemporary daily discourse. However, now that the metropolisation of the globe seems to become dominant from the point of view of geographers and city planners, in social sciences a perception is pushing its way that cities are failing in their being objects, in their shape, in their singularity, in their being identifiable. Cities disappear to make room for indefinite sprawls, a metropolisation of territories that would be the victory and at the same time the death of cities.

However, from a semiotic point of view the problem takes a different shape, with cities as a more complex subject of analysis, seemingly more elusive and reluctant, but anyway not different from other semiotic formations, e.g. a literary text or a film[1].

The point is: *how does a heterogeneous multiplicity become a globality of meaning*? Even more, how does the heterogeneity facing us or in which we are immersed obtain from any point of view, that is within a specific relation of difference, some kind of unity, some kind

[1] On «semiotic formations» as a key concept for contemporary Cultural Semiotics, see: [Sedda, 2015].

of articulation of plurality, of discordant consistency, whatever it is: a harmonious polyphony, a tight counterpoint or an almost unlistenable cacophony, yet recognizable in its clear and disturbing dissonances.

In order to deal with this point, we will have to deal with cultural definitions, case studies, formal structures relating to the abstract configurations of spatiality.

City, metropolis, megalopolis

The complexity of reality and the fact that part of the meaning it has for us rests on an inexhaustible struggle of definitions (including self-definitions, which are crucial) is proved by the relationship of connection and separation that characterizes what we define as *city, metropolis, megalopolis*.

If on the one hand cities are the genus to which the species of *metropolis* and *megalopolis* belong (and this is the structure underlying the quantitative datum of a numerical domain of the city dimension in the world), on the other hand this triad can be read as an *historical trend* that becomes dominant both on an urban level and on common imagery (and this is the structure that emphasizes the qualitative pre-eminence of cities in contemporary social dynamics).

But we could also read through the getting together of the three words and find a *formal line of reasoning* drawn between the definition of cities as circumscribed spaces, with something (once walls, today ring roads) clearly defining their shape and separating them from surrounding empty spaces, and the contemporary drift of cities, that is megalopolis, which define their shape in losing it, in their being endless *sprawl*, made of endless *slums*.

We could now say that the loss of a shape is in its own way a shape. But we aim at something more, so we will show how the identification of cities has always been based on its *physical delimitation* but also on the possibility of differentiating itself from other places offered by its common recognition in a *name* (or the even more complex recognition in a name in spite of the transformations this name has undergone) [see Sedda, Sorrentino, 2019]. The paradigm of this is defined by all those cities – New York bears powerful witness to this – that have grown to include and put under their *shared name* other cities that used to be neighbouring but different, that in time have become

quarters and areas, parts of a wider unit. A process of name incorporation that obviously goes together both with administrative reorganization and a redefinition of the way cities are perceived. It suffices to think of city profiles, of their borders and skylines as icons, that is of the redefinition of their self-representation through maps and logo [see Pezzini, 2006].

Even their loss of a definite shape, if properly analysed, turns out to be a result of an *excess of coexistent and competing shapes*, creating frayed spaces of vagueness, unstable in their web of meaning [cfr. Sedda, 2007]. This generates feelings of chaos, lack of control, danger, that are often associated to the perception of the megalopolis of the globe. However, our analysis reveals a much more complex dimension.

If it is true, for instance, that entering a *favelas* alone is dangerous, it is not true that it is as dangerous if you are taken there by a resident of the same *favelas* or by some government or university employee who is involved in cooperation projects with the community of the same *favelas*. On a more extreme level, *favelas* are dangerous and chaotic places for those who experience them, describe them and live them from outside, but for an hypothetical boss of a certain *favela* it is the place of maximum protection and maximum order (or of a confusion functional to the order he has established).

If more shapes, and therefore more meanings, converge on the same space, it is also because, as we will see, contemporary cities, and especially those we will try to single out as *glocal cities*, are characterised by their being meeting places for different subjectivities, for plural stories that bringwith them connections to other places. Think about cities from the point of view of migrants, refugees and strangers in general to have a glimpse of this phenomenon. These subjectivities must re-define themselves starting from specific political, social, cultural relations that are stored in the space, in the memory, in the practices of the city that houses them. At the same time these subjectivities call for the city to change, to become glocal, to be world.

Quantity and quality of contemporary urban experience

Cities are becoming global both in quantitave and qualitative terms. In the first sense, as we said at the beginning of this essay, the urban population already exceeds rural population and in the future,

cities will represent the whole of demographic growth, with a peak in 2050 of about ten billion people [see also Davis, 2006, p. 11].

This means urban experience is becoming dominant from a quantitative point of view, and the pace by which populations in cities grow seems to draw future metropolitan scenarios for almost the entirety of the world population.

In the second sense, urban-metropolitan experience becomes global from a qualitative point of view. In a sociological sense, this globalisation of cities is manifest in their «functional interconnectivity» [Sassen, 2000], in their mutual interdependence, which is growing more and more, so much so that social life in a city – especially from the point of view of production and economy – directly depends on what happens in other cities in the world.

This is not enough. Interconnectivity among cities makes metropolitan experience politically and culturally dominant. Cities seems politically dominant, because it is in and from metropolis that politics and powers are developed – in the same way as counter-politics and counter-powers take place in cities or have to make reference to cities as an opponent to define their goals and values – that seem more capable of affecting the experience of the entirety of world population. Cities are culturally dominant, because contemporary imagery, especially TV imagery, has looked since its birth like a constant translation of metropolitan experience in media immaterial spaces. Mass media have their roots and the sense of their existence in the daily life of big metropolis and in a way they are at the same time their mirror and their continuation [Abruzzese, 1995].

Levels of reality: globality and difference

Cities, in their interdependence, are a specific *level of reality*, as if this network of cities was a sort of *macro-city* that envelopes the globe[1]. Besides, newspaper rhetoric, and sometimes commonplaces on globalisation, have very often nourished the idea that cities like New York and London are «closer» to each other than to their own suburbs, as if there was between them not just a physical proximity due to air

[1] On the distinction between «city-world» and «world-city» see also: [Augé, 2007].

connections, but also a community of lifestyle, feeling, interest that binds them more deeply to each other than their own suburbs. A fascinating idea, sure, but it underestimates two issues. The first one is the difference and the plurality inherent to individual cities, that difference that makes them unique every time. The second one is the difficulty in generalising such a metaphor: it does not stand the test if we compare cities with histories, languages, lifestyles that are more distant than and more distinct from those represented by New York and London. To what extent can we talk about the relations between Mumbai and São Paulo, Shanghai and Mexico City, as we talk about a closeness between London and New York?

This is why we are interested in talking about a *level of globalising experience* that transversally cuts through the cities on the planet, creating a sort of common atmosphere, of feeling of familiarity, of similarity of tastes and of possible experience, without thinking that such level completes the complexity of real cultural life. The possibility of going to different metropolis and finding the same buildings of the same *starchitects*, the offices of the same multinationals, the same big names in the fashion world, the same DJs livening up the nights on earth, and so on, does not complete what metropolitan experience offers, the inner complexity every metropolis has within.

The difference constantly comes to the fore. From within the different cities, original mixtures of different experience and personal stories as from without. The same «rural» experience, the same «surroundings» of cities are not homogeneous. The relationship between São Paulo and its «interior»; between Rome and «the castles», the countryside around Rome; between Dubai and the «desert» surrounding it cannot be standardized. Even less can we standardize these and the relationship Stockholm has with its surroundings, which is both natural and cultural (since in Sweden nature seems to be a real part of culture). Let us think how the city and the State, in 1891, dreading the possibility of losing their own roots because of industrialization, recreated a picture of non-urban Swedish culture and life on one of the main islands that make up the city, moving and putting together again pieces of villages, whole farms, churches, and along with them the biodiversity of Sweden. Skansen, this is the name of the first outdoor museum and zoo, recreates *inside the city* the picture of its *outside*, of its *surroundings*, of that *particular otherness*, *original* in its own way, which Swedish people did not want to forget (and have not forgotten).

In a similar but different way (decidedly more rhetorical and less incisive) in the centre of Dubai the original pearl divers' village from which the city was born has been reproduced, and the quarter of Bastakia recreates a picture of local architecture, «traditional» and «up-to-date» at the same time. On a more general level, the Emirates, just when they run towards a sort of hyper-modernity, celebrate the Bedouin culture they come from. As it was clearly shown in the exhibition that in 2008 displayed the Abu Dhabi's «Cultural District Master Plan». And as it is implicitly underlined by the fact that the Zayed National Museum, which is named after the father of the nation and is dedicated to the history of the Emirates, is going to be in the shape of falcon wings, powerfully rhyming with one of the most beloved and celebrated Bedouin traditions: «Inspired by the dynamic of flight and the feathers of a falcon, the design reflects Sheikh Zayed's love of falconry and creates an iconic symbol for the nation»[1].

As we can see, the definition of the *other*, of what populates the outside of cities, compared to what is typical of cities, is not always and necessarily perceived and described in a *negative* way (*en passant*: the *caipira*, i.e. the Brazilian «yobs», are the ones who are given credit for inventing *caipirinha*!).

The space outside cities is therefore a space full of diversity and stories. But cities do not behave differently in their inside. As soon as we leave airports, luxury hotels or malls, that is the main *hubs* of transnational capitalism, and we go into cities, difference prevails again [Tomlinson, 1999]. To say the truth, even the places of the apparent standardizing logic more and more often stage diversity, or rather *some diversity*, as long as it can make an impression on the visitor, activate the feeling of being living a «unique» experience, encourage a desire for being a consumer of that experience. In Dubai hotels like the *Burj al Arab*, resorts like the *Royal Mirage* or the *Atlantis*, mall like the *Ibn Battuta Mall* or the *Mall of the Emirates* (with its phantasmagorical ski run), make the experience alienating even in the places of global consumption. And it is not difficult to realise that places of consumption in São Paulo – *Daslù*, *Cidade Jardim*... – translate and reproduce in their own way *forms of diversity*, maybe exploiting different levels of difference that

[1] Mode of access : http://www.zayednationalmuseum.ae/architecture.html (accessed: 27.10.2012).

do not rely on the semantic of the exotic or of the ethnic but rather on economic, social, aesthetical distinction.

Starting from climate and landscape peculiarities fatally inherent to every city, the sense of diversity is evident and discernible in an almost immediate way. These natural (better, «naturalized») meanings become a powerful reserve of stereotypes of metropolitan diversity – the London drizzle, the afternoon's heavy rain in São Paulo, the hot wet in Dubai, the good weather in Rome – to the point of hiding completely the mutability of the experience connected to every individual place: the sun sometimes appears in London too, sometimes it is cold in São Paulo or Dubai, and it even snows in Rome.

The same idea of a global network of cities, moreover, does not lead to a standardizing idea, rather to a complex systemic vision. Every network is a network because its points are in relation and depend on one another, so their being in relation makes the network something more than the individual points it is made of. However, each point in the network, without which it would not exist, is inevitably local and localised.

From this point of view – and without losing that possibility of partial belonging to a global reality we have mentioned – every city appears as the place where those translocal flows of men, capital, ideas, images, technologies that travel the globe are made concrete and composed individually [Appadurai, 1996, also see Sedda, 2012, Chap. 5].

A doubly global locality: a world at hand

Every city is therefore connected to the global – that is, to what exceeds that single place – just as a kind of space that is populated, inhabited and crossed by subjectivities (or objectivities) whose existence, whose significance and value, could be attributed to more than one place. Thus, these subjectivities (or objectivities) are existentially characterized precisely by this being *among more places*; moreover, their primary task is to manage and articulate their own identity boundaries, economic interests, community loyalties, territorial affiliations and emotional horizons within a necessarily disputed and contested social space[1].

[1] On the concept of «contested social spaces» see: [Rosati and Stoeckl, 2012].

Every metropolis thus becomes the privileged place of an often-confrontational identity re-articulation game[1]. A game involving in the first place the different subjectivities that inhabit the city, but also the city's relationship with spaces of regional, state, national, continental identity. As if the city were a token that defines itself both for its position in the network of translocal geopolitical relations in which it takes part on several levels; and for the original way it arranges its internal relations, namely the way it organizes (although in an always incomplete, partial, precarious, even violent manner) the flows that run through it and the memories that live there.

If this game seems to succeed, and cities seem to be a privileged actor (also at a cultural level) of current international relations, it is because they, even when they become megalopolis, appear as *the most circumscribed place in which the world as a whole finds a synthesis*. The world is refracted and translated into a phenomenologically present, delimited and identifiable space, seemingly circumscribed and circumscribable. It is in this tension between *the city as a synthesis of the world*, a local translation of the global complexity, and *the city perceived as a liveable place of one's own*, a whole at hand, the place where one is born and grows, where one belongs and in which recognize him / herself, it is in this *coexistence* that the strength of the *glocal cities* emanates.

The *metropolitan glocal experience* is therefore, once again but in a different sense, the experience of *a doubly global locality*: global not only as image and experience of the world, even though this globality is an imperfect and partial translation of the whole; but also global as experienced and perceived in itself as the global reference of one's own bodily existence, always situated, interwoven with passion and memory.

This intimate glocality of cities, their participation in a double game – identification but also self-ascription of a planetary role and identity – seems today to become more and more brought to awareness. In fact, many cities are not only, *in actuality*, a synthesis of the world as is the case for places such as Dubai, where it is estimated that there are people from all the countries of the world, or New York, where, as noted by Pierluigi Cervelli, new geographies are created with new frontiers, such that «Mexico, within the United States, borders China»

[1] On identity, politics and articulation see: [Clifford, 2000].

[Cervelli, 2009, p. 38]. But many cities also take on this «planetary» role at the level of self-representation. That is, they describe and communicate themselves *as world-cities*. This performative reflexivity, acted out through multiple cultural formations and multiple forms of communication, can be discerned both in Rome's historic self-definition of «Caput Mundi» and in the catholic ecumenism linked to its role of capital and hub of the flows of people, images and ideas of Christianity [see Sedda, Sorrentino, 2019]; it is persistently evident in Dubai where services – from those related to luxury to medical ones – are ascribed to a «world-class level», where the architecture insists on the idea of a world primacy – both in size and in innovativeness of constructions – and in many places the city is told as a place in which the world can be found on a smaller scale; it can be sensed in São Paulo, as far as the city embeds the incredible cultural diversity of Brazil and, with it, the idea that anyone can become or be acknowledged as a Brazilian. Clearly, these translations of global into local are neither homogeneous nor innocent: rather, they disclose, or at least hint at, the idea of global that a place offers or wishes for. In the practice of self-representation as well as in other life practices, *glocal cities* are given as incorporation and consistent deformation of the totality of the world from a specific history and a specific geography.

The semiotic boundaries of the city

Cities individuate themselves. They do so mainly in two ways: as *defined spaces* that distinguish themselves from other spaces which surround them, or as a *name*[1], that is, as a space whose boundaries are not perfectly delimited but that identifies itself through memory, present in the textures of culture and history[2].

This mechanism can be seen clearly, almost to its extreme, in the comparison between Dubai and Rome, which will give us the opportunity to reflect also on the intermediate position of São Paulo. The existence of Dubai is heavily indebted to the opposition that defines cities as a

[1] The distinction between «city as delimited space» and «city as name» is somehow outlined in: [Lotman, 1985, p. 225].

[2] On the semiotic analysis of the city see the essays in: [Marrone and Pezzini, 2006, 2008] and [Leone, 2008].

«populated space», a humanized and man-made space, clearly outlined against a physically other, uninhabited space. Dubai, a city with hardly any history, with very little memory, which however individuates itself clearly and powerfully. A city «from zero», that is grown from a few tens of thousands to a million and a half people in a very short time, grown upon and against a *tabula rasa*. Dubai against the desert, full against the void, culture as opposed to nature. On the other hand, there is Rome, a city whose individuation is bound up with its cultural identity, its historical existence and the multiple definitions (often competing) that made it present and famous on the worldwide stage: Caput Mundi, The eternal city, SPQR, The City of Rome, Rome the Capital, the She-Wolf, the Great Beauty.

As previously stated, with regard to the polarization represented by Dubai and Rome, São Paulo seems to lie in an intermediate position. While on one side its history as a city that preserves its memory of growing from zero – the village of São Paulo Piratininga was founded January 25 1554 by Jesuit missionaries Manuel de Nóbrega and José de Anchieta – and of then having perceived itself as *cidade que mais cresce no mundo*, relates it to the contemporary Dubai; on the other hand, its extension and its current gigantism, as well as its role in Brazil and in the world, identify it more as a recognizable name than as a delimited and circumscribed space, consequently bringing it closer to Rome in this respect. The very fact that São Paulo «in the narrow sense», with its 11 million inhabitants, is complemented today with the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (20 million) and with the Complexo Metropolitano Expandido / Macrometropole de São Paulo (29 million) reminds us of the expansive and encompassing dynamics of New York, which has become what it is today passing through the definition of a metropolitan area – the «Greater New York» [see Cartosio, 2007] – that included what then fell beyond the borders but it was now integrated with and indistinguishable from the «original» core of the city.

Obviously the two dimensions, the two forms of identification we are describing and illustrating talking about Dubai, Sao Paulo, Rome and New York, interact and reinforce each other, but the logic of *delimitation* and that of *nomination* show us different aspects of this crisscross process.

The power of these two phenomena is such that, on one side, the very name of a city preserved in mythic narratives is sufficient to create the expectation of its existence – think of the story of Troy – or, on the

other side, just a road surrounding the inhabited area is sufficient to recreate the sense of a delimitation – see the *Grande Raccordo Anulare* surrounding Rome, or the various «Ring Roads» marking the mobile city boundary in Beijing. In this respect, cities are like lizards, if you cut their tail you will see it growing back.

Glocal networks, glocal cities

As we have seen, cities individuate themselves. Now the crucial point is that *local* spaces in cities, once put in relation to physical or cultural otherness, define *a global whole* within themselves. They individuate themselves as *one* populated space, which a given boundary defines with regard to its surroundings and to other populated spaces, and as *one* specific memory the given name holds together over time, through the series of its transformations. Cities, viewed at this level, are no longer simply a collection of heterogeneous items, but find their own *internal unity*. A unity (at least) *by difference*, a unity built upon its distinction from other spaces and other histories.

Here is where all the *glocality* of spatial, and in particular urban, mechanism emerges. In order to exist as a global unity, a city needs to relate with otherness (another space, another city: São Paulo vs the *interior*, Dubai vs. the desert, Roma vs the *agro*, but also São Paulo vs Rio de Janeiro, Dubai vs Abu Dhabi, Roma vs Milano). By the time this relationship is established, the city earns its inner global unity and at the same time is *localized*. At that very moment, indeed, it arises *anew* as locality: nothing more than a locality in relation to another locality, involved in *a global mechanism that encompasses, constitutes and exceeds both*.

There is a double movement of intersection: the local stemming from the global and vice versa. In fact, one might even say, though apparently a paradox, that cities in order to exist *as localities* have to go through *a double process of globalization*. They must be recognized as something greater than a mere sum of their parts and, moreover, they must be situated as opposed to something other than themselves. That is to say, they must see themselves as *a global whole* and at the same time as situated inside *a more global space*, one that is more than the

presence of two terms, but rather is the mechanism of putting them in relation[1].

Thus, this *more global space* is densely populated by other *local globalities*, other cities, more or less interconnected. A single city, therefore, turns out to be a node in a network of cities, each one unique and different within a common series[2]. Simultaneously singular and plural. Cities become cities through this reciprocal movement, which is local and global at the same time.

If what we sometimes call «the local dimension of the city» seems to be the same as what we define as «the global dimension of the city», it is just because we are always talking about a fundamental glocality. We're talking about *glocal cities* that form the nodes of a network.

This reticular structure is also seen in the way in which the sense of a city is built in the translating reference that the discourses about the city establish, finally shaping connections underlying the perception of the city itself: Dubai like Disneyland, Dubai like Las Vegas, Dubai like Miami, Dubai like Beirut, Dubai like New York...

Or through a negative, oppositional, differential, equally fundamental, reticular structure: Dubai vs Abu Dhabi; Dubai vs Doha; Dubai vs Ryad; Dubai vs Beirut...

None of these positive or negative translations, either by similarity or difference, can grasp the identity of a city on its own. But all together they can help shape its image and intervene in highlighting or concealing some of its traits. A city, or rather its image[3], is *also* the sum of all the cities to which it can be related, by similarity or difference. Or, more to the point, it is the *form* that, every single time and in every single discourse, this network of positive and negative connections takes on and hints at[4].

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[1] We have developed this argument in a more general way in [Sedda, 2004].

[2] On networks see: [Latour, 2005] and [Grewal, 2008].

[3] On the subject of the image of the city see the classic [Lynch, 1960]. For a semiotic analysis, starting from the case of Rome [see Cervelli, 2008].

[4] Suffice it to say that in western journals a reference to Dubai as the new Beirut is never found. Which, however, is explicitly stated in the history that Samir Kassir [Kassir, 2009] dedicated to Beirut, where Dubai is seen as the heir to the role once occupied by the Lebanese city. Likewise, Dubai as seen from a broker's point of view – from Dubai or from elsewhere in the world – therefore through a financial discourse, will activate positive and negative connections with other cities where international

Space and subjectification

There is another mechanism that makes cities an intimately glocal device. It is an intersection movement between two trends: one dealing with spatiality and the other concerning the subjects' phenomenological experience.

Having previously considered the opposition between the city – the architectonic space made habitable by and for man – and its exterior, namely its *alterity*, next we can regard this opposition as one of the roots that gives rise to the subjectivity or, more precisely, the *potential of subjectivity* of the human being.

According to Yuri Lotman, in fact, not only is human consciousness intimately spatial, but a fundamental mechanism of signification is tied to space, and in particular to city space: «The duplication of the world in the word and the human being in space form the initial semiotic dualism» [Lotman. Semiotica de la…, 1996, Vol. 1, p. 85].

In other words, from the point of view of the semiotics of culture, each signifying system must possess a mechanism for duplicating, actually repeatedly multiplying, the object that constitutes its meaning [Lotman. Semiotica de la…, 1996, Vol. 1, p. 84]. And while the word would be responsible for multiplying «the world» by forming it into its textures, spatial relationships will multiply «the man». That is, it would be the division of space into spheres that require different behaviours – as is clearly the case, for example, in the passage from mundane to ritual space – that makes the subject aware of his/her own body and ability to act in different ways. This is a minimalist and primordial opening of the space of *culture* and *freedom*, both defined precisely as the *possibility of choosing between alternatives* [Lotman, 1992 b, 1993]. It is clear, therefore, that city experience, metropolitan life, appears as a common potential way of subjectification, which is opposed to the non-urban way of life. Yet, at the same time, every single metropolitan experience contains the seeds of its own specific variation and folding of this common metropolitan subjectivity, thus implying a constant difference within the apparent commonality. In fact cities are not simply that part of the universe endowed with culture compared to an «uncultivated» outside – or considered as such by those

stock exchanges are based, otherwise these connections will be imperceptible and non-existent if we set up another network with another form.

who feel «citizens»[1] – in comparison with which they appear as the space of culture and the development of subjectivity. Actually, since they «copy the entire universe» [Lotman. Semiotica de la…, 1996, Vol. 1, p. 84], cities reproduce both their own and others' characteristics, the interior and the exterior, the familiar and the alien, the civil and the barbarous, order and disorder, and so forth. To put it differently: «the world created by man reproduces his idea of the overall structure of the world» [Lotman, 1987, p. 6].

The mechanism originating from here is that of a multiplication of spaces – spaces of sense – whose proliferation generates nested and overlapping structures. From a city as a whole down to a single architectural object and even further, we can see a kind of *fractalisation* of space structures. Cities thus become, *simultaneously*, an organic whole and the place where an unavoidable structural heterogeneity is made manifest. If we regard cities as a device in which the global and the local intersect and reproduce at any level, then urban space becomesboth a space of *proliferation of conflicting subjectivities* and a *continuous imperfect synthesis of the world*. The point is to investigate the *form* of these plural relationships, to understand how at any time a discordant concordance between local and global experiences is created; how the different global flows – which are often just the flows coming from *other localities* or from *other logics* – intersect in cities and constitute unique patterns, as if they were different carpets made of the (perhaps almost) same threads.

Cities, therefore, are a global phenomenon but always realized locally, in space and time: «(...) urban history is the history of different forms of space organization. *The city* does not exist, only *cities* exist» [Cacciari, 2004, p. 51]. At the same time, however, while their actualizations are local and plural, their operating mode is unified.

[1] It is worth noting that the «uncultivated» is exactly the image of someone who lives in the countryside, deemed devoid of culture, from the point of view of the citizen, although cultivating is his / her job: consider, for example, labels such as «hick», «caipira», «boor». Thus, non-urban subjectivity comes to be characterized by rudeness and backwardness, although sometimes those meanings can change into signs of simplicity and authenticity. The temporal dimension underlying the transition between countryside and city, namely the opposition between tradition and modernity, while devalues what is not urban, yet sometimes can be the bearer of positive values: a deeper wisdom, a most natural way of being, a better mankind or an original truth. That is, a utopian time and place, where we come from and should go back to.

Cities always give rise to an idea of global, for they are always a translation of the cosmos, that is, a local form that internally reproduces the heterogeneity, complexity and contradictions of the whole.

But this type of glocality is not enough. Actually it is doubled by the very presence of our bodies, with their being practically involved in space[1]. The subject's fragmentary experience of space, his / her always incomplete grasp of the city, in addition to his / her *subjectification* by dealing with heterogeneous structurings of space, imply the need to establish cities as a global whole, as an «imaginary global reference» [Greimas, 1976, Greimas and Courtés, 1979] and to do this imaginatively, drawing on the products of culture. So extension becomes space, a cultural one – and a real and imaginary one – lived by and for man.

Metropolitan poetics

In the relationship with individual and social bodies – and with the various projects of city promoted, more or less consciously, by these bodies – city boundaries change, pluralize and become multilayered. Within themselves cities incorporate what used to be outside. Their distinctive geographical and social features change. Their internal structure also change, as well as their general mapping. The redefinition of central and peripheral location, visibility and invisibility, accessibility and inaccessibility – i.e. exclusive or inclusive places – occurs relentlessly.

Moreover, cities shape their face through large-scale or minimal interventions. Empty places are filled, whilst others that used to be filled are emptied. Green areas turn to grey, whilst abandoned areas become gardens or parks. Some neighbourhoods decrease in value whilst others flourish. The new replaces the old. Alternatively, the old is renewed, it is rediscovered and redeveloped.

Even the past of the city, its temporal outside, may fall within the semiotic space of the city thanks to an archaeological excavation, the recovery of a historic area or of a reputed ancient architectural style.

Cityscape change constantly. And in the crisis that accompanies this mutation the conflict about the value of the city intensifies. As,

[1] On the relation between bodies, spaces and politics see also: [De Certeau, 1980 and Hall, 2006].

towards the change, everyone usually takes a stance: to act to change or to act to preserve. But between these two extremes there is also a wide range of possible intervention forms.

Cityscapes are *heterogeneity in motion*. Yet they also offer their constants, such as their morphology, not to mention, as already stated, their climate.

The landscape of cities, an inextricable tangle of natural and artificial elements such that it is neither completely natural nor entirely artificial, has its own rhythms, forms, colours and materials. The community that lives a particular landscape raises portions of it to the dominant role of symbol or image of the whole city. This is clearly the case when, for example, a particular view becomes emblematic or a skyline turns into a logo. Or when either a material – e.g. travertine in Rome – or a meteorological condition – e.g. fog in London – arises as a shared stereotype.

Further, and even more profoundly, cities offer themselves as places of dynamic correlations. Ephemeral connections of different forms synaesthetically mark the perception of cities in subtle but pervasive ways, as it happens, for instance, when the musical forms emerging in a place[1] seem to harmonize with the rhythmic pattern played by the metropolitan landscape through its hills or its plains, its dense buildings or its low houses, its modern constructions or the remains of its past, its popular or bourgeois neighbourhoods, its narrow streets or its grand boulevards, its shiny windows or its opaque stones. At a profound level, therefore, where space and community intersect, the city generates a feeling, has its own poetry. Which requires us to be able to listen to and comply with it. Otherwise, it has to be reinvented before it becomes a well-worn cliché.

The heterogeneous totality of each city, with its architectural and human landscape, finds in the continuous production of texts and narratives a mirror to make room for a possible self-image of the city itself. This image, as partial or short-lived as it may be, is what a city requires in order to identify itself. And to give a glimpse of the common good – local and global at the same time – which lies in it.

[1] For an example referred to Rio de Janeiro [see Hershmann, 2000 and Fernandes, Maia, Herschmann, 2012].

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