



A Cartographic Approach to pragmatics in the mood of the ‘respectful silence’¹

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Abstract

This essay presupposes, due to unavoidable theoretical necessities, some definitions of a stipulative nature. These are fundamental, on the one hand, to identify the interdisciplinary framework in which we are working. On the other hand, they are essential in order to define the terms of a form of embedded analysis. By this we mean a contextual analysis from a hermeneutic viewpoint within the same framework of cognitive reference and scientific investigation. This context can only be the ‘Occident’, a term indicating a categorial, symbolical and historical constellation to be declined very much in the plural (the same also applying, clearly, to the ‘Orient’). Firstly, we shall establish, through the lens of some appropriate disciplines, a minimal clarification of the main concepts at issue – pragmatics, alterity, identity, asymmetry, cartography - and, by means of these, render the context more explicit (Chapter I). Then we shall move on to present the outline of a philosophical method, of a reflective-interpretative kind. With this there will be an attempt to put the five terms into practice. This is specifically with the aim of strictly defining the social and political challenges as regards a non-violent co-existence within the ‘European’ Occident (particularly in Chapters II and III), with the help of a renewed hermeneutical kit of tools (IV).

Keywords: Pragmatics, asymmetries, Occident/s, Otherness, embedded analysis, cartography, Auditory turn.

Interweaving of critical perspectives and identifying bridging principles

For the sake of good sense and usefulness as regards the requirements of an associated non-self-destructive life, should we wish to identify and bring about some ‘successful’ pragmatics with respect to the coexistence between alterities (to be dealt with soon), there is the need to take a sideways, and preliminary, step involving epistemological and methodological clarification and definition. It is necessary to pass through the transdisciplinary area, in continual metamorphosis, in which there is the meeting between political philosophy on the one hand, and social and cultural sciences on the other. This, by considering the Occident (or ‘West’), firstly, as a philosophical construct, secondly, in the plural². USA, Canada, Europe, Israel, Australia...are some of the diverse examples of this

¹A partial version of this article has been published in Italian, and modified, in english. See: ‘Alla ricerca di principi-ponte fra discipline e fenomeni sociali’ [Looking for bridge principles between disciplines and social phenomena], “Esercizi Filosofici”, 10:2 (December 2015), 169-183. ISSN 1970-0164. *Pragmatics of alterity and asymmetries. A hermeneutic approach* Publicado el 12 de Mayo de 2023 en la Edición N° 13 - Mayo 2023 de la Revista de Ciencia de la Legislación (ISSN 2545-8833), dirigida por Ramón Gerónimo Brenna y editado por IJ Editores

²Jürgen Habermas, *Der gespaltete Westen*, in *Kleine Politische Schriften*, (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp 2004).



plurality – as a specific symbolic/material construct, with internal variants and a long, multi-layered history, especially if we put it under a philosophical-political lens³. Modern sciences have been for centuries fundamental components of this geopolitical set.

The disciplines quoted above are an integral part of the Western scientific paradigms, of which we are certainly a part, although from an eccentric position because we are strongly critical of some of its mainstream aspects. Political philosophy alias social philosophy, gender studies, sociology of religions, intercultural communication, philosophical and cultural anthropology, and cross-cultural psychology are the main areas of knowledge involved in this investigation. Within these areas, in the past twenty decades or more, there has been a growth in doubts, to a great extent justifiably, as to the credibility of the definition of the concept of ‘multiculturalism’ and of its relative terminology. These bodies of knowledge have increasingly become relevant for the practices and forms of concrete life, in that their adepts critically focus on pragmatic scenarios, prompting with urgency a need for the grammar of translation. This must take place by means of uninterrupted processes occurring among interactively constructed gendered subjects, and depositaries of practices of sense which are effectively or potentially intertwining. Both the *interchanges* in transformation, and the *consolidation* of these merging of experiences (including both conflicts and arduous negotiations) in individual and group experiences have already been defined by many authors as ‘pragmatics of the coexistence between dissimilars’⁴ – migrants, refugees, aliens of any kind and with various impact on political imaginary⁵. ‘Pragmatics of alterity’ is not the same but nevertheless a very close concept; *it is* to be understood as a combination of communicative and interactive practices ‘in movement and in situation’⁶. The reason for having a predilection for such an approach is that it constitutes in itself a meeting point not only between different disciplinary perspectives, but also between, on the one hand, qualitative empirical research, and concrete praxis, on the other.

How can we justify this predilection? It can be done with an explicit position of epistemological standing, having consequent effects at a methodological and methodical level.

Despite dealing with a stance that is still in a minority, or perhaps precisely because it is so, it is desirable that we assume a semantic and disciplinary reading of the issue with differing inspiration and origin. This must be carried out with due caution as regards *the translations of meaning from one discipline to another* (referable to a hoped for, but as yet non-existent, metaphorology), and in such a way as to acknowledge the limits and conditions of our Western, or better Westernised, mental curve. Why? We are, in the opinion of many⁷, in an era in which the orientation of classification and definition in the sciences has changed *but in which awareness of this change is slow to arrive*. In fact, for a while there has been an inversion in tendency among scholars and experts. There is no doubt that among the upper echelons of the scientific establishment the prevailing model of intellectual elite

³*Occident*, which comes from Latin *occidere*, means originally "to fall". Once it was referred to the part of the sky in which the sun goes down, to the direction of the sun's trajectory from dawn to dusk. Geoffrey Chaucer still used the word in that now-obsolete sense around 1390 in *The Man of Law's Tale*. In an earlier work, *The Monk's Tale*, which was written circa 1375, he used the word in the "western regions and countries", *sense that we still use to-day and the ancients have used even before*. Many centuries before Chaucer, *Occident* referred to the Western Roman Empire or to the western part of the land above sea. In modern times, it usually refers to some portion of Europe and North America, including Australia, New Zealand, even Israel, because of their sharing the same political and juridical culture, as distinct from Asia. The opposite of *Occident* is *Orient*, which comes from Latin *oriri* ("to rise").

⁴An attempt to operationalise tolerance through coexistence: Evi Velthuis, Maykel Verkuyten and Anouk Smeekes, *The Different Faces of Social Tolerance: Conceptualizing and Measuring Respect and Coexistence Tolerance*, "Social Indicators Research" (2021) 158:1105–1125. Published online: 16 June 2021.

⁵Heidrun Friese, *Profughi: Vittime - Nemici - Eroi. Sull'immaginario politico dello straniero*, (goWare: October 2023)

⁶ See: Paola de Cuzzani and Kari Hoffun Johnsen, *Pragmatic Universalism – A Basis of Coexistence of Multiple Diversities*, in *Nordicum-Mediterraneum. Icelandic E-Journal of Nordic and Mediterranean Studies*, 18: 3 (2023).

⁷See: Edward Said, *Orientalism. Western Conception of the Orient* (New York: Vintage Books 1979); Edward Said, 'Globalizing literary study', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 116:1 (January 2001), 64-68.



up until the middle of the last century, made up of *white Western male* experts and scientists, has been replaced by that which incorporates greater currents and energies that are *gender-sensitive, decolonised, and decentralised*.

However, as already mentioned, between the legitimisation of this model and the taking root of disciplinary and academic policies the path is still long⁸. More so, this ideal change is taking time to permeate the common consciousness, that is the various levels of awareness widespread within Western societies and above all among the scientific communities which possess rather rigid codes regarding disciplines. This is despite the signs of the times and the influence of the semantic revolutions that have created upheavals in scientific paradigms in the last two centuries⁹. Whether or not we are dealing with a latitudinal revolution, able to permeate each interpretation of ‘semantic-disciplinary code’, is still to be verified. We still must learn the rudiments of the daily practices of interdisciplinary translation, let alone those of the as yet embryonic search for bridging principles for translations. This is also with the aim of undermining the expectations of cognitive superiority or wisdom implicit in all those scientific positions unconsciously self-centered and apodictic, given that they are self-referential. The sciences, through their adepts and the citizens who supply the critical contribution of the public sphere, must become ever more aware of the *contextual*, cultural, social, and political conditionings¹⁰, of the presuppositions of scientific doctrines and all those having claims on truth and objectivity. This does not mean relinquishing objectivity, but putting it in inverted commas, as already said two centuries ago by Max Weber, and in such a way as to make it a methodically and reflectively controlled cognitive intersubjectivity. As the historians and more informed adepts of the ‘*hard*’ sciences teach us, the object changes or even vanishes depending on the instrument used to observe it. What is a fundamental, and not ancillary or circumstantial, assumption is the accurate consideration of both the context of observation and the position of the conscious subject, together with the dynamically and historically interpreted relation between subject and object. The stories, the ‘pasts’ of the two sides of the relation *count and are diriment*. Science can, in fact, be studied, sustains Isabelle Stengers, in the same way as any other social activity, neither freer from the cares of the world, nor more universal or rational than any other¹¹. The strictly correlated key terms of this phenomenon are, therefore, the impossibility of an unconditioned objectivity, the position/situation of the subject and the stories which influence the events. When science is no longer seen as bestower of absolute truths beyond contingency, there emerges its capacity of ideological construction and, above all, its strict relation with the political and cultural power within which it operates¹². The social and economic forces dominant in society determines for the most part what science does and how it does it. Science is, like every human activity, a product of a historical knowledge (and feeling). Stefan Amsterdamski defines it as “a social phenomenon” and maintains that the methodology of research and the very same notion of rationality that guides it, is conditioned by the historical circumstances in which it operates, that is by extra-methodological factors often considered to be external, not essential, or accidental¹³. The techniques, instruments, and the relations within scientific communities and with society characterise research and enable us to see the actions and conduct of science from a point of view that is ethical, social and political, and

⁸Said, ‘Globalizing literary study’, 65.

⁹See: Barbara Henry, ‘Asymmetrien im Spiegelbild. Repräsentationen des Selbst und des/der Anderen, in *Der Asymmetrische Westen. Zur Pragmatik der Koexistenz pluralistischer Gesellschaften*, ed. Barbara Henry and Alberto Pirni (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 115-140.

¹⁰See: Chiara Certomà and Barbara Henry, ‘Social Sciences as Sciences and “Hermeneutics”. “Matteo Ricci’s Legacy”’, *Questioning Universalism. Western and New Confucian Conceptions*, ed. Anna Loretoni, Jérôme Pauchard, and Alberto Pirni (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2013), 147-163.

¹¹Isabelle Stengers, *Power and Invention: Situating Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 3.

¹²Richard Lewontin, *Not In Our Genes: Biology, Ideology and Human Nature* (London: Random House, 1984).

¹³Stefan Amsterdamski, *Between History and Method: Disputes about the Rationality of Science* (New York: Springer, 1992).



epistemological¹⁴. The various nomenclatures, the old and new trends of such an approach cannot be deepened here¹⁵.

The proven vocabulary and the grammatical structure of a disciplinary language, metaphorically speaking, is the first condition for building the instruments of observation, the only tools that are able to make the objects being observed visible. From here stems the need for a critical realisation of the contextual and perspective character of each scientific assumption. This is without this very same awareness diminishing in any way its *validity*. Creating the conditions of systematic control is a procedure analogous to that of identifying the bridging principles for a correct transfer/translation. It is like transferring a meaning from one semantic field to another, and into disciplinary semantic fields with a fixed repertoire and which are recognised apodictically as undisputed mainstream and therefore, as we have attempted to say already, ‘normalised’ always in an unjust form.

If therefore the philosophical-political ‘grammar’ (morphology and syntax) of human phenomena expresses and indicates these phenomena¹⁶, ‘pragmatics’ does not limit itself to this, but acts with and starting from phenomenal occurrences, in all their variations, translating and decodifying them into diagnostic forms and into interactive intervention. The latter is not necessarily to be seen as if it were irenic, but rather as if it were (one would hope) equipped to identify and face conflicts. Coherently, the term ‘alterity’ fits into the lexical and semantic climate defined by the abovementioned disciplines *principally* as descriptive specification of the notion of diversity. In fact, there is more than one notion of ‘alterity’, but it is possible to limit oneself to a semantic arrangement that regards at least five interpretations. It would be opportune to clarify in each context of application (common, political, or disciplinary language) which meaning is being used for each occurrence of the term. In the first interpretation, the simplest ‘alterity’ indicates the empirical others, the plurality of concrete and *gendered* individuals while the second identifies the significant others dealt with in philosophical pragmatism, both resulting as being associated with the vocabulary of pluralism. In the third interpretation, ‘alterity’ is equivalent to the *Andersein/Andersheit (Otherness)* of the metaphysical and/or transcendent climate, the dimension of the Other with a capital ‘O’, and this is not taken into great consideration herein, *ratione materiae*, differently from the first two. Rather, in the terminology of social sciences and political philosophy, alterity, in the fourth interpretation, is otherness (with a small ‘o’) in that it is a phenomenal kaleidoscope of the possible differences/diversities/dissimilarities. This meaning, along with the first two, is considered here and in the following pages. On the other hand, a separate disciplinary role, and one which is particularly structural for anthropology, is deserved by the notion of *Other* and the process of *Othering*. This is as a dynamic of construction of the other by oneself to find oneself, and through the distancing and opening of a symbolic space/gap to be interpreted as ‘external/exterior’¹⁷. This is the process which

¹⁴Chiara Certomà, *Laura Conti. Alle radici dell’ecologia* [Laura Conti: At the root of ecology] (Milano: Edizioni e Ambiente, 2012).

¹⁵“The acronyms ELSI (in the United States) and ELSA (in Europe) refer to research activities that anticipate and address ethical, legal and social implications (ELSI) or aspects (ELSA) of emerging sciences, notably genomics and nanotechnology”. Si veda: R. Chadwick e H. Zwart, Editorial: From ELSA to responsible research and Promisomics, «Life Sciences, Society and Policy», 9:3, 2013; H. Zwart e A. Nelis, What is ELSA genomics? Science and Society Series on convergence research, «EMBO Reports», 10 (6), 2009, p. 1-5.; H. Zwart, L. Landeweerd e A. Van Rooij, Adapt or perish? Assessing the recent shift in the European research funding arena from “ELSA” to “RRI”, “Life Sciences, Society and Policy”, 10:11, 2014. At the present moment, in 2024, the hegemonic trend of the social-ethical approach to research funding and research monitoring is still called Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI).

¹⁶In this case, the phenomena are alterities/differences, be they inequalities to be overcome, or diversities to be exploited, or asymmetries-dyscrasias to monitor so that they do not become stable inequalities.

¹⁷See: Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other – How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Heindun Friese, ‘Europe’s Otherness. Cosmopolitanism and the Construction of Cultural Unities’, in *Europe and Asia beyond East and West: Towards a New Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Gerard Delanty (London: Routledge, 2006), 241-256; Heindun Friese, “‘Vom Aussen Denken”, François Jullien und die Repräsentation des Anderen’, in *Der Asymmetrische Westen*, ed. Barbara Henry and Alberto Pimi (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 161-185.



has constituted the Occident/s primarily through the shifting of the Other into the exotic sphere of the Orient/s.

The Occident therefore presents itself as a framework which cannot be ignored by these new pragmatically oriented and interacting disciplinary terms, and it is to be conceived here as an institutional and symbolic construct. It is fundamentally characterised by group identities immersed in the worlds of life, which are neither permanently peaceful nor harmoniously cohesive, unless they have already experienced processes of arduous renegotiation of the relative positions among individuals. ‘Group identity’, in a certain way is a polysemic concept which here indicates the ‘what we are, what we want to become’ of aggregations of gendered and interactively constructed individuals who actively and laboriously identify with one another within a set of common qualities. As *group identity* is an explicitly anti-holistic category, and therefore programmatically antithetical to that of *collective identity*, it emphasises undoubtedly the fact that symbolic narrations and stories and codes of identification are necessary for the dynamics of structuring and consolidation of the group. These are also essential for the conditions in which there is the triggering between groups of bridging principles of translation, of symbolic passage between different or asymmetric codes, albeit commensurable, at least presumptively. Symbols are one of the insulators of identity and of the encouragement to communicate, as a rule neither equal nor balanced and due to their asymmetric nature, they are subject to dynamic adjustments.

‘Asymmetry’: this term is one of the fundamental bridging principles, indicative of a gap, of a dyscrasia, understood as a ‘relative’ lack of proportion of correspondence to two or more components of a set, of a relative and circumstantial non-parity *rebus sic stantibus*, which needs to be kept under observation. It can assume very different axiological meanings; it can indicate an opening towards some form of transcendence (religious, moral, mystic, theurgical, erotic) or a physiological and functional condition of dependence, such as the caring relations till now codified between parents and children, which are destined to be overturned with time, although they remain within a social and artificial construction of gender roles.

Having said that, the identities characterising the western European societies in particular possess in themselves not only the dimension of relative and temporary asymmetry, but even more structurally they bear in themselves and bring to bear the dimension of alterity, in the polymorphic modes of the fourth interpretation, with respect to what has been said above. The European context of one of the Occident is further configured as polity *sui generis*, inserted into the Atlantic dimension of geopolitics, but with a socio-cultural physiognomy, and a constitutional and institutional framework which is distinct with respect to that of *the States*. It is within this Western European institutional frame that the group identities referred to here are positioned.

However, as always occurs for the dialectic and acquisitive ways with which the “who we are” takes shape with respect to the “who they are”; the Occident, the European one, in particular, constructs its alterities in the processes of construction of the components of identity of itself. It is worth mentioning in this regard, and based on attraction between opposites, the Italian author who is most deep-rootedly opposed to the category of identity and its corollaries. This is particularly appropriate if one sustains, as is the case here, that each process of construction of the self takes place only thanks to the combination/dependence with respect to the alterity that is most relevant in the determining context. We are speaking of the anthropologist and philosopher Francesco Remotti, who has ridden for twenty years or more, with notable iconic and media success, the long-term and somewhat belated repercussions, of Adornian origin, of the now updated postmodern attack on the very same category. “One thing is to sustain that we scientists (if that is how those of us who deal with the human and social sciences wish to be called) must take on identity as a tool of analysis, that is an *explanans*. Quite another thing is to consider identity not as an *explanans*, but as an *explanandum*, not as an instrument with which one seeks to explain, but as an object that must be explained. Identity is not a tool with which one actively explains something, but is something which must be explained, analysed,



dismantled. Analysis means after all precisely this: attempting to open, disarticulate, dismantle, and deconstruct (using the current term)”¹⁸.

What we wish to highlight here is that, in the Occident, to be seen as context, background and frame, but not as *explanandum* in which to locate the identities to be deconstructed and problematized, the ways of building oneself by means of alterity takes place not in authentically pluralistic forms (according to the first and second meaning of alterity). This is because these modes are still contaminated by the legacies and removal mechanisms of responsibility (those that are more cognitive, epistemic, and symbolic rather than political and economic) stemming from the colonial past, and subtly reverberating, because they are latent and unconfessed, in some aporias of the models of integration and inclusion policies. On the one hand, the western scientific paradigm is still very much a system of thought, of language, of conceptual instruments, but above all has been for centuries the *vision* on the world, ‘the’ model of construction of social realities, valid everywhere and for everyone. On the other hand, if there exists an erosive and deconstructive potential *from the inside*, it can surely be found in these very same political discipline in social and cultural sciences. The weakening of conceptual apparatuses and policies, together with those social practices considered harmful or negative for oneself or for others, may have a greater likelihood of success if whoever has this aim works within and with the concepts that one intends to annul. In fact, a researcher in this field is permeated by the very same concepts, and therefore must work in parallel on one’s own stereotypes and prejudices to oust or weaken the collective equivalents. This is all with the aim of creating a more widespread social diffusion of criteria of thought that are not standardised, but critical. It is not by chance that decodification, the critical-diagnostic treatment reserved for the controversial nexus between identity and alterity, in terms of the pragmatics of co-existence is justifiably the *experimentum crucis* inside and outside of the Occident/s. The deconstructive view should be expressly directed towards those identities that are fringed, multifaceted and pervaded with endogenous alterity, often resistant to the recognition of this internal contamination, in order not to accept the circumstance shared, with the other worlds, of being contaminated, in a sort of self-immune short circuit¹⁹. The well accredited philosophical term ‘Occident’ should now be drawn as a polymorphic and metamorphic social and institutional dimension, criss-crossed by deep fractures, by dyscrasies, divisions, together with asymmetries, as defined above. All these configurations, both that of the notion of asymmetry, and that of the notion of alterity, are not always acknowledged reflectively, but are rather removed and forgotten because they are painful or ‘embarrassing’ for the good conscience of the citizens of our societies.

Non-standardising emancipation of alterities and detecting ‘positive’ asymmetries

From what has already been said, one can only sketch out the descriptions of the methodological tools used, and the approach steps to the objectives set. The main aim is to trace, by means of exclusion, the cartography of a territory that is invisible to many but still wide pervasive with respect to the Western societies. We are within the context in which there appear to be the theoretical and methodical conditions for a *non-standardised emancipation of alterities*. By this we mean the specific features of manifestation of both the *diversities* be guaranteed, and the discriminating *unacknowledged* characteristics to be contrasted. Any heterogeneity with respect to any pre-established standard is to be considered *iuxta propria principia*. In other words, what are being referred to here are the alterities that are materially embodied in individuals and groups that are temporally and contextually identifiable, and according to ways of acknowledgement that enhance

¹⁸Francesco Remotti, ‘L’ossessione identitaria’ [The identitarian obsession], *Rivista italiana di Gruppoanalisi* XXV: 1 (2011), 9-10.

¹⁹See: Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas* (Torino: Einaudi, Torino, 2002). *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011); Elena Pulcini, *La cura del mondo* [The care of the world] (Torino: Bollati-Boringhieri, 2009).



the specificity and autonomy of the single cases. What we are dealing with and aim to produce is a volumetric cartography, in which, again with the careful and monitored) use of hydrographic and orographic metaphors there are no sections that are impenetrable but rather interacting, and prepared to accept, within a dynamic and open perspective, even unpredictable or unprecedented realignments. This should be neither ideological nor militant, but realistic, ductile, and pragmatic. It should also be neither apocalyptic nor terrorizing with respect to the unknown quantum of social conflictuality, either latent or open²⁰, which the 'indomitable', perhaps unyielding, components of the territory express.

On the contrary, it is expected programmatically that the cartography, materially and symbolically embodied, is receptive and that it 'listens' to the territory – only presumptively known - in which the explorers have arrived, following the pathway indicated by Rosi Braidotti and by the philosophical constellation of post-structuralist feminism²¹. Along with this pathway, gender studies are an irreplaceable theoretical paradigm and of universal validity also for an even more fundamental reason. Gender studies, revitalizing in some respects the lesson of pragmatism, have in fact, within the perspective of what is a dense and multi-dimensional theory, brought about an innovative discussion regarding both identity and alterity and also individual and culture. They have replaced "a monological theory of the definition of identity with an intersubjective point of view. Some scholars tend to interpret the relationship between the Self and the Other as a continual exchange, emphasizing not a linear movement from union to separation, but an equilibrium still to be defined between the two moments of construction of identity and perception of alterity. According to Jessica Benjamin, for example, who has recently obtained due recognition from European social scientists, the hypothesis of a linear development of the ego through separation appears convincing on the basis of the assumption that dependence on the Other threatens one's own autonomy and jeopardizes the Self²². However, the contrary seems to be true. The central assumption is that recognition on the part of the Other does not arrive unexpectedly from outside and *ex post* with respect to the construction of the Self, but that it is unavoidable for the very same dimension of the *Self*, "according to a process that keeps the pragmatics of identity and the pragmatics of alterity strictly connected"²³.

At this point, there is a need to venture into the contexts of political philosophy applied to qualitative social methodologies.

The indication as to how to proceed, the '*discours de la méthode*' up to this point modestly carried out is the only contribution to this essay. It appears to be one and the same with the putting into practice or putting to the test of the single research contexts, and always by adopting a view oriented towards the institutional repercussions of scientific practices. Along these lines we have the most mature contribution regarding those anthropological theories with a reflective and critical layout.

²⁰"In ancient cartography the unexplored zones, unknown and frightening, were often marked with an indefinite expression, which simply warned *hic sunt leones*, here there are lions, indicating all the dignity of that land untrampled by human foot. The borders of knowledge (...) blur for this reason into a primordial and wild world, where untamed nature dominates over whatever law", Andrea Marmori, opening words of the text in the catalogue of the exhibition *Hic sunt leones*, Studio Gennai (26 February – 31 March 2011, Pisa). The display, with catalogue in Italian and English with texts by Andrea Marmori, Director of the MAL Museo Civico Amedeo Lia of La Spezia and by Eleonora Acerbi, CAMEC Centro Arte Moderna e Contemporanea della Spezia, included the participation of twenty artists, among whom Mirella Bentivoglio, Achille Bonito Oliva, Christo, Emilio Isgrò, Ugo La Pietra, Mauro Manfredi, Mario Nanni, Vladimir Novak and Wolf Vostel.

²¹Cartography is the image in transformation of a territory which is in turn undergoing transformation. The reference is to the philosophical constellation of feminist post-structuralism, Braidotti, *in primis*. See Rosi Braidotti, *Towards a Materialistic Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

²²Anna Loretoni, 'Das Gender-Prisma zwischen Identität und Alterität', in *Der Asymmetrische Westen*, ed. Barbara Henry and Alberto Pirni (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 141-160.

²³The concept of '*Othering*' referred to by Fabian and Friese to qualify the methodical construction of alterity in the terminology of anthropology does not refer precisely to this meaning of inescapable and vital co-belonging between the two sides. It refers rather to the circumstance that the other is never simply given, is never found or encountered, but is manufactured. On this, see: Fabian, *Time and the Other*; Friese, "Vom Aussen Denken".



The *positioning* regarding the articulation constituted by the *identity/alterity* syntagm is an *inescapable step*. It is one and the same with declaring that there are diverging and incompatible meanings or ways of constructing the identity of collective aggregations. The first model is referred to as normative-ascriptive, and its advocates use it in the following way: it is used to indicate, prescribe, or even impose from outside on the *true or presumed* members of the supraindividual identity, common characteristics and qualities, historical continuity, stability and coherence of behaviours having a practical-moral value, and in such a way as to link them all, and once and for all, in a single destiny. It is worth noting that the detractors of the model are those same social scientists that coined the term, electing it, erroneously, as the one and only way of conceiving the supraindividual identity: Nierhammer and Remotti among others.

The second model, referred to as reflective-interpretative, is used to describe the practices and self-representations, and the visions of the world, defined and communicated by the concrete subjects who attribute a certain identity to themselves, in both a synchronous and diachronic sense. The observer is positioned to consider individuals as actors and interlocutors in their reciprocal relations, and with respect to painful challenges and crises effectively occurring in time. Ian Assman is one of the most renowned propagators of this model, within the context of the *Kulturwissenschaften*²⁴.

This still 'eccentric' position, even if theoretically well-worked and convincing, was chosen to avoid the philosophical, political, and social debate on recognition and on models of justice becoming unproductive in a sort of self-referential scholasticism. What's more it works along two parallel tracks, which are incapable of interweaving and tangencies in the specialist languages of both the paradigms. The debate on the concept of recognition has widened in various directions and has arrived at the contemplation of various new expressions. One could cautiously venture the hypothesis according to which the current level of elaboration at which discussion on the issue has arrived, reveals the profile of a dyscrasia at the level of overall elaboration. It is as if we were facing a *plus* at the theoretical level, a clear advance in the refinement of the concept, like of the ideal group of authors who can bring innovative contributions to its wider and overall conceptual construction. On the contrary, there is a *minus* at the level of concrete procedural implementation, that is with respect to the translation/transposition into concrete *policies* that substantiate and incorporate the relevance of the renewed theoretical background that the current debate within political and social philosophy has made available.

Having said that, we intend to follow the most recent, and still incomplete, contribution of the contemporary reflections on the unmaintained promises of both paradigms of the theory of recognition. We resume from a diagnosis of the social pathologies²⁵ (in the plural because they require individualised attention), of an epoch such as ours. As we can read in a very recent, powerful as well as significant, Italian volume of international importance, on the one hand we need to give a contribution to the intuitions of political philosophy on the legitimacy of democratic institutions, reflecting on the fundamental role of the concept itself. On the other hand, we need to establish if it is possible and desirable, to translate and move, with sensitive attention to life contexts, the language of rights into the lexicon of the institutional productive models of good rules and good practices. Both can be considered thus if put to the test, that is if they can bring about therapeutical indications as regards the social pathologies triggered by the various forms of un-acknowledgement which do not do justice to the multi-faceted kaleidoscope of alterities. The precepts and signs of recovery are to be understood not only in the legislative sense, but above all in a diagnostic sense, since the aporias identified, if not healed, can compromise the healthy conditions of reproduction, neither deviated nor degenerated in the institutional outcomes of the Western democracies.

²⁴See: Jürgen Straub, 'Personal and Collective Identity. A conceptual Analysis', in *Identities. Time, Differences and Boundaries*, ed. Heindun Friese (London-Oxford: Berghahn Book, 2002), 69; Jürgen Straub, 'Personale Identität als Politikum. Notizen zur theoretischen und politischen Bedeutung eines psychologischen Grundbegriffs', in *Der Asymmetrische Westen*, ed. Barbara Henry and Alberto Pimi (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 41-78.

²⁵Axel Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).



A close understanding of the contemporary social conflicts already taking place and of the latency of new conflicts prompts us “to find in this way a deeper understanding of social justice and democracy than that expressed so far by both communitarism and procedural liberalism²⁶”, to be seen as an inescapable historical-ideal legacy, but not also as a source of theoretical-political innovation, with respect to the pragmatics of co-existence.

The refinement of the vision according to the selective criterion aimed at identifying the gaps, of the non-linear conditions of interchange, aims at the elimination of “those *optical effects*, induced or self-produced, which cause *invisibility* and therefore the un-ascertability of minority, marginal or simply ‘unprecedented’ forms of political subjectivity. Furthermore, this would enable behaviours and practices of *asymmetric respect* between reciprocally “others” subjectivities. This contribution as regards cognitive and recognitive faculties prompts the development of criteria directed at detecting and inhibiting the adoption of ‘wrongfully’ asymmetric *policies*, that is not reflecting the specificities, but rather distorting the appropriate representations of the self, referable to a certain group positioned within the public sphere of a juridically organised whole.

Reflective-interpretative model and its political potentials. Some minimalist cues

In this context, the reflective-interpretative model comes strongly into play as a methodological instrument *in actu*, capable of exerting a corrective function with respect to the mainstream (empirical-quantitative) social disciplines and the unduly standardized *policies*. Sometimes the conditions of homeostatic equilibrium, the ‘us, the identity, of groups are reached following lengthy negotiations, lacerations in biographical pathways and conflicts between subjects in structurally (but not necessarily stably) asymmetric positions, as gender studies, recalled here various times, teach us²⁷. It follows that there are a great many gradations and steps with respect to the propensity to exclude the different from oneself²⁸, something that explains the different typologies of identity, some more self-centred and obsessed with internal homogeneity, others more open to comparison with the outside. This occurs because the semantics of the concept of ‘identity’ certainly does not end into the identical/non-identical duality. Using the two previous metaphors, it is not reduced to the brutal alternative of wall/mirror. There ‘are’ walls with windows, gaps, slits, scaffolding, just as there are mirrors that are distorting and misleading with respect to the images of some of the components inside the identity group. Almost always, and for structural reasons of perpetuation of dominance, we are dealing with women and children. The mirror is not always an image of constantly positive meaning, because through the looking glass we can appear to ourselves also in forms that are monstrous, harbingers of sufferance. In the social construction of gender, as anthropological studies show, the representation that makes the female image in itself ugly – females are not ‘beautiful’, and they must therefore adorn themselves, make themselves acceptable, males are by definition ‘beautiful’ – is the rule imposed on women with irresistible mimetic automatisms. The previous case, of induction to a distorted and damaging self-representation to the detriment of certain subjects is the

²⁶See: Antonio Carnevale and Irene Strazzeri, *Lotte, riconoscimento, diritti* [Struggles, recognition, rights] (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2011); Alessandro Ferrara, ‘La pepita e le scorie. Ripensare la reificazione alla luce del riconoscimento’ [The nugget and the scorias: Rethinking reification in the light of recognition], *Quaderni di Teoria Sociale* 8 (2008), 45-67.

²⁷Among others: Sarah Song, *Justice, Gender and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁸With respect to personal identity, there is an illuminating clarification by Jürgen Straub as regards the age-old debate on the typology proposed by E.H. Erikson. This typification is the most recent result of a numerous series of in-depth and accredited works on this theme. This concept is to be inserted, according to a triadic logic, at the centre of a *continuum*, at whose extremes we find, respectively, the concept of ‘totality’, and that of ‘fragmentation’ (dissociation, diffusion). If seen in the correct light, the conception of Erikson enables elimination of the undue and tendentious simplifications from the contemporary debate on the role performed by the notion of identity in the social diffusion of a model of individual personality that is homogenous, compact, and integrated in an all-absorbing sense. See: Straub, ‘Personale Identität als Politikum’.



rule, not the exception. However, there are always stratified networks of alliances, affiliations, of resistance strategies, also on the part of figures that are subaltern, in the widest sense of the word. Broadening the field, sometimes we are dealing with inhibiting self-regulation, accepted at times within an allocative perspective, in terms of possible future remuneration. One learns to use strategic thought within any kind of group identity. At the same time, the meaning of *reflectivity, if corrected with that of asymmetry*, appertains to the vocabulary associated with the justification of forms of repartitioning of material and immaterial costs and benefits, typical of the sphere of social interactions. The main aim of a discussion on the lexicon of asymmetries, understood predominantly in the light of the pragmatics of alterity, consists definitively in tracing, proceeding by exclusion, the cartography of a territory that is invisible to most, but whose presence is nonetheless still in some way seen as immanent in Western societies, Europe in particular. We are dealing with the context in which there are the theoretical and methodological conditions for a *non-standardising emancipation of alterities*, meaning for the latter the specific characteristics of manifestation of both asymmetries/*differences/alterities* to be guaranteed, and of the un-acknowledgements and discriminations to be contrasted. The emancipation of the multiverse of alterities means, firstly, making both sides of the argument explicit and, consequently, finding the languages, the reasons and the motivations for exploiting the diversities, together with the excessive or transcendent distances and instead eliminating the discriminations, at least *inside* the democratic contexts, in order not to betray the principles on which they are founded and which very often are hypocritically trumpeted come banners of superiority with respect to the outside.

We are dealing with a volumetric cartography with no fixed points since also these cannot be subtracted from a process of redefinition and repositioning. This representation of the cultural, political and juridical territory of the Occident must not be, nor appear to be, ideological or militant, and it must be neither apocalyptic nor terrorizing, but rather realistic, ductile and pragmatic. Above all, the representation on offer must be ready to face the unknowns of (explicit or latent) social conflicts which numerous components of that territory create in an endogenous manner or “simply” host, having “received or imported” them from outside. This must be done not only by means of the neutralizing device of *in vitro* distancing operated by disciplinary conceptualisation, but rather in the forms and styles of life of the ‘variously dissimilar’ groups that affirm themselves laying claim to their rights to be publicly recognised by the current institutions. The best start for politological and social studies would be that the recognitive cartography, materially and symbolically embodied, is receptive and that it can “listen” to the metamorphic territory – and thus *only presumptively* known – in which the explorers have entered. It must listen to its logic and its (apparent or real) *diametrically opposed forms of logic*, which however, beyond any completed thematization or “reduction” to the merely linguistic-expressive medium, possess the same value and efficacy that music lovers appreciate in the so-called “continuous bass”. Or in other words the value the same music lovers practise as being part of a respectful audience in a concert. I will briefly give a methodic example of what I have in mind.

The respectful silence in action. The auditory/acroamatic turn

The acroamatic dimension means the interpretative attitude of hearing and listening to somebody narrating in a given time, is what I am referring to, as a specific methodology. This implies the following: to try to perceive, to allow oneself to be aroused from within, not only through the mind, but also through modes of self-situating and acting, without obviously excluding the possibility of saying no to certain fundamental questions and rejecting imitation as such. An extremely rich, and not only evocative, dimension of hermeneutics, that of listening in the position of the pupil with respect to the master in a living context of shared communication, should be recovered and applied under controlled conditions and within a limited time span. We should act primarily (not exhaustively)



like those who are listening without interfering with the source of the message, just like the public in a music concert, for as long as the concert proceeds:

ακροαστής/ακουσμαστικός.

This fits the intellectual honesty and rigour that prompts us to assume that phenomena are very probably different from how we consider them at first. The solution will be reached, it is to be hoped, in the end. Starting from this arrangement one can therefore try to understand, as said above, with an openness that is not only moral, but also cognitive. It is mental openness, and the willingness to let oneself be involved and influenced, not mechanically, or mimetically. It is rather to take part in a nobly pragmatic manner which is not predetermined according to the mere dualistic type of reasoning of acceptance-rejection. Moreover, the refusal of the dualistic type of reasoning in favour of a prismatic/polyphonic one is a primary step, not at all definitive. On the contrary, it signals a serious deficiency in the methodological lexicon of the social sciences, to be filled in the future. As a final point, the declaration of a weakness to be eliminated is a research outcome in itself.

It could make sense, because it is desirable, effective, and not merely fascinating, to make recourse again to the 'noble' set of hermeneutic kit of tools. In doing this we conceive ourselves as being positioned – temporarily – in the asymmetric location of a pupil who is convinced she/he is giving attention, maintaining silence, to someone else, who exhibits and possesses – *rebus sic stantibus*- the authoritative and cognitive role of a privileged testimony regarding something totally or almost unknown. It is like the audience in a concert, which is politely requested and committed, for the sake of the game played, to respectfully guarantee silence and attention, in order to enable the performer to give his/her own best in setting and embedding something (each interpretation is totally unprecedented) that has never been fulfilled in this particular way before, so long as the needs of the performance are accomplished, and no more. This kind of temporarily asymmetric condition is not imposed by anyone. It sets some self-evident contextual constraints existing on behalf of the cognitive goal at stake. To summarise, we should learn to abandon for a while, as 'scientific master narrators', the kind of surreptitiously over-ordered view of the world that we are used to dispensing as self-evident, together with its correlated vocabulary and nomenclature. It would be better to accept for a while, even better if for a long while, that the role of a listener is what is recommended as the most eligible method for today's social scientists, who are mostly engaged in discovering the hidden interrelations between chains of cultural and social phenomena that are only *prima facie* well-known and feasible.

In the social sciences paradigm, if so redrafted, research is specifically oriented towards action. Towards pragmatics, in the broad sense adopted in these pages. We, as researchers, possess the master-narrative ('we' are the master of symbols and names), but we must avoid giving credit *ex antea* to our domestic vision of a particular reality. Thus, reflexively controlled social praxis is configured with respect to the theory of the social sciences²⁹.

This does not mean having pre-constituted concepts, but admitting having them, and being prepared for them to be demolished or at least rectified. Therefore, it is appropriate to use the metaphor of the journey towards the ideal point that is not known. Such a metaphorical journey presupposes the humility of those who abstain from asserting and imposing their own vision of things. It is the humility of those who, going to a distant, and culturally alien country, do not speak for a year, but

²⁹Elena Gagliasso, *Verso un' epistemologia del mondo vivente* [Towards an epistemology of the living world], (Milano: Guerini, 2001); Michel Foucault, 'Society must be defended'. *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (New York: Picador, 2003).



limit themselves to listening, just as Matteo Ricci did for a whole year, the first he spent in China at the imperial Court³⁰.

Such a way of approaching events is highly recommended as a feasible pattern of what I called above, “The non-standardising emancipation of alterities encourages us to trying new pathways as regards the ‘classic’ theme of differences”.

Some concluding remarks

In this sense the conceptual instruments of the philosophical and social disciplines used to investigate the suppositions of dialogue and intercultural communication deserves constant and sympathetic attention. However, often the very same practice of investigating and experiencing all the available pathways and even the most hidden route of symbolic interchange runs up against obstacles which appear at first sight to be insurmountable, even though they may be in a historically and contextually connoted form. Often, we must likewise acknowledge as momentarily insurmountable the asymmetric situations in which we find ourselves “thrown”, and proceed with dignity, renouncing neither open criticism nor untiring civil condemnation. However, we are quite simply not given the possibility of resolving the issues with interaction free from dominance, at least *rebus sic stantibus*. Let us think for example of inhibiting and damaging asymmetries, both social and economic, including those that are extremely relevant, which our societies never cease to produce or leave in existence, within or without. With respect to the latter, it is certainly not sufficient to have a “heroic” act which attests a noble but fanciful decision to claim responsibility. This is particularly true if whoever observes these diversities is the same individual who experiences in first person these relations – and from their “wrong side”. This is clearly from the side of the disadvantaged, and, if taken singularly, the least appropriate side to overturn those pathological situations which inflict individual and social pain and suffering on the individuals and their dear ones. For those experiencing penalising and harmful asymmetries, any possible glimmers of solution or giving way must come from the institutional or macro-social level. Once again, however, in the very same fact of recognising the limits to dialogue, political and social theory should never opt out of tackling the issues, no matter how obvious, impervious, or taken for granted they might seem.

³⁰Doris Weidemann, ‘Matteo Ricci in the Perspective of Intercultural Communication Research’, in *Questioning Universalism Western and New Confucian Conceptions*, ed. Anna Loretoni, Jérôme Pauchard and Alberto Pigni (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2013), 165 – 184.