

REFLECTIONS ON GLOCAL On the Basis of the Semiotic Study of Culture

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0. Introduction

Our proposal and contribution is to reconsider and to “update” some of the principal concept of semiotic of culture in order to better comprehend the processes of definition of identities and the cultural conflicts that we live nowadays around the world: categories like *one’s own* and *someone else’s* (with the processes of cultural appropriation and influence), concepts like *semiotic boundary* and *translation* (with the processes of creolization and hybridization) or, to go on, that of *semiotic self-consciousness*, can be really useful to answer for the dynamics of emersion of “systems of representations” – practices and forms of believe, feeling and knowledge – that constitute that “universes of values”, that *forms of life*, that take part in the *intercultural confrontation*.

All this necessarily leads to a convergence between Jurij Lotman’s semiotic of culture and the semiotic of Algirdas J. Greimas, the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the philosophic hermeneutic of Paul Ricoeur, as well as the cultural and anthropological studies. In fact, according to us, the relation local-global can be understood restarting from the role of the body and of the everyday practices of life in the construction of meaning and than laying and articulating the “paths” that bind (in both direction) this level with that one of construction of self identity and sense of belonging through the production of “stories” or, more in general, social discourses (going from “historical” and “political” discourses to that ones represented by “media”): the production, inside the discourse, of “times”, “spaces” and “actors” is in fact the way to produce cultural subjectiveness and to define “local” and “global” spatiality. Moreover studying “why” and “how” object, practices and representations assume attributes of “globality” and “locality” we can try to clarify the sense of the present phenomenological experience of cultural identity.

Starting from all this it comes to analyse the *practices of translation*, essential in *glocal’s* forms of life, that build the “one’s own” through the “someone else’s” or regenerate the first from within; to think that paradoxical process of *homogenization* and *heterogenization* that lead each one of us, at the same time, to be more similar and to feel more different from all the others; to explore the processes of *semiotic effectiveness*, where the *meaning*, through its signs, comes to be a force “present” and “tangible” able to build or destroy identities, to move bodies, to give shape to feelings and beliefs, to mark out “boundaries”: places of struggle or/and dialogue.

1. A Necessary and Desired Beginning

We will try to develop some reflections on the *Glocal* – therefore acknowledging its specificity, beyond its simple ability at matching global and local to give “evidence” of the relationships between the two – on the basis of Jurij M. Lotman’s studies on culture.

Why Lotman? First of all, almost trivially, because one must start somewhere: Lotman is as good as Greimas, Eco, Barthes or others. As a matter of fact, and this is the second reason, it seems to be self-evident the useful and important role that a semiotic theory explicitly centred on the theme of “culture” (a theory that, as Lotman himself remarked, is able to link mutually the commonest practices and the great events of history) can play nowadays inside a theory of a “Glocal world” where, as we will state, the great systems of representation and beliefs are strictly interconnected with the individuals’ everyday life. After all, the Lotmanian theory stands on the basis of the elaboration of instruments for the explanations of the relationships among cultures – therefore it speaks about diversities, conflicts, dialogues, translations – and for the interlinked enquiry of cultural *systems* and of the meaning of *processes* that transform those systems crossing them, thus building the “real” – therefore a theory which tries to explain deconstruction *and* structuration, permanencies *and* transformations, similarities *and* differences without being entrapped in the net of alternatives. That sounds decisive to catch the form and keep the rhythm of nowadays world. Last but not least, choosing the Russian scholar has got a clear “symbolic” meaning: it implies the exemplarity of a human life showing the production and development in progress of a global thought (and in some way a thought about “globality”, certainly that one of the system of culture) starting from the top of localization, as represented by one who has been forced to spend almost all his life confined in a single town, Tartu, in Estony. The demonstration of the possibility of becoming global starting from whatever type of local, just while one is or becomes local: or, to say it better, of our being glocal always and intimately.

In this sense, these pages are also a tribute to all those people who, even “exiled”, are able to live and enrich the place of their exile, to love and transform their country and its culture, to think and cultivate mankind, our living together and common belonging to the world.

At this point it is necessary to say and state that this is not an exhaustive study of Lotman’s thought (which, on the other hand, we force towards the theme dealt with), nor of the field of semiotic studies or the question of the *glocal* itself (or of its relationships with the studies of culture in general). These are stimulating tasks far beyond the exploring aims of these pages.

2. The World contracts, Incomprehension grows up

Let us start from one of the first Lotmanian passages where, as far as we know, we meet an explicit reference to the “global” dimensions of nowadays existence. As reported by Remo Faccani:

...Lotman realizes that the XXth century is different from all the previous ages for the “globality” of its historical process and “social explosions”: “world wars and revolutions, even the changing of the concept of text due to mass-media etc.” In

particular, a XXth century constant is “the trend of substituting self-descriptions of culture with descriptions of descriptions”, *i.d.*, with meta-texts whose object is not culture but the mechanism itself of description (Faccani 1975, 18; Lotmans’ sentences are taken from “Vvedenie”, *Stat’i po tipologii kul’turi. Materialy k kursu teorii literatury*, fasc. 2, Tartu, 1973).

To be noticed that in Lotmans’ words “globality” seems to be a “deed” inherent to historical events (here related to the war-communications dyad) of “worldwide” importance. It does not sound exactly like that, but let us go on facing what Lotman writes somewhere else in the same year.

The interest in the “description of descriptions” within the meditations developed with Uspenskij, in 1973, is important for our discourse. In fact, it is linked to that change in the scientific field after which the “absolutization of the European point of view” (and the attribution of “barbareousness” to different points of view) of XIXth science is substituted with the awareness of the “existence of *various* description systems”, thus forcing “science” itself to keep into account the “point of view of the ‘other’ (the ‘I’ from the perspective of the ‘other’, the ‘other’ from its own perspective)” (Lotman e Uspenskij 1973, XIII).

Here, too, the game seems to be played on a somehow “objective” way, implying what can be defined as the “discovery of the other” according to anthropology (see Featherstone 1993); anthropology, in its turn, must relativize, if not utterly discuss, the self-conceit of “universality” and absoluteness of the science-producing “West”, being forced to keep into account the existence of places (cultural spaces/locality) which are “others”: anthropology must re-localize it, despite its will of being a globally valid discourse. It should be noticed that such a passage is strictly linked to the theme of “communication”: on the one hand, it summons the *comprehension-incomprehension* connection in a cultural confrontation; on the other hand, it investigates how such a confrontation is linked to the *cultural forms* that have historically framed the field of communication.

According to Lotman and Uspenskij, “in the Ancient and Medieval texts as well as in the XIXth century novel the theme of incomprehension is extremely rare to be found” (*ibid.*, XVIII). Only in Romantic texts communications becomes a problem, thus giving place to “tragic collisions” (*ibid.*). There we find that sliding from “traditional” societies (especially inscribed in such texts as the mythical and fairy ones) – whose problem is that of the sense of life for a subject strongly inscribed in a tendentiously “univocal” universe of values and beliefs (Greimas 1983) – to “modern” societies, where the “dialogic” principle rules and cultural texts (especially novels) bring into play, or are even based on, the conflict among different universe of values and beliefs, thus emphasizing the tension between comprehension-incomprehension and the question of identity-making of subjects (both as individual and collective ones) (Geninasca 1997). It is plain that here “traditionality” and “modernity” are not inherent in cultural collective, but the results of the analysis itself: this individuates *in texts* the sliding

between two different ways of articulating the question of culture making and cultural confrontation.

This is how, then, and at what implications, the process develops nowadays:

The powerful development of the technical media of the XXth century has focussed the attention on *the difficulties of the communication act itself*. On the one hand, not only the advantages, but also the dangers of the mass communication media have been discovered. Thus, for example, not only has reactionary demagoguery become a typical feature, but also a real menace for the XXth century culture. At the same time, though the *world* – which before sounded enormous – *has contracted and become spatially smaller*, that is, more accessible thanks to mass communication media¹, *the difficulties in human mutual comprehension* have not decreased; on the contrary, they have *increased* (Lotman and Uspenskij 1973, XVII-XVIII, *our Italics*).

The consequence is that whereas before – as in the epic plots – communication was seen as “an ideal act, immediately realizable without a loss”(ibid.), now the problem of *translation* asserts itself. As Lotman will remark in his last work, communication lies on an “intersection of two contrasting tendencies: the aspiration to make it easier communication [between two “speakers” A and B] [...] and the aspiration to increase the value of a message, which is linked to the tendency to implement at most the difference between A and B” (Lotman 1993, 14): in this sense, it is based and lives on such a tireless *tension* and *resistance of forces* between the confronting subjects that the “value of dialogue”², of communication, lies on what “makes it difficult [...] and, within limits, impossible”³ (ibid., 15). That is to say, again, in that “indeterminateness of meaning” which continually forces to the “translation of what is untranslatable” (as when one must establish a “contact” between two languages that had never been in touch before), to that fundamental intellectual activity which is the basis of generating new signification.

This tension of communication is the same as the tension between cultural *homogenisation* and *differentiation* that plays such an important role in the present discourses on the relationship between local and global and drives to the present day (perhaps not necessarily contrasting) spurs towards *unity* and *diversity* inside mankind; that is, towards the typical dynamic of super-complex systems (and valid also referred to the process of development of

¹ “Communication media” meaning both the media that make it easier people’s “material” mobility (trains, cars, aircrafts ...), and the media that make the people “move” even without changing their material location (obviously tv, radio, Internet ...).

² The theme cannot be entered here, but it should be noticed that, even if the idea of a traditional communication with no incomprehension could induce us to think otherwise, in Lotman the “dialogue” is the principle itself of communication: the dialogue comes before the dialoguing parts. These are based on (are *not* at the basis of) dialogue (Lotman 1983).

³ As a rule, we must remember that in Lotman heterogeneity and conflict are basic factors of conscience and culture.

culture, consider as a sort of “organism”), that paradoxical and circular process according to which the stability of the whole is obtained increasing its inner variety (“the increasing of information” that makes it easier “the ability of orientation in the world”⁴) but, at the same time, this process tends to transform the “semantic knots” in the structural organization of the whole (the cultural net, the culture as a net of relationships) into entities striving to become “cultural individualities” (gifted with their own organization, memory, behaviour and self-development abilities): all this tends to shatter the whole or to make it highly conflicting within itself (Lotman 1980, 35, 38, 60). Then, the “schizophrenia of culture” and “semiotic conflict” between the parts and the whole, just to use Lotman’s definition, is inherent in the cultural process including (accounting for) a double, though seemingly contrasting, *feeling* of the present days reality:

...the perception of the world of modern times depicts the earth as a small space, and if the idea of a small earth has extraordinarily reconfirmed the idea of the planet’s solidarity and unity (Saint-Exupéry), it has also made it particularly clear that difficulties of contact do not repose on spatial categories (Lotman and Uspenskij 1973, XVIII).

In Lotman’s view the consequence is that the problem of the “social”, of “contemporary civilization”, is framed by and based on a “semiotic” problem (*i.e.*, it deals with the problems of communication and comprehension), not on a trivially “spatial” dimension: this evokes the questions related to the cultural memory and the self-description of cultural collectives.

However, the theme of *description* already hinted at has opened the passage towards that level of “representations” which give “existence” to local and global dimensions of living beyond their simply looking like deeds stored in common sense. It is the level we are going to enter.

3. A Short Semiotic Phenomenology of the Glocal: Culture/Cultures, the Glocal Objects

In his Introduction to the fundamental *Typology of Culture* Lotman defines culture in different ways: from time to time, it is defined as “the flexible and complex mechanism of knowledge”, “the theatre of an endless battle, of continuous social, historical and class fights and conflicts [...] for the monopoly of information”, “an organized system of signs [where] the moment of organization, which proves to be as a sum of rules and restrictions imposed to the system, is the connotation defining culture” (Lotman 1973a, 28-29). The last assertion gets Lotman closer to Lévi-Strauss and in approaching *culture* to the systems of rules attributes it the features of the “relative” and the “particular” as opposed to the “universal” and the

⁴ Elsewhere, as an evidence of how he perceives the intimate paradoxality of such a process, Lotman will write: “Therefore, in spite of the increasing of knowledge, ignorance does not decrease but increases, and activity, becoming more effective, will not be made easier but more difficult” (Lotman 1980, 59).

“spontaneous”, which, instead, pertains to *nature*. Such subdivision is strengthened by the thought that culture

never represents a universal whole, but only a sub-whole with a given organization. This never includes *all*, to the extent of forming an area apart. Culture is only conceived as a portion, as a closed area on the setting of non-culture (Lotman and Uspenskij 1973a, 40).

It is not an unimportant assertion, taking into account the present-days idea that the intensity of the “globalization” process would produce the inexistence of what is “external” and “out” respect to globalization itself. No need to say that it should be necessary to discuss the meaning of such visions of globalization, but it is to be pointed out how assuming a completely cultural point of view seems to imply the impossibility of “totalising” the relationship between *culture* and the *world*, between culture and the “real”. In fact, Lotman perceives culture as a translating mechanism (a “language”) continually engaged in catching and giving shape – inside its own frame – to that extra-linguistic and extra-systematic space respect to which it continually defines itself (Lotman 1993, 9).

This implies various things: first, that the “space of reality” can (theoretically) be encompassed only by languages as a whole, by the “ensemble” of all the existing languages⁵; second, that two languages are always needed to understand the world; third, that “the plurality of languages is aboriginal and primary” (ibid., 10-11). In short: no “culture” before or without Babel.

One of the consequences is that whatever kind of cultural ideal wish for a universal language is an “illusory” and “secondary” one – though a dynamic one for culture itself; another consequence is that

...only at a given meta-level, sometimes a strongly abstract one, it is possible to consider as a single language both the various human actual cultures of human collectivities and the World Culture as a whole, *i.e.*, as a system of organized signs after a single hierarchic structure and after a unified hierarchy of rules for the combination of these (Lotman and Uspenskij, 1973a, 30).

That is to say, the possibility of detecting the features of a “pan-human culture” is given as a *discourse product*, depending on the point of view of the observer’s, who seems to be characterized by important limits (ibid., 44); not just out of a case elsewhere Lotman (1980, 56) points out how many theories give the idea of “human” as of an “abstract conceptual unity”, implying the impoverishment of its basic features since it only selects (on the basis of a

⁵This is an only seemingly contradictory statement respect to the assertion that the relation between culture and the real is not totalizable: human beings’ actual ownership of culture (of its “languages”), in fact, meets such necessary “memory limits” that a not formalized “real” (which may also be the others’ culture) always exceeds

“model”) some supposedly “essential invariations” and is in contrast with the everyday experiences of diversity, polyglottism and heterogeneity (Lotman 1998): a complexity of sensible experiences that cannot be sacrificed, also due to its granting the subject’s existential emotional *fullness* (Geninasca 1997). In this sense the making of a unitary human dimension, viewed as a “common” level to all individuals, seems to suffer from the same problem Tomlinson (1999) finds in the making of a “global culture”: in fact, the abstraction process standing at the basis of the quest of unitarity removes this culture from its phenomenological foundation, from its possible taking roots and being significant within its own relationships with the concreteness of “ordinary” everyday life.

Despite that, and in accordance with the constant paradoxicalness of the mechanism we are describing, it is through the description/definition of itself (*i.e.*, the construction of a *meta-level* capable of “organization”) that a portion of the cultural matter – and, by means of that, a given social collective – gets to existence (“visibility”) or strengthens its presence as such. In other words, a collective acquires the features of “reality” and “unity” making it easier both its self-identification and an external identification through the production of *narrations* (cultural objects) decreeing and becoming the common memory of the collective itself: even if, must be said again, this kind of process always produces a loss of heterogeneity, whatever may be its intensity.

This shifts our interest on the discursive production of those dimensions defined as “local” and “global” ones – which must not evoke abstract representations, but the process by means of which objects, practices and texts shift from their own “hybrid”⁶ nature (Latour 1991) – semiotic formations mediating local-global (*glocal*?) relationships –, to become *realities*, or “representative” of, local and global realities. Just like in a sort of *loop* (a returning/re-folding) of the “representative definitions” on the “real”, what has been discursively defined as “local” or “global” ends up by being carried out and perceived *as such*; that is, by different and complex manners that cannot be analysed here, it hoists these qualities/essences as though they were its own.

Before going on any further, let us consider the results of our procedures. We have been speaking about constitutively – *somehow glocal* – hybrid “cultural objects”. Therefore, we are supposing that every semiotic formation, all the “meaning objects”, are *the products of “situated” (local) enunciations but, at the same time, the producers of a potentially global enunciate/space*: this is due to both the inclination of a text to present itself as a “globality” of sense, and its self-representation as the holder of any globality “value” – as though its “system of values” were essentially “global”; on the other hand, it is also due to its ability at effectively

one’s own “culture”.

⁶ Such an assertion seems to meet the idea, assumed by Lévi-Strauss too (1991), that a culture is but a whole of hybrid elements, whereas a cultural unicity is given by what could be named the “singular hybridity” of each culture, *i.e.*, that unique way of being thus composed of culture and its assuming a shape and a sense through a certain self-definition. Even the story of cultures is made of cultural meetings or encounters, which always make it an hybrid; nevertheless, it always finds a “rhythm” in its writing.

becoming “a common place”, a container of memories, experiences and collective passions transcending the condition of its enunciation, the local memory it came out⁷.

Let us go on, then, keeping in mind such a basic hypothesis.

4. A Short Semiotic Phenomenology of the Glocal: Spaces and Chiasm

In our opinion, all that belongs to the complex dynamics of the *semiosphere*, *i.e.*, to the *semiotic continuum* “full of different types of formations situated at various levels of organization” (Lotman 1985, 56) – “that synchronic semiotic space which fills the borders of culture” (Lotman 1990, 3) – that defines the space of culture, made of texts and languages; that opposes to the “extra-systematic” space surrounding it and inside which only texts and languages can have or produce signification.

Now, it is to be noticed that such a space – a seemingly cultural “global” space – is, on the contrary, something more and different: despite its acting as a somehow unitary “organism” whose globality precedes the existence of its components, yet, it finds its “structural heterogeneity [...] as the basis of its mechanism” (Lotman 1985, 70), which make us continually detect how actually the semiosphere is crossed by “inner borders that specialize its components” (*ibid.*, 65) and that, in their turn, tend to constitute themselves into semiotic individualities/“personalities” (*ibid.*, 59), *i.e.*, into particular inner “semiospheres” constituting the – as it were – “global”⁸ semiosphere. The consequence is that, starting from the Semiosphere with a capital “S” up to all its components including texts, a “spaces” proliferation process can be detected; those “spaces” are, at the same time, somehow “local” and “global”⁹. In Lotman’s view this is also because each semiosphere is related to the superior one according to a sort of *isomorphic* relationship, that is to say, each text, each semiotic formation, each semiosphere, is part of a whole and, at the same time, similar to it (in other words, a “whole” in itself).

Then, a semiosphere proves itself to be a real *glocal device*. Nevertheless, things are even more difficult since it is inside a semiosphere that – in the shape of texts/discourses – self-descriptions and meta-texts are produced; these score and decree spaces, memories and practices as being “local” or “global” (where, on the other hand, such terms end up with having an absolute relative purport or, rather, an absolutely “determined” purport according to the discourse that defines them and the “value” they assume inside a cultural system: thus, from time to time, a “local” will be a face-to-face place, a village community, a region, a nation, a State, even the world itself respect to the universe – whatever is “particular” – and will end up with the assuming of such values as open-mindedness, broad-mindedness, authenticity,

⁷ The anthropological writing can be consider as an example of an intellectual practice that transforms the enunciation in an enunciate that is able to “travel”, *i.e.* able to detach itself from the place of its emersion and to get value of “generalization” (see Clifford 1988).

⁸ This is such a powerful mechanism, that Lotman wonders “if the whole universe is but a message making part of an ever wider semiosphere” (Lotman 1985, 70).

⁹ A similar view can be found in Sahlins (1994), who considers each culture as a “globality” since it takes its own “cosmology” including both the world and the alterity.

regression, stability, authority, order, etc., depending upon its opposition to a “global” thought, time to time, as the world, the “inter-national” system, the dimension of “capitalism”, of a world-wide economy, of what is “national”, of “universal” values etc, even these awarded with the most various euphoric or dysphoric attributions).

Then, even if under a certain point of view the semiosphere looks like a “reality” whose texts, languages, objects and subjects act with each other as though they were on “only one level” (a place where meanings and trajectories continually mix; we could call it *glocal* and consider it as substantially hybrid), under another point of view these semiotic formations produce hierarchies and systems of values, *i.e.*, levels of “abstract representations” which allow the constitution of classes of equivalences (and, of course, of “differences”) from the immediate data of experience (Geninasca 1997, 59); but such classes, now and there more or less steady or fluctuant¹⁰, tend to “shape” the cultural matter (respect to which a Subject defines his/her/its identity).

Probably it depends on the different points of view, but it is exactly in such a polymorphic, heterogeneous and complex space that representations and cultural practices emerge and act to define (thus “constituting” and providing the *medium* and becoming the *place* for this constitution) collective subjectivities that, recognizing one another and perceiving given cultural texts/objects as theirs, live and assume them as their “memory”: where the term, despite some what some of Lotman’s passages can make us think, is more an experiential dimension and matrix deeply innervated in the subject’s body than a “store” of artefacts from the past. *Memory*, then, oscillates between the artificial naturalities which continually *take* the subject’s body (natural languages, incarnate practices, unconscious automatisms, ordinary ritualities: “natural world” as Greimas called it, Greimas 1968) and its being a limit and a substance from which thoughts depart, just like the *quick* of a “situated thought” (Merleau-Ponty 1964).

Under that perspective the “local” assumes its phenomenological dimension, a place for the inscription of the body inside a wept of bodies and meanings and, at the same time, the subject’s articulated joint between his/her/its would-becoming something else and other ones’ alterity.

It here we recognize that deep ambiguity of the locality (that wept of relations in everyday life), which is “strong” – just like when it presents itself as a “culture”, a historically shared memory able at providing us almost automatically with a “world” and a translating filter of the alterity (in its own localization “mechanism” of the global, of indigenisation of extraneousness, de Certeau, 1980) for the community that *lives on it* – and, at the same time, “fragile” , as subdued to the dynamism and tensions of the real, to the transformations of the subjects and the community that go on acting, suffering and fighting inside themselves and with each other: other times, other spaces.

¹⁰ Around this pole seem to spin the concepts of media-scape and ideo-scape that in Appadurai’s theory (1996) witness the “global” circulation of representations and values.

Now, such a local memory is marked and determined by what transcends it – or, to say better, surrounds and crosses it – which is also its target (see Lotman 1994 on “the need for the other”). *I.e.*, that alterity without which it would have no existence as a “local” memory: in this sense, if we disregard from its historical determinations, this alterity is a “globality” respect to which any “local” takes place and situate itself.

But here things follow a chiasm-like manner. If the local has got that cultural and phenomenological dimension we have been speaking about, it lives (and *is* lived) as a globality of meaning, a “universe of values” including *inside itself* the position of the other: it has reserved the other a “local” space inside its “globalizing” extension. Nevertheless, at the same time, it stretches *outsidewardly* (it is inclined to situate and localize itself respect to an outside) *through its inside*: what is “own”, the “local globality”, needs a “partner”, an alterity respect to which define itself, an alterity that gives to the local its own existence (*ex-sistere*), value and meaning *by means of the differences*. Nevertheless, in doing so such a “local globality” *relativizes itself* (thus completely “self-localizing”), since the acting players (the one’s own and the others’ own) cannot but become the “parts” of a (more) global dimensions that in-globes and reunites them both (both in case this dimension is a shared unifying “meta-level” and a “structure of the differences”). Now, it is such a deep mechanism that Lotman often remarks that, even if the “other” or “external” is absent, culture (cultural collectives) create it by themselves; they create their own “other’s image”: “an image created in the *viscera* of culture – which contrasts its own dominating codes” (Lotman 1985, 124, *our Italics*); *i.e.*, contrasting with the claim of localities (of human collectives) not to depend on any alterity at the moment of their self-definition.

Then, that is how at the same time what is internal becomes external (what is “one’s own” and “local” becomes a globality producing and containing alterity – even when this is thought about, represented and legitimised as “globality”: the locality englobes the globality) and what is external becomes internal (the global, the alterity, becomes necessary and present – it becomes an inalienable presence since it has also to be “re-presented” – since, in its turn, it “constitutes” the “one’s own” of locality doubly: the global inhabits and produces the local – the presence of alterity gives existence to a “one’s own” assuring the process of “localization”). It is a real process of *co-emersion*. We will talk about it again.

5. The Glocal World, that one of communication and the paradoxical, current and structural tie between independence and interdependence

It seems that such a structural paradox of glocality can be fully detected inside cultural objects or, in other words, “texts”. At a first sight the text – the “textuality” – seems to stand for the “locality” of culture and its students: in this sense, a text is a situated production of signification. But, in the meanwhile, the situationalization – the “spatialization” – of the meaning is also the moment of its liberation from the chains of enunciation to start travelling: textualities can be mutable, and their meanings – their “effects” – can extend their impact beyond a textual space and beyond the spatial immediateness a text seemingly stands on. Apart from that, a text

appears or would like to appear, as a globality of meaning not only as related to itself and its narrowness respect to the world, but also as it always is a *translation* of a “reality” in another kind of “reality” (Lotman 1980). And always tries to become both a container and a matrix of the same world it emerges and takes its life from. The text contains (and tries to produce) its context: therefore, it carries a double potential globality¹¹. Then, it activates a co-textual ability (Fabbri 2001); it has got (is) something potentially more global than itself.

In the meantime it structures and is internally structured by several “spatialities” that are fundamental in the generation of the global meaning of the text (Geninasca 1997). It can be seen, then, that “local” and “global” spaces are mutually dependant on the point of view of their existence to the extent that – not looking at them from the perspective of “definition”, they compenetrates utterly and are indistinguishable (contexts are co-texts and texts assume their full social meaning only in such a co-textual landscape).

Now, such a type of process, or a keen awareness of it, seems to be indebted to that “communication” field that Lotman looked at as a “globalizing” factor since the beginning of the 1970s. In other words, it is from the inner process of cultural objects production that – as in a sort of “contrapuntist”¹² reading, the process of culture as a whole can be detected.

The larger the novel, the more structurally closed the chapter. The unitary the poetic cycle, the more important the verse, the word, the phoneme. XXth century art is a fine specimen of that phenomenon, with its highest *globalization* of the text (*the textual “counterpoint” of that age*) and its marked *atomisation and independence* (Lotman 1985, 123, *our Italics*).

This passage by Lotman, where the idea of globalization is evoked latently, shows us the signs of a widespread process nowadays and, at the same time, introduces us to another paradox of glocality.

The trend is the same detected in mass media and brought to excess by the new media. Let us consider TV programming. This tends to two opposing but contemporary directions: on one side its becoming (especially in collective self-representations and perception) a “flow” of the real through means that mediate it (corresponding to a potentially amorphous consuming experience), on the other side TV texts increasingly becoming “events”, “short forms”, “small texts (...) at the top of their inner coherence and cohesion” (Pezzini 2002, 17), strong marks of a so in-globing global rhythm that it makes it difficult to understand if texts are fragments of the flow or if this, losing whatever kind of “rhythmicity” or shape, is but a “nebula” (ibid., 16). It

¹¹ Perhaps such a mechanism, whose origins trace back to the mythological conscience and the isomorphism between the body and the world (Lotman 1980) can be exemplified by one of Ghandhi’s supposedly attributed sentences (“Be the world you want to live in”), where the subject’s meaningful action creates contexts. Individual acting and suffering *so as to*...take their own co-textual traits which allow selecting in the real what is useful “in order to” make a wished form of life emerge (in Ricoeur’s words, to “find” something and to “put” something in the reality: these are the two simultaneous acts of the process of “invention”).

¹² About such proceedings in cultural analysis see also Said 1984 and 1993.

is a drastically present problem in cyberspace, a potential space-world where, at the same time, finding or telling a global rhythm is very difficult: a space without which the “islands” of meaning created by men could not exist, but also a space far from defining one only global logic of (its) meaning.

That is how communication, then, seems to propose us what Lotman theorized about the generating process of “new signification” – *i.e.*, about the dynamism of reality – and that seems to be fully valid in nowadays relationships among cultures and between these and the world.

The tendency towards a growing autonomy of the elements and their transformation into independent units *and* the tendency their growing integration and transformation into parts of a whole *exclude and include mutually*, generating a structural paradox (Lotman 1985, 122, *our Italics*).

In our view, another basic trait of glocality can be detected here.

6. A Short (not Only Cultural) Semiotic of the Glocal

In paragraph 2 it has been noticed how the making of a discursive meta-level generating a pan-cultural “language”, that could be defined as “global”, is accompanied in Lotman’s view by the problem of simplifying and abstracting too much the idea of “mankind”: it is to be pointed out that the idea of “abstraction” does not mean that such a representation has no “reality” of its own. As proved by Robertson (1992), instead, the representation of “mankind” is one of the playing poles in the space of globalization. As a matter of fact, to become wholly real and effective, it must enter a phenomenological experiential space that, maybe for a truism, we (we, the human beings) are inclined to identify with the “locality”. In such a perspective, unlike everyday life, which gives meaning and emotional concreteness to existence, the “global” is somehow always “somewhere else”, a unitary language that may exist, but that is hardly recognized as “one’s own”. Even when the “global” is lived positively it seems to present itself more as an alterity to take possession of and a dimension to enter than one’s own production. Even in such a case things seem to go on in such a way that what is “one’s own” is dispossessed from the locality that gave it life and, as its value is recognized beyond and outside the place of its production, it becomes “global”. It is neat that here two different approaches to the relationship between globality and locality fight; these short notes do not allow the exploration of the knots interlacing such a binomial. What is important to point out is that from the semiotic of culture’s point of view, the “global”, considered not only as the sum of parts but as a “reality” by itself, could also be a real “language” circulating across the semiosphere and trying to inform it. Which does not prevent this language – to exist – from standing on localities that produce their parts, that accept, legitimate and sanction globality, that assume it as parts of the respective local semiospheres (whether it is viewed, in the language of structural semiotic, as a *Subject* – when that locality identifies and believes itself to be “the”

globality –; or as an *anti-Subject* – when the local lives itself as a pure zone besieged by the global against which it fights to get the control of that object of value given by the possibility of creating and maintaining its own system of values and identity; or as a *Addresser* – when it does not identify or cannot identify utterly itself with the globality but it deems to act in the place of that; or as an *anti-Addresser* – when the globality is seen as a system of values moving the actions of other local subjects which are the depositary of the system and against whom is necessary to fight in order to destroy the system of values they embody; or as an *Helper* – when it is considered as a part of the local helping it to exist and syncretizing with it; as an *Opponent* – when it is perceived as one of the contributing factors, along with other ones, to menace and discuss the existence of one's own local form of life; or, in the end, as an *Object of Value* – when “globality” is seen as a more or less abstract essence the access or joining to which are possible: a possible quality of one's own way of being in the world which turns into a project for life and moves the single collectives thus contributing to determine one's own choice and self-perception¹³). This implies that, far from any abstract “description” (is to note that Lotman's perception of human culture as a structure is based on the point of view of an analyst), in the real dynamics of things the global is always forced to modify itself inside the languages that we use really; these languages are necessarily but vehicles of the “globality” of the senses of the world. The global, just like the human, then, tends to acquire its existential accent starting from those contexts which, even being the product of “generalizations” and “abstractions”, as they set a string and flexible enough limits to the memory of the collective, at the same time grant its ability to face and fit the world to itself without sinking in the chaos of indeterminateness. “Local” generalizations that give existence and collective force without losing (too much) in terms of existential effectiveness and strength.

Yet, at present the global seems to be the reality of facts, not only because each locality has got its own “image” of the global. According to the perspective of the semiotics of culture (the Lotmanian one, at least), this happens as some “locals” tend to become global through a “dominance” process, that is, through the establishment of actual *power* relations (which seem to meet not only the idea of a subject gifted with a “project” for power, but also that of a more general indeterminate expansion “power” of the cultural forms produced by a given subject).

The starting idea comes from linguistics and makes reference to the works of such scholars as Jakobson and Tynjanov. They speak about the “dominant” as a “focussing component of the artistic work” (Jakobson 1972, cited in Lotman 1985, 132) and, more generally, as a factor marking some “direction” (Tynjanov and Jakobson 1928, 149); we would say a “trend” inside a cultural field. Now, dominance includes elements not alien to the history of globalization as we know it: in fact, it implies that a given sub-structure of the system tries to subdue every part of the system to its own formal organization and rules; that it assumes the right to speak (and to act, we would add) “in the name of” the totality; that in this process it produces its own “meta-linguistic self-descriptions”, legitimizing only the language of such sub-structure and confining

¹³ These short notes based on the Greimasian “actantial scheme” do not pretend to be complete; they should certainly be expanded and tested through exemplifications.

its opposite and opponent in the field of the inexistent or the incorrect (Lotman 1985, 132). Examples can be easily deduced.

Such a type of process, which induces a “locality” to become *tendentially* a global system “through a great activity of producing texts and meanings [that] spread its semiotic mechanism in an aggressive way” (ibid., 133), has got various consequences; the first of which is that, in the end, the intrusion of who claims too be the “centre” of the areas (real or symbolic ones) of those which play the functional role of the “periphery” but have got a real cultural memory of their own, excites the translating re-appropriation of this “imported” language, to the extent that the dominating “global locality” could be unable to recognize itself in the area it “dominates”. Another consequence is that even when such a “globality” (now identified with definition of “civilization” by Lotman) confirms itself more strongly, thus destroying the existing systems and memories and *really* producing “barbarians” (in Lotman’s view, meseems, those who, having lost their self-definition power, do not possess a memory-language making them collectively exist), this provokes, on a medium or long time term, a quite evocative *boomerang* effect. The following paragraph dating back to 1985 contemplates many of the present days processes.

The “barbarian” is a creation of civilization not only in a semiotic sense, but also in the real one. Cultural centres need, in fact, an endless flow of forces from the outside and at the same time they cast out of their borders all the human material which for some reason has no place in their structure. Thus, out of the external line of civilization, a particular collective exists that cannot rise without this closeness. It is de-structured and cannot exist in any independent way. The original way of being that it had up to the meeting with civilization is destroyed.

At the same time this is a store of enterprising men, who assimilate the technological achievements of near civilizations. The techniques worked out by the civilized world release from these societies and become the instruments for their destruction (Lotman 1985, 141).

The result is the creation of new “civilizations”, new “centres” springing from the conflict between cultures, often – even if in an unacknowledged way – through the creolization of “languages”; in any case, always whereby the translation of systems of meaning that bore the various forms of life, where this may also mean – as Lotman shows – that the destroying “barbarians” in the end take possession of what they have destroyed: even in a transforming way, they “integrate” and become the willing heirs to what they had damned to death at the beginning.

Everything is complex and subdued to translation in the semiosphere. Thus also the “global” techniques (become global because such was the definition of the locality that had created them and because, in such an expansion project, their diffusion becomes global) can be the

instrument of other localities that are going to destroy the previous global dominant and perhaps going to create a new (better or worse) global “dominance”.

Therefore, their meaning is intimately “glocal” just like, more in general, that of the forms of life that produce them and *are* produced by means of them. Thus, the local making itself global and becoming a dominant inside the system is already a part of its, *i.e.*, it becomes dominant inside a system of relationships transcending it and in some way it in its role (perhaps, partly, far more beyond its will to take possession of that role). The other systems live themselves and their localities on the basis of their feeling of participation/exclusion, nearness/distance respect to the global: where this means to be already taken inside a relation with globality, which is more or less embodied by a local, more or less able to present itself as a real global language. If such a language exists, it is continually reproduced and re-read in a space marked by the comparison and the fight with the external (with other localities) and its own perception of the global itself. The global itself to exist is taken between its being *one of* the local’s point of view on the world (one of its production) and a point of view *from* the local (one of its re-reading) of what, at a given moment, is perceived as global, universal, world-wide.

Through such a tireless, complex mechanism inside which an incredible plurality of points of view plays its role, a mechanism innervated in the “texts” of culture – in the bodies and lives of single human beings whose practicing it make it exist – fights and conflicts increase: fight and conflicts that are the effects and the causes of the dynamism and transformation of the world.

Such a dynamism is as much necessary and unavoidable – at least in complex systems – as potentially tragic, to the extent that in Lotman it seems to be limited to its catastrophic side in the possibility of a “stereoscopy in the perception of the world” (Lotman 1980, 24, 26, 37, 59), that is, being able to assume continually the other’s point of view inside one’s own horizon: living a sort of “cultural polyglottism” which, without scarifying its own existence, relativizes and makes it more complex in favour of a deeper ability at acting and suffering *with* the others more than *against* them.

7. In the Place of a Conclusion: Coming Back to Some Basic Mechanisms and Aporias

To conclude, let us go back to two points. The first is the tension between the “globality” as a deed and as a meta-level.

As a meta-level: some representations build the level of globality and, to that aim, populate it with objects and subjects, with spaces and times defined (and definable) as global, *as parts* in the global discourse. In such a way they “inscribe” the global inside objects (they make objects/practices as global, grant them this “essentiality”) through narrations.

As deeds: certain “events” as narrated, but before all immediately lived as global (since the perception of this “essence” of theirs seems to be shared: for the trans-local purport of their effects, for the world-wide extension of their field of action, for their emerging from or being

associated to subjects pertained as global ones) seem to take with them a globality deed that, at the same time, is made/stated by narrations (the narrations of their global being).

As one can see, there is a “creative paradoxality”: narrations and facts run after each other, and if it is true that the “fact” is always made inside narrations (Fabbri 1998), it is also true that certain “events” impose themselves with such a strength that, in their present, narrations seem to spring out of these in an almost unavoidable, determinate way.

The second point is the question of the *co-emersion* of global-local relationship from the *glocal* background which acts as an “immanence level”¹⁴, to which the definition (or meta-definition?) of such forms of existence (but also of meaning, identity, relation, power, etc) is always indebted.

What is important to point out is mainly the relation between the global and the local; a relation somehow perceived in its link with the glocal background or in its glocal mechanism, at least: it is as though we tried to find that connection between their complete “indistinction” *in the* background and the perception/representation that in nowadays sphere of meaning tends to present them to us as decidedly severed ontologized dimensions, often thought about as mutually opposed.

Then. The global produces the local since it provides the meta-systems of representations (Lotman’s abstract meta-level) – the equivalences/differences, forms and values, “positions” grid – which allows a culture to “locate” itself respect to the other areas and in a relationship with them (so that it recognizes itself and is recognized as a “part” in the play of globality), through a common translating code, which inscribes in its own inside a series of possible positions and which then acts as a common Discourse-metre/Discourse-parameter¹⁵ (obviously, historically and socially produced: a place of fights, of contrasting representations, therefore inserted in texts and continually changing and arranging itself).

It is self-evident, then, that such a global “medium” provokes exactly one’s self-collocation and localization (the having or the being a locality) and, in doing so, contributes to make wholly exist what seemingly denies it or, at least, opposes to it.

¹⁴ I think that, as discussed in due time, this idea is near one of the standing points in Abruzzese’s essay (my acknowledgements to him, Valeria Giordano and Isabella Pezzini for their generous and open discussion upon these themes) – that of the *glocal* as a global dimension of the *inhabiting*, continually oscillating in the re-creation of that inhabiting itself (of this “locally situated life”, of this being culturally located in the world and of the world, of this *immanence* of ours) – and, on the other hand, to the idea of an “aboriginal plurality of origins”, that is to say, the emersion of the “world” from every “singularity” and “exclusive, local and instantaneous fold” (Nancy 1996, 9 and 15). There is to say that, as hypotheses, it could be necessary to distinguish between the *glocal* as level of immanence, as cultural mechanism, as “meaning effect” due to particular “glocal definition” (representation) of the world and of the practices themselves. There is to say that probably all these elements are interlaced and parts of a continuum, but all these hypotheses have to be verified.

¹⁵ It is the case, for example, of such semiotic forms (formations) – both discursive and institutional ones – as those of Nation, State, Nation without a State, Region...; or civilization, people, ethnic group, community, culture, sub-culture; or those of “positions” like dominant, oppressed, subaltern, antagonist, majority, minority...; or of one’s perception of him/herself or belonging to the First, Second, Third, Fourth World, of one’s belonging to North or South, West or East (with the various “Western”, “Eastern”, “Arabian”, “American”, “Latino-American”, “European”, “Asian” identities, not to cite the hybrid ones, which, from time to time, oppose, intersect or superpose). It seems to me that, even using different terms, Robertson and White (2004), too, try to underline and emphasize this “global production” of locally assumable *forms* of existence.

The production of cultural objects – the practices and the representations – is an example of such a cross. The objects-representations that shape (are grieved by) any “globality” are in their turn a part of the local; they frame and help it to form as such: not only by differences, but also in a constitutive way, since they insert in a plot of wider relationships that is the realization of the other’s needs for the existence of what is one’s own¹⁶. On the other hand, it is starting from the local that, in the production of cultural texts/objects in communities, relations and *located* bodies that the representations of globality are formed.

Then, sliding towards this slope, the global (“universal”) seems to be always and necessarily a point of view of the local (*from* the local). If we start from the bodies that go through the earth, we cannot help noticing how the universal is filled with different tones, values and meanings, that are just indebted to the local through which it constitutes the place it “emerges” from and where it “collocates” itself to get done. In other words, in order to actualise – to acquire – “reality”, it must localize itself and in this sense it loses its power; or, at least, the power that it seems to have when it is thought as a “pure” globality, as a unified and unifying dimension abstracted from the bodies that it would form and through which, instead, it lives and assumes meanings in diverse “subversive” ways: it does not impose a meaning – it has no meaning before meeting those bodies and, in any case, does not maintain this meaning entire (even in case the global has a meaning) at the very moment of its meeting with them – it does not assimilate (does not make similar to), but is assimilated (made similar to itself), so that any appropriation of, any modification on the basis of one’s own cultural experience/memory is always practiced (de Certeau 1980) (whereas sometimes that takes explicitly place since – seen from a certain local – the global/universal is absolutely and consciously “another” local).

In the end, it is to be pointed out that the local (and its glocal crossing with the global) is framed with global elements that it tends to localize or to save as “pieces” of the global kept under the control of its stitches (or that it evokes in the shape of what is “prohibited” and banned respect to which any self-production and definition takes place “by negation”); but in doing so, it somehow implicitly accepts to “globalize”, to transform itself, if not towards that global, at least with respect and in relation to it. In its generality, this is a “glocal” mechanism – *i.e.*, that lives on a necessary circularity between local and global – that has its own folds and matter-of-fact consequences on each single situation¹⁷.

¹⁶ For example: 1) when what is one’s own is defined as a cultural space that want to close itself against the other it has evidently recognized his/her own dependence on an alterity; not only this alterity surrounds us, but it also is inside us, crosses us and is present to us; 2) on the contrary, when one recognizes the other’s needs to the extent that he thinks he depends on them, as if the imposition of a globality (of other localities) in one’s own local is the only way of having a culture or existing culturally; 3) in a “neutral” form (or, perhaps, on conditions of strength relations being “equal”), when the need is asserted of giving heterogeneity to one’s life, of completing him/herself in a confrontation, of going on being dynamic in cultural exchanges even without losing his/her self-representation...

¹⁷ Obviously, in such a discourse, all the more in an actual analysis of culture, it is necessary to pay attention to even the way we define the “local” (or the “locality”); in other words, if we use it as the place of the “face-to-face” relations, as a phenomenological dimension (where this is linked to everyday life and its “national” space, often a medial space), as a discursive product which is indebted to pre-existing constitutively hybrid practices (Latour), etc. Each of these obviously changes its way of acting and being interlaced with the global.

The model we have summarily sketched is that type of double tension typical of contemporary world, whereby we seem to look at a growing “resemblance” process among cultures on one side (“homologation”) and, on the other side, at a growing assertion of diversity/alterity by the cultural collectives themselves (“differentiation”) that claim the *incommensurability* of their own forms of life respect to other ones. In other words: the more one gets (“objectively”) alike, the more one feels – or wants to feel – (“subjectively”) different¹⁸.

(translated by Giampiero Vacca)

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¹⁸ A phenomenon detected by Lotman while studying the “national cultures in their globality”: “not only the process of mutual information and inclusion in a general cultural world provokes an approach between different cultures, but also their specialization. In fact, entering a general cultural world, a culture begins to cultivate more its own originality. In their turn, also the other cultures codify it as a ‘particular’ one or ‘out of normal habits’. An isolated culture is always ‘natural in itself’ and ‘ruled by natural rules’. As soon as it becomes a part of a wider whole, it gets in touch with an external point of view regarding that culture and finds out to be gifted with its own specificity” (Lotman 1985, 76).

To such a process Sahlins seems to refer when he speaks about the possible formation of “a *system* of world cultures, a Culture of cultures – with all the features of a structure of the differences”: “After all, in every local sector of the global system the transformation assumes the double appearance of assimilation and differentiation. Local populations approach the dominating cultural order even if they keep their distance; they dance at the cadence of the world music while singing their own music” (Sahlins 1994, 470).

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