TO RECOSMIZE

by Alice Pontiggia

Fundamental terms to understand cosmo's constructions and perception ruptures

> *"For a moment's duration, the world stands still.*
> *A human moment lasts one-eighteenth of a second."*

> Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans, 1934*

Jakob von Uexküll, Baltic German biologist and philosopher, after the study of animals' behaviours, stated that we sit too comfortably in the illusion of the existence of a one and only space and time for all living beings, one world for all. Instead, he claims, the world for us is a constant, unceasing repetition of multiple functional cycles between the subject and its habitat. If the environment is known through a subjective perception, each living being, including the human being, will be enclosed in an ever changing perception bubble, colliding with other bubbles. Therefore, "**there is no space independent of subjects**"[4].

In 1985, the French geographer and philosopher Augustin Berque rediscovered the term mesology, previously used to describe the "study of the human surroundings", in the effort of translating the neologism *fudogaku*, developed by the Japanese philosopher Tetsurō Watsuji. Adopting the word **mesology**, Berque re-defined it as the trans-modern discipline that studies the **milieu** (translation for *Umwelt* or *fudo*). Milieu is the set of ecological-technical-symbolic relationships that a society creates from the process linking the inseparable halves of the individual physiological body and its raw environment (*Ungiven*), the abstract and objective datum studied by modern science. This trajective process, co-creating, continuously and at the same time, the human and the non-human, the matter and the symbol, a specific cosmos, is called **mediance** - from the Latin term *medietas - halves*, is "the structural moment of human existence".

The fundamental meaning of the Greek term *κόσμος* (cosmos) is that of order. An order that encompasses in mutual relationships the beliefs of a society, its social dynamics, the material disposition of things over the land they inhabit, land treatment, the evolution of their

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[4] Jakob Johann Freiherr von Uexküll (1864-1944), *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, 1934 (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 70.

techniques, their aesthetic. Different societies correspond to different **cosmologies**, id est the metaphysics explaining the origin of their universe and the universal order that they believe organizes and moves their world in terms of space, time and matter. Their cosmology is expressed through religious credo, mythemes, mathematical models, or any other kind of beliefs, that are passed down in time through rituals, myths, practices, and others. To different societies also belong a different **cosmotechnic**, that is "the unification of the cosmos and the moral [human behaviour metaphysics, ed.] through technical activities, whether craft-making or art-making"[5]. In our technological era, technology is the engine of globalization – understood both as a force of convergence in space, and synchronization in time.

As part of modern society, materially, logically and ontologically founded on the modern-classical-western paradigm [MCWP][6], the human being has been gradually led to **decosmization**: the loss of the cosmos, of the reference points of the order that co-constitute us and our world. This happened through the process of abstraction of our Being from its environment: ontologically with dualism, and logically with the law of the excluded medium. Historically, decosmization can be summarized in three stages: "first, conceiving absolute Being, namely that of the God of monotheism, who is purely transcendental since he is both subject and predicate of himself, and correlatively depends on nothing but his own substance for existing; second, applying the same principle to the human, as symbolized by Descartes' cogito, first expression of the modern subject, and correlatively of the modern object; third, implementing technically that same principle, in the human subject, … and correlatively geoengineering"[7].

Decosmization makes us feel detached from our bodies and from others, human and non-human beings. This has happened through a long process of dressage. The term **dressage** is used by Henri Lefevbre in his posthumous volume *Rhythmanalysis. Space, time and everyday life* to describe the imposition of specific gestures and movement with the aim of imprinting specific mental, emotional and physical automatisms to the individual. This training is carried out through the repetition of specific rhythmic patterns, usually embedded in ritualized dynamics. He says: "Humans break themselves in [se dressent] like animals. They learn to hold themselves. Dressage can go a long way: as far as breathing,

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[5] Yuk Hui, *Cosmotechnics as Cosmopolitics* (e-flux journal, Issue 86, 2017)

[6] Augustin Berque, *An enquiry into the ontological and logical foundations of sustainability: Toward a conceptual integration of the interface 'Nature/Humanity'* (in the volume Global Sustainability 2, Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1–10.

[7] ibid.

movements, sex. It bases itself on repetition. One breaks-in another human living being by making them repeat a certain act, a certain gesture or movement"[8]. With the aim to imprint socially recognized manners in the individual, the process of dressage shapes society.

The rhythm of dressage is based on the alternance of the triad activity – repose – entertainment, maximizing its efficiency for armies, offices, religious and educational establishments. It moldes linear (social) time, creating disturbances in polyrhythmia, eurhythmia and arrhythmia of cyclical (natural) time. When memory is affected, then automatism begins: the need recreates itself, and only a crisis can break its repetition.

On the contrary, for mesology, the thing we perceive is at the same time a subject (S), that has an existence on its own, but also exists as a predicate (P), within the relationship we have with it, constituted by a **trajective** chain of perceptions mediated by an interpreter, the third term I. In this way, the logic of the identity of the subject is replaced with the logic of the identity of the predicate through the ternary, not binary, relation S–I–P. The knowledge is therefore based on how the subject is perceived and interpreted by the predicate.

The rupture in the human / land relationship

How is the grass perceived by the cow? As food. How is the **Earth** perceived by humankind? Differently, depending on the cosmology to whom the subject belongs to. Due to anthropological and historical studies, in fact, we know that the notion of **landscape** does not belong to all societies, or can have different and untranslatable meanings for them related to a food, medicinal, aesthetic value or others. Giving a preliminary definition of it, landscape is the human perception of land, a representation that stemmed from the eco-technical-symbolic relationship that binds land and the human community inhabiting it. To bring examples, we can identify the birth of the term landscape in China and Europe.

In IV century AD China, the fall of the Han dynasty coincided with the spread of Taoism, a belief based on ideals linked to nature. Hermits then began to move to unknown places and to devote themselves to natural beauty. Through poetry was therefore born the term landscape, *shanshui*, deriving from the union of the ideograms mountain and water. This term closely links the ontological and aesthetic dimensions of what is seen and perceived; it simultaneously refers to the material being and its intrinsic essence, as there is no transcendence in taoist and buddhism doctrines.

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[8] Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis. Space, Time and Everyday Life* (Continuum 2004), originally published by Éditions Syllepse, Paris, 1992

In Europe[9], the birth of the idea of landscape is linked to religious discussions. The monk Pelagius heretically argued that, ignoring divine grace, man could enjoy the creation as a supreme good; a thesis dangerously close to Platonic statements. St. Augustine of Hippo opposed him, confirming instead that without grace man could not deserve salvation and that the supreme good was not creation but man himself; he therefore had to seek the truth within himself. "What do I love, when I love you? Not bodily beauty, not the gracefulness of time, not the brilliance of light, so dear to these eyes; no sweet melodies of varied songs; not the fragrance of flowers, perfumes, aromas; no manne, no honeys, not limbs dear to carnal embraces; these are not the things I love, when I love my God."[10] declares St. Augustine speaking about the beauty of sensible things.

This debate somehow irreversibly separated the intelligible from the sensible, the transcendent representation of the environment and its profane, tangible dimension. So, if the the first one, historically coopted by christian interests, has been boosted by Renaissance painting, has give birth to the neologisms *landschaft* - addition of a new meaning to an already existing word, in the Germanic languages - and *paes-aggio* - addition of a suffix in the neo-Latin languages - , the second one has become the universal abstraction of nature needed to the birth of modern science. Through this separation, the rupture in the perception of the cosmos has widened.

Criticizing the changes of late XIX century agriculture, Karl Marx put the base of the theorization of a **metabolic rift** between human beings and the soil. For Marx, "the human metabolism with nature" is a highly dynamic, interdependent relationship. Labor is, in this relationship, the interpretation, the trajection, namely "a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature".[11] Even if lacking an integrated vision of man and nature, of man as part of nature, Marx's thesis reinforced the perception of a collaboration of the two in the co-creation of a relationship; a relationship that in that historical fragment was starting to show a crisis, an environmental and social crisis. The introduction of new capitalist modes of production increased the disconnection between humanity and land. Firstly affecting soil fertility

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[9] Considering another history: for the philosopher and aesthete Alain Roger, the first landscape society was Imperial Rome as it already recognized the concept of landscape; of it there were already pictorial representations, literary representations and terms to define it, such as the Greek-inherited *topia*.

[10] "Quid autem amo, cum te amo? Non speciem corporis nec decus temporis, non candorem lucis ecce istis amicum oculis, non dulces melodias cantilenarum omnimodarum, non florum et unguentorum et aromatum suaviolentiam, non manna et mella, non membra acceptabilia carnis amplexibus; non haec amo, cum amo deum meum." St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, X book, 400 AD approx.

[11] Karl Marx, *The Capital*, 1867 (Penguin Books, translated by Ben Fowkes, 1976), Vol. 1, 283.

through the use of chemical fertilizers and the industrialization of agricultural practices. And secondly directly changing the form of human assemblages on territory with the promotion of migration from country to town. Under the pressure of the demand of labor force for the industries, in fact, rural population abandoned their land and entered a **migratory trend** that repositioned the same subjects in an urban context. Cheated by the capitalistic dream of a "better life in cities"[12], the ancestral knowledge related to land use was abandoned and later forgotten, and the human individual has been extracted by its milieu to become a modern subject.

This dynamic also creates a new relationship between the two previously mentioned contexts, the simplified concepts of the city and the country. A relationship of **material subjugation**, in which the non-urban become just an inert stock of resources freely available for the subsistence of urban life[13], or a non-place accommodating the waste of the metropolis, represented only by a decontextualized inflow and outflow rate diagram.[14] A material relationship that inevitably translates also in a **cultural subjugation**: the city is not

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[12] We could here start enumerating an infinite number of policies promoted by national states, international institutions or private companies to trigger this migratory flux. But, as an example, we can recall the slogan of the 2010 Shanghai EXPO: if the English translation was promoting "better city, better life", a moderate vision of development for the foreigner public, the chinese version was actually advertising to their citizens "better life in cities", or, literally, 城市，让生活更美好 "the city makes life more beautiful". A propaganda strategy that drives to a completely different meaning.

[13] Above the easier to imagine exchanges of food or construction materials, for example, it is very worthed to mention the importance covered by the production of electric power in non-urban contextes, and the role that it had and has in the development of city's commodities. Specifically, Valtellina has 25 small dams and 27 large dams on its territory and contributes with the production of 12% of the national hydroelectric energy and 50% of the Lombardy one. 310 are the captation works, 71 the production plants, 500 km of pipelines and canals, 510 million cubic meters of reservoir capacity (Alta Rezia News, published on 10/05/2021). A story started at the end of the XIX century: several electricity companies secured themselves the concessions for the use of lakes and river's waters for forty or more years, and started the construction of the hydropower infrastructure. The high-voltage energy transportation line towards Milan, has been the conditio sine qua non for the construction of the milanese public tramline transportation system.
On the other hand, moving toward a global dynamic, at the foundation of colonial history, we detect an even more violent disconnection between the nation state and its subsistence: whole colonies saw their land and resources robbed to support the capitalization of the colonizing countries.

[14] Funny enough, this exchange has founded and crystallized in a 1960s urban planning theory called urban metabolism, focused on studying the fluxes of matter and energy intercurring between city and country. Specifically, these scholars have mainly worked on water shortage in US cities proposing the practice of water chlorination, namely supporting the chemical alteration of water (see Abel Wolman, *The metabolism of cities*, 1965).

only the geographical center but is also the center of knowledge production. The urban lifestyle of the modern subject is not only exalted as "the most advanced one" in its own context, but a cunningly altered version of it is tried to be sold back to those people that have remained in the outer territories. As it happened with tribal societies or post-war Matera alike, the non-modern subject is made to feel ashamed for its lifestyle by the colonizer. In this way the mechanism of reproduction of the modern lifestyle is ensured, and the conquered, in reaction to this humiliation, present itself as the most loyal protector and preacher of the modern discipline.

Finally, "terziarizing" the idea of extraction, and therefore following the transformation of capitalism in late-capitalism, we have moved from a material operation, that is anyhow still present, to an intangible one. The cultures of non-urban contexts have been either deleted to create a tabula rasa on which install the occupier's cosmovision, either caricatured and transformed in simbolically emptied amusement parks. To allow citizens to obtain their moments of leisure and relaxation, the newly created idea of **tourism** is promoted in non-urban contexts with great enthusiasm.

Towards a practice of recosmization

"MCWP triggered off what is nowadays called the Sixth Extinction of life on Earth, and broke up the social bond and caused havoc with the landscape. It entailed a loss of cosmicity which may well be fatal for humankind. This means that, contrary to that decosmization, in order to ensure sustainability, **we have to recosmize, reconcretize, re-Earthbind human existence**; and this is precisely the aim of mesology."[15]

von Uexküll's functional cycles are altered by the matrix of power, in Quijano's words. But acknowledging the awareness brought by the campesinos and indigenous communities, and by "Mnemosine of thousand names" itself, we now see that in modern society a shift in the perception of land is needed. Modern collectivities need to reconsider their relationship with the territory in terms of natural flourishing, and not possible consumption. **Land as life, not land as profit.**

But, once detected the ruptures and identified the problems, how to deal with the herency of the Modern Colonial-Capitalist Western-White Patriarchal-Paradigm? And, if survived and

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[15] *An enquiry into the ontological and logical foundations of sustainability: Toward a conceptual integration of the interface 'Nature/Humanity'*, Augustin Berque, 2019

healed from it, how to create **alternatives**? How to regenerate the relationships between humans and non-human, how to regenerate their cosmos?

Following a similar strategy as the modern dressage, before tackling the collective construction, we need to subtract the **modern individual** from being an exploited, alienated, secular, algorithm driven consumer (nowadays, a consumer being consumed, a consumer being also a consumption good), so it can engage with its environment through its senses, reclaim its humanity[16]. Hoping it will connect with its own symbolic and spiritual dimension. It will heal its relationships, its functional cycles, and start again to reimagine its singular and communal narratives. New cosmotechnics, new cosmologies, new cosmos. A shift from the stiff sensorium (or perceptive interface) standardized by the dressage herency, to an embodied listening of inner-skin and outer-skin vibrational changes.

We can learn from the experience of the Tseltal Mayan philosopher Xuno López Intzín, who has encountered himself in the position of a colonized subject, that "was **devastating** to realize that the indigenous spirit 'was defeated and subjugated' "[17]. And that to enter the process of de-domestication "we must immerse ourselves in our history, understanding our origins as Maya people. In this extensive present, our reflections about sp'ijilal O'tan[18] have led us to the act of "making our heart return" to our remote past, to our forgotten cosmos."[19]

Assuming that it feels equally "devastating" for the european individual, a subject of Valtellina let's say, to face the recognition of subjugation, the process of undressing, in this case, from 2000 (pre-christian and pre-roman[20]) or more than 5000 (pre-indo european[21]) years

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[16] Humanity here understood as the word for the general form taken by the Subject, id est a living being with consciousness and intentionality (*Perspectivism and Multinaturalism in Indigenous America*, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, 1996-2005)

[17] Xuno (Juan) López Intzín, *Sp'ijilal O'tan: Knowledges or Epistemologies of the Heart* (published on Resistant Strategies, 2019, and translated by Marlène Ramírez-Cancio and Margot Olavarria)

[18] Sp'ijilal O'tan is translated as "knowledges or epistemologies of the heart", but it also refers to a constellation of practices, concrete modes of community life, ways of being in and with the cosmos.

[19] ibid.

[20] The arrival of Romans in Valtellina is set around the year 23 BC. "At the end of the Iron Age there was an episode which we magnify in our textbooks, but which was, in fact, the undoing of Europe. The Romans, by creating an empire, stifled the tribal autonomies, for which they suppressed the different. The only possible logic was Roman logic, the only free citizen was the Roman citizen, the only right law was the Roman one." Emmanuel Anati, *Le prime comunità umane in Valtellina* in *Le origini della Valtellina e della Valchiavenna*, 1989.

[21] The arrival of the indo-europeans in Valtellina is set around 3200 BC. For Emanuel Anati and Marija Gimbutas alike, indo-europeans were a colonizing society. Bearers of a new religion for the former, the

of spiritual and material coercion, if it manages to overcome this, what is the path of return for its hearth? to which forgotten cosmos do it move toward?

Since 1986, the team of Francesco Fedele (University of Naples) has been working at what is reported as the oldest trace of man in the central Alps. They have been excavating at **Pian dei Cavalli and Borghetto** localities (at the end of Valchiavenna in Sondrio province), at 2200 mslm, where temporary settlements of Paleo-Mesolithic hunters of around 9000-7500 years ago were detected. Fifteen hearths with no appearance of food (no charred bones) nor light or heating use, appears to be located on two very exposed edges facing one another on the opposing slopes of the Febbraro valley. This suggests the hypothesis of a ritualized deer hunt and the construction of a dialogue of fire, part of a cycle of ceremonial events.

In her articles[22] about the Camunian[23] petroglyph site **Naquane**, Sandra Busatta tries to re-constructs the mediance from which this art expression stemmed. Through linguistic, anthropological and archaeological comparison, she binds the selection of Naquane locality, the visual and acoustic presence of Oglio river, the position of sunrise and sunset, copper and iron mines, the use of quartz, the mythological figure of the Aquane, the deer and other elements, and give us an approximate perception of Camunian cosmology. "Using the word 'thing' in the broadest way, I translated every 'thing' into a phoneme, the smallest phonetic unit in a language that is capable of conveying a distinction in meaning, and looked for meaningful combinations. How did these landscape/mindscape phonemes combined into words, that is into clusters of meaning? As soon as I could recognize 'words', I started to see meaningful sentences and, at last, to understand the grammar of the Camunian landscape."[24] On this basis, Busatta also offers her interpretation of the petroglyphs as funeral ceremonies with passages to "other worlds" and ritual activities around death, recalling the hypothesis of a Proto-Indo-European shamanism.

Since the thaw era, around 15 to 10 thousand years ago, the area of lower Valtellina has been a land of slow exploration for humans. With time, it becomes a real melting pot of roads and people. It is known that Celts, Romans, Spaniards, Swiss and many others were trying or had

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second one argued that the expansions of the Kurgan culture were essentially a series of military incursions through which the new warrior and patriarchal ideology imposed itself.

[22]Sandra Busatta, *L'arte rupestre camuna tra Cervi, Caccia Selvaggia, Aquane e Nani minatori*, 2019

[23] Camuni were the prehistoric population of Val Camonica, the valley that connects to Valtellina through the Aprica pass, today belonging to the territory of Brescia province. They settled here in the Central Alps around 8000 bC and left a great herency in terms of petroglyphs.

[24] Sandra Busatta, *The Grammar of the Camunian Land/Mindscape*, 2021, commissioned text

managed to reign over the vital alpine passes that connected the Mediterranean basin to continental Europe. Palafittes remains were discovered in the Careciasca locality, at the foot of the mountain slopes, at a sight distance from the Forte di Fuentes hill, where various relics were found. Two castellieri, fortified villages built in an easily defensible elevated position, were thought to have been located on the utterly exposed north-west side of the Còlmen and in the Scheneno fraction of Ardenno, located at the bottom of a deep creek, hidden and protected by multiple hillsides. A third castelliere might be located in the shady woods of Morbegno, intersecting the engraved crosses, cupels and canals discovered in the Tempietto locality, on the way to the Valli del Bitto, where a constellation of iron mines and ovens are still recognizable. But how the understanding of these cosmotechnics, mediances and logics of habitation will help contemporary communities in regenerating their cosmos?

Through the study of Popul Vuh and the experience of everyday life in his community, López Intzín started working on a belief that bonds all the indigenous peoples of Abya Yala: the existence of **ch'ulel** in every living being. Intending this term as the vital power or energy (but also consciousness, soul, spirit) that all human and non-human beings have[25], we know that the whole matter is living-feeling-thinking-speaking, and that there is a mutual dependency, influence, interconnection among it. The ch'ulel occupies the space of the **o'tan**, term usually translated as the noun hearth, that can also be used as a noun in a metaphor to identify the subject (a being or entity that feels and thinks). But it could also be used as a verb with the meaning of feeling with the heart, listening to the hearth, thinking with the hearth, feeling-thinking, "enhearting". "We just have to let ourselves be surprised and re-enchanted by everything that hegemonic knowledge and the capitalist hydra have disenchanted, everything in this vast existence that has been reduced to mere objects and commodities", he concludes.

I propose to begin reweaving our histories from the tangible, the body, the hearth, the Earth. From the specificity of every milieu, selecting how we want to re-exist in our presents and being re-handed down in our pasts and futures, building new communal metabolizations. **Independent processes of recosmization in a world where many worlds fit**, as Zapatistas would say. What each of them has to teach us? **I start from mine.**

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[25] ch'ulel has at least other three meanings: 1. the process of language acquisition by infants, 2. a type of consciousness or a notion of reality (for example when a person's conscience is in an altered state, due to substances or a distraction), 3. has a social or collective character and is the accumulation of knowledge that is transmitted and recreated from generation to generation. Is a collective historical memory that becomes ways of thinking, acting, and being in the world.