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Introduction to the semiotics of belonging

Abstract: The article proposes a phenomenological and semiotic theoretical framework for the intelligibility of the meaning of belonging, one of the most fundamental concepts in present-day cultures and societies. After defining belonging as a spatial enunciation that brings about 1) the frontiers of a space of belonging; 2) the consequent opposition between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging; and 3) the relation between, on the one hand, the subject of enunciation and, on the other hand, the opposition /environment of belonging/ versus /environment of non-belonging/, the article articulates a typology of “figures of crossing,” in which belonging is manifested through the narrative dialectics between placement and displacement. In the theoretical framework of tensive phenomenology and semiotics, four macro-regimes of belonging are singled out: “sedentary estrangement,” “nomadic belonging,” “nomadic estrangement,” and “sedentary belonging.” Moreover, four semantic paths dynamically representing the transition between these regimes are identified: “exile/invasion,” “cosmopolitanism/curiosity,” “acclimation/tolerance,” and “alienation/suspicion.” In the conclusion, the theoretical framework developed by the article is proposed as instrument for the analysis of the “rhetorics of belonging” in present-day cultures and societies.

Keywords: belonging; phenomenology; semiotics; frontiers; space; rhetoric

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1 Relations of belonging and spatial enunciations¹

This article inquires into the semiotic dynamics through which a relation of belonging is established between a subject (individual or collective) and a space (physical or conceptual, “real” or virtual). From the semiotic point of view, the

¹ This article is part of a book on the semiotics of belonging that the author will hopefully publish in 2012.

phenomenological origin of every relation of belonging can be characterized as an operation of spatial enunciation.² Three elements are simultaneously enunciated through this operation: the frontiers of a space of belonging, which can be more or less marked;³ the consequent opposition between an environment of belonging and an environment of non-belonging; and the relation between, on the one hand, the subject of enunciation and, on the other hand, the opposition /environment of belonging/ versus /environment of non-belonging/. Although these three elements can be theoretically separated, they are, from the phenomenological point of view, inextricable: a relation of belonging cannot exist without the opposition between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging; such opposition cannot exist without the enunciation of the frontiers of a space of belonging, and so on.

The relation of belonging between a citizen and an urban neighborhood, for instance, is not established simply through administrative bureaucracy (Mohr 2009). For administrative purposes, bureaucracy can state that a citizen belongs to a certain neighborhood, even if the citizen does not feel to belong to that particular place, but to somewhere else, for instance, to the neighborhood of her childhood. On the contrary, such relation of belonging is established through a spatial enunciation that:

1. projects onto the map of the city the frontiers of a space of belonging (Leone 2010a). They can be more or less marked: for some citizens their neighborhood will be defined by certain specific streets, whereas for some others it will be outlined not by sharp frontiers but by fuzzier thresholds, for instance, a group of streets or even a group of buildings;⁴
2. brings about an opposition between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging. Again, such opposition can be more or less sharp, depending on how clear-cut the frontiers of the space of belonging are. In

2 The bibliography on the linguistics and the semiotics of enunciation is vast. On the genesis of the concept of enunciation, cf. Benveniste (1966, 1971). For a survey of Benveniste's theory of enunciation, cf. Ono (2007). For an effective synthesis of this tradition of studies, cf. Manetti (1998, 2008). For an interesting phenomenological approach on the semiotics of enunciation, cf. Coquet (2007). The literature on the linguistic and semiotic study of space is equally abundant. Among the most recent contributions, cf. Cavicchioli (1997, 2002); Hess-Lüttich et al. (1998); Hammad (2006); Schönle (2006); Lussault (2007, as well as the other works of this "semiotic geographer"); Marcos (2007); Auer and Schmidt (2010: esp. chapter 1); Jaworski and Thurlow (2010).

3 For an introduction to the semiotics of frontiers in Lotman and other authors, cf. Leone (2006a); Velázquez (2009).

4 Bibliography on urban semiotics and urban enunciation is extensive. For a recent survey, see Leone (2009a).

some cases even crossing a single street will dispel a citizen's feeling of belonging, whereas in some other cases the citizen will have to walk or drive through a series of streets before gradually realizing that she has entered an area of the city where she does not belong (Leone 2010b);

3. establishes a relation between the citizen and the opposition /environment of belonging/ versus /environment of non-belonging/. In other words, it turns the relation between the citizen and the urban space into a patterned relation, consisting of cognitive, pragmatic, and emotional oppositions. In some areas of the city – those to which she belongs – the citizen will have the impression to know the environment, to be able to act in and through it, and to feel at ease in it: such are the basic characteristics of an urban environment of belonging. Outside of these areas, however, where she does not belong, the citizen will feel that she does not know the environment, that she is unable to act in and through it, and that she does not feel at ease in it: such are the basic characteristics of an urban environment on non-belonging (Leone 2010b).

2 The dialectics between placement and displacement

Given that a relation of belonging is established through an enunciation that posits a link between a subject and a space patterned by frontiers, such relation can be revealed only through the dialectic between placement and displacement. Placement is meant here as the operation through which a relation of belonging is established through the enunciation of a link between a subject and a space patterned by frontiers. On the contrary, displacement is the operation through which such relation is dissolved.

Phenomenology and semiotics should investigate the semiotic processes through which frontiers are enunciated in the relation between a subject and a space: why are frontiers enunciated in a certain way, bringing about a certain series of oppositional patterns? Does the creation of such patterns depend exclusively on the subject of enunciation, on the material characteristics of space, or on a combination of both? And how is characterizing such combination possible?

The present article will, however, inquire into a preliminary phenomenological and semiotic problem: how is the existence of an environment of belonging revealed to subjects in the first instance? How do subjects realize that there are certain physical and conceptual spaces to which they belong and some others to

which they do not belong? The main hypothesis of this article is that subjects (individual or collective) do not become aware of the existence of an environment of belonging when they contribute to its enunciation. Instead, they become aware of it when they experience the opposition between such environment of belonging and an opposite environment of non-belonging. This opposition cannot be experienced abstractly, but as it was said earlier, it can be sensed only through the dialectics between placement and displacement, that is, when it is experienced as transition.⁵

It is in the transition between an environment of belonging and an environment of non-belonging that subjects are able to interact with the oppositional patterns created by the projection of frontiers onto a certain space. For instance, a citizen does not realize that she belongs to a certain neighborhood in abstract and absolute terms, but as the consequence of an infelicitous transition, when crossing a street, a park, or a square, results in the experience of the passage from an environment of belonging into an environment of non-belonging, i.e., in the experience of frontiers.

Therefore, before any consideration on the construction of such frontiers, the present article will primarily focus on the dynamics through which they are detected. As it will be evident, the transitional detection of frontiers and their enunciation can only be theoretically separated, since they are part of the same phenomenological and semiotic dynamic. However, following a phenomenological more than a constructivist rationale, this article will first analyze the semiotic processes through which frontiers are detected, leaving to subsequent articles the task to reconstruct the phenomenology of their enunciation.

3 Figures of crossing: Intensity and extension of transition

To this purpose, the present article will analyze a series of figures of crossing, that is, narrative models through which the transition between placement and displacement, between an environment of belonging and an environment of non-belonging, are imagined in present-day societies and cultures.

Two factors play a key-role in determining the semantics of these figures of crossing: on the one hand, they can be categorized according to the intensity of transition between the environments of belonging and those of non-belonging,

5 Cf. Crapanzano (2003).

which they manifest in narrative terms. On the other hand, they can be categorized according to the extension of distance between the environments of belonging and those of non-belonging, which they reveal through narrative forms. The feeling of belonging is inversely proportional to the intensity of transition (the sharper the perception of the crossing of a frontier between environments of belonging and non-belonging is, the less intense the feeling of belonging will be). Analogously, the feeling of placement is inversely proportional to the extension of distance (the more relevant the movement implied by the crossing of a frontier between environments of belonging and non-belonging is, the less intense the feeling of placement will be).

As regards the intensity of transition, figures of crossing can be placed along a continuum: at one end, we shall find figures of crossing that manifest, in narrative terms, those passages in which the semantic differential between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging is minimal. At the other end, on the contrary, we shall find figures of crossing that manifest, in narrative terms, those transitions in which the semantic differential between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging is maximum. Minimum and maximum levels here are not to be considered in absolute but in relative terms, as polarities in the semantic field of belonging characterizing a certain society and its culture.

Whereas in most present-day “Western” cities driving out of downtown, first through suburbia and then in the surrounding countryside, is not generally regarded as a dramatic transition, in most ancient and medieval societies and cultures crossing the walls of a city was often characterized as a dramatic passage from an environment of belonging into one of non-belonging. The difference between the two semantic differentials of belonging, minimum in the first case and maximum in the second one, depends on the different ways in which frontiers of belonging are enunciated in the two historical and cultural contexts: in the first case, only bureaucratic signs tell the driver that, for instance, she is out of the city of Turin and is therefore moving into terra incognita; in the second case, massive walls, gates, and inquisitive soldiers mark the passage from the city into the surrounding space.

Nevertheless, narrative texts can play with these differentials. For instance, they can represent a simple drive out of town as a dramatic figure of crossing in order to emphasize the semantic opposition between downtown and suburbia: moving from the latter into the former therefore implies as sharp a transition from an environment of belonging into one of non-belonging as stepping out of a fortified town in medieval times. Vice versa, a semantic differential of belonging can be downplayed by a narrative text that minimizes the experience of crossing the walls of a fortified city and the transition between environments of belonging and

non-belonging that such crossing entails (all sorts of parodies often resort to such narrative strategy).⁶

Figures of crossing can be placed along a continuum not only as regards the sharpness of transition between belonging and non-belonging that they manifest in narrative terms, but also as regards the dialectic between placement and (dis)placement that they reveal through narrative forms. At one end of the continuum, we shall find figures of crossing in which such dialectic reaches maximum levels, that is, figures of crossing in which the physical or conceptual distance between a space of belonging and one of non-belonging is maximum. At the other end, instead, we shall find figures of crossing in which such distance is minimal.

Again, the tension between figures of crossing implying a dramatic experience of distance and those in which such experience is minimal must not be conceived in absolute but in relative terms, i.e., in the frame of the semantic field of belonging characterizing a certain society and its culture. Returning to the example provided above, in pre-modern Catholic towns, the campanile was a fundamental landmark and “soundmark” of belonging: not being able to see it or, even worse, not being able to hear its bells, were both signs of intolerable distance from the environment of belonging that the town and its church provided (Leone 2012a).

In post-modern and post-Catholic societies, instead, much more dramatic forms of displacements are often required in order for citizens to experience the transition between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging. Only after long and costly journeys, for instance, and only upon hearing that the ring of bells has been replaced by the voice of the muezzin, does the present-day post-modern and post-Catholic citizen realize that bells are in fact part of her “soundscape” of belonging.

In this case too, narrative texts can play with the polarities of placement and displacement and with the feelings of distance and belonging that they entail. Post-modern narratives can represent the mere stepping out of one’s room as a sort of exodus, in which the movement across a very short distance entails the experience of a dramatic transition between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging. By contrast, parodies or analogous genres can represent even the Biblical exodus – that is, the (dis)placement per antonomasia of “Western” culture – as a movement in which the long distance covered is not matched

⁶ Italian readers will perhaps remember the parody of crossing the frontiers of Renaissance cities in *Non ci resta che piangere*, the 1985 movie by Roberto Benigni and Massimo Troisi.

by an equally impressive feeling of the transition between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging.

In summary, whereas the first factor measures the sharpness of the transition between belonging and non-belonging that a certain figure of crossing manifests in narrative terms (intensity of transition), the second factor measures how dramatic is the distance between placement and (dis)placement that such figure reveals through narrative forms (extension of distance).

4 The polarities of belonging

The matrix of semiotic possibilities resulting from the combination of these two factors can be visualized through a tensive diagram (figure 1).⁷

Four areas can be singled out in this diagram. They have been lexicalized “sedentary belonging,” “sedentary estrangement,” “nomadic belonging,” and “nomadic estrangement.” As it is always the case in semiotic tensive diagrams, what matters are not the lexicalizations but the combination of semantic features that underlay them.

In the left part of the diagram, we shall find figures of crossing characterized by minimal (dis)placement, that is, by minimal extension of distance. Combined with the factor of belonging (i.e., intensity of transition), such minimal (dis)placement gives rise to two semantic areas: “sedentary belonging” and “sedentary estrangement.” Figures of crossing in both areas are characterized by their manifesting, in narrative terms, transitions between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging that entail minimal distance (of course always in

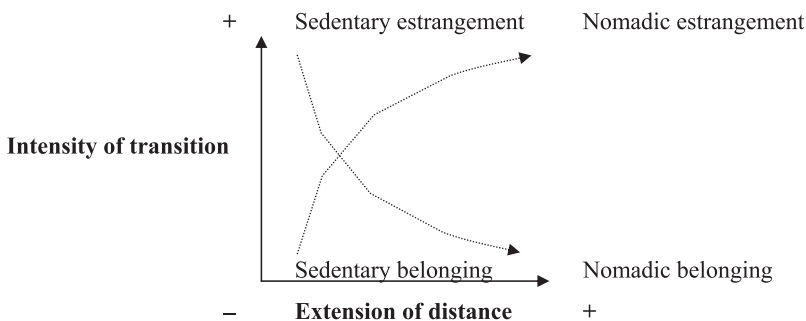


Fig. 1: The tensive diagram of the regimes of belonging

7 For an introduction to tensive semiotics, Fontanille and Zilberberg (1998); Zilberberg (2006).

the frame of a specific society and its culture). However, whereas figures of crossing in the first area (“sedentary belonging”) have minimal effects in terms of revealing the dialectic between placement and (dis)placement and between the environments of belonging and those of non-belonging, figures in the second area (“sedentary estrangement”) combine minimal extension of (dis)placement with maximum awareness of frontiers.

Some examples will clarify the meaning of these first two categories of figures of crossing. The bottom-left area (“sedentary belonging”) contains figures expressing through narrative forms the idea that, when a subject (an individual or a group) moves across a frontier of some sort, it does not experience either the distance of (dis)placement or the intensity of transition between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging. Routines are often figures of crossing falling into this category (Leone 2012b). Routines are narrative forms conveying the idea that the frontier between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging, as well as the distance between them, is annihilated.

The transition between wakefulness and sleep, for instance, could be one of the most dramatic experiences in everyday life (Caillois 1956). The passage, through the threshold of falling asleep, from the environment of consciousness into that of unconsciousness might remind one of the most dramatic transition in human existence, that between the realm of relative belonging, i.e., life, and that of absolute non-belonging, i.e., death. Some people are so terrified by such transition that they more or less unconsciously refuse to go through it. From this point of view, insomnia is nothing but the refusal to experience the passage into the non-belonging of unconsciousness and death.

On the contrary, most people “domesticate” this transition through routines: acts and words performed day after day before sleeping, from placing a glass of water beside the bed to exchanging some ritual words with one’s spouse, construct a quotidian narrative in which the frontier between wakefulness-life and sleep-death, as well as the distance between these two realms, is annihilated.

Analogously, the top-left area (“sedentary estrangement”) contains figures of crossing that express through narrative forms the idea that, when a subject (be it an individual or a group) moves across a frontier of some sort, it does not experience the distance of (dis)placement between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging, but nevertheless feels the intensity of the transition between them. As it will be analyzed in-depth in a specific section, when routines fail in providing the narrative forms for the domestication of the experience of non-belonging, they give rise to figures of crossing that often fall into the category of “sedentary estrangement.”

For instance, the short transition between one’s home and the street might also be experienced, like the passage between wakefulness and sleep, as a dra-

matic transition from an environment of belonging into one of non-belonging, from the realm of secure life and certainty into that of uncertainty and potential death. Through narrative mechanisms that will be investigated later, in this case too, routines usually protect individuals from the awareness of such passage. Repetition of acts and words “on the threshold,” from checking that lights are switched off to looking at oneself in the mirror, annihilate the feeling of the intensity of this transition.

However, when the “anesthetic” power of such routines fails (Leone 2003), awareness of the existence of a sharp frontier emerges in spite of the modesty of the distance involved. For some people, stepping out of their home’s front door can become as unbearable as falling asleep is for some other people. From this point of view, agoraphobia manifests in spatial terms that which insomnia reveals in temporal terms: the failure of routines in working as narrative figures of crossing able to “mask” the existence of a frontier between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging.

In the right part of the semiotic tensive diagram we shall find two categories of figures of crossing, both characterized by high levels of (dis)placement, that is, (relative) high levels in the extension of distance implied by the movement across a frontier. However, these categories differ as regards the level of intensity of transition. The bottom-right area, in particular, categorizes figures of crossing denominated “nomadic belonging.” Narrative patterns in this area are semantically opposite to those contained in the area called “sedentary estrangement.” In this case, despite the relevance of the extension of distance entailed by a movement across a frontier between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging, narrative patterns manage to narcotize the feeling of such passage. Texts representing the cosmopolite attitude of those who believe that “the world is their shell,” that they are “citizens of the world,” that “the world has no frontiers and no nationalities,” and that, therefore, “they belong everywhere,” perfectly exemplify figures of crossing categorized in the area of “nomadic estrangement.”⁸ In this area, the experience of frontiers disappears and only that of movement remains.

Such category of figures of crossing manifests through narrative forms not only the post-modern mentality of cosmopolites but also the pre-modern attitude of nomads. However, as it will be analyzed more in-depth later, nomadic texts do not simply convey the idea of the disappearance of frontiers, but rather the

8 The concept of “cosmopolitanism” has been investigated by several scholars. Among the most recent contributions, Beck (2004); Appiah (2006); Sassen (2007); Benhabib (2008); Delanty (2009); Harvey (2009); Holton (2009); Kendall et al. (2009); Cabrera (2010); Chung and Nootens (2010); Forte (2010); Mau (2010); Delanty and Inglis (2011).

concept that the sedentary pattern of frontiers is replaced by a nomadic one in which the intensity of transition across most frontiers is downsized and at times annihilated.⁹

The top-right area of the semiotic tensive diagram contains figures of crossing that reveal, through narrative forms, a phenomenology of frontiers that is semantically opposite to that denominated “sedentary belonging.” In this area, called “nomadic estrangement,” we shall find figures of crossing characterized by both high intensity of transition and high extension of distance. Representations of exile of all sorts are typical of this area.¹⁰ More in general, all those “epic” figures of crossing in which the great distance covered to move from an environment of belonging into one of non-belonging is accompanied by a dramatic experience of the frontier between them fall into this category.

5 Paths between regimes of belonging

The semiotic tensive diagram constructed and described above must be considered not only as static visual representation of different categories of figures of crossing but also as dynamic visualization of them. The diagram reveals the possibility of several semantic paths between the four identified categories of crossing. Four of them are particularly interesting as they represent transformations between opposite semantic polarities. The first two are represented in the semiotic tensive diagram of figure 2.

The first, denominated “path of exile/invasion,” underlies those textual narratives in which the experience of a subject (be it individual or collective) is manifested by increasingly replacing figures of sedentary belonging with those of nomadic estrangement. Given the logic underlying the diagram above, the phenomenological implications of such replacement should now be clear: figures of crossing characterized by minimum intensity of transition and extension of distance are more and more substituted by figures of crossing entailing maximum intensity of transition and extension of distance. The path of exile therefore summarizes the semantic features of those narrative patterns that evoke a dramatic passage between two “regimes of belonging,” one in which the experience of

⁹ The literature on nomadism is copious. Among the most recent scholarly contributions, cf. Scholz (1995); Attali (2003); Leder and Streck (2005); Callari Galli (2007); Ó hAodha (2007); Barnard and Wendrich (2008); Nascimento (2008).

¹⁰ Cf. Ouditt (2002); Allatson and McCormack (2008); Carrera (2010); Genova and Peutz (2010).

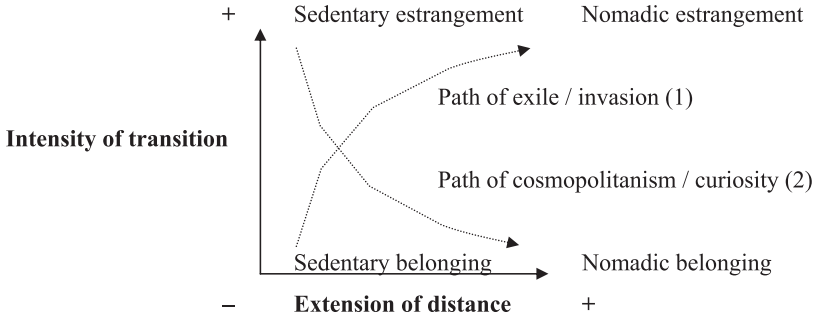


Fig. 2: The tensive diagram of the paths of belonging, part 1

frontiers is downplayed as regards both its intensity and its extension, and one in which such experience is magnified.

All narratives of exile, migration, and uprooting can be interpreted, for instance, as manifesting, through narrative forms, such semantic path. The path of exile/invasion underlies the textual narratives of subjects whose extensive displacement through (physical or conceptual, “real” or virtual) space coincides with an intense experience of non-belonging, of crossing the frontiers between an environment of belonging and one of non-belonging (Leone 2010c).

However, this semantic path as well as the following ones underlie not only texts in which the transition between different regimes of belonging is represented from the point of view of the dynamic subject, that is, the one (an individual or a group) that moves through space and crosses frontiers, but also from the point of view of the static subject, that is, the one that, rooted in an environment of belonging, sees its frontiers crossed by someone or something coming from an elsewhere. Transitions between regimes of belonging that embody a semantic path of exile from the dynamic subject’s perspective, manifest a semantic path of invasion from the static subject’s point of view.

As it will be considered more in-depth later, in this first semantic path, the static subject and the dynamic one are also the anti-subject of each other: the former fears the latter’s exile will result in her own invasion and therefore exile, and in the disruption of her own regime of sedentary belonging (Leone 2010b). The dynamic subject, on the contrary, might see her own regime of nomadic estrangement as a consequence of the static subject’s antagonistic attachment to her own regime of sedentary belonging. In other words, just as the crossing of the frontier by the dynamic subject in exile suddenly makes it dramatically visible to the static subject, the entrenchment by which the static subject protects such frontier from the “invasion” of the dynamic subject makes it more visible to the latter. Narratives of belonging are nothing but the textual manifestation of the

dialectic between static and dynamic subject, which, in turn, is nothing but an anthropomorphic manifestation of the battle of semantic regimes of belonging they impersonate.

The second path, denominated “path of cosmopolitanism/curiosity,” underlies those textual narratives in which the experience of a subject (be it individual or collective) is manifested by increasingly replacing figures of sedentary estrangement with those of nomadic belonging. From the phenomenological point of view, such replacement implies the gradual substitution of the figures of crossing characterized by maximum intensity of transition and minimum extension of distance by those entailing maximum extension of distance and minimum intensity of transition. The path of cosmopolitanism/curiosity, therefore, summarizes the semantic features of those narrative patterns that evoke a dramatic passage between two “regimes of belonging”: one in which the experience of frontiers is downplayed in extension and magnified in intensity, and one in which the experience is magnified in extension and downplayed in intensity. For instance, narratives in which a subject “afraid of the world” somehow finds the strength to overtake a journey and discovers that the world can become “her shell,” may be interpreted as manifesting, through narrative form, such semantic path.

Similarly to the first semantic path, that of cosmopolitanism also underlies not only narratives from the point of view of the dynamic subject (the one who crosses frontiers) but also from the point of view of the static subject (the one who sees frontiers being crossed by the dynamic subject). In this semantic path (which we shall call “the semantic path of curiosity”) a static subject (be it an individual or a group) moves from being puzzled or even terrified by differences coming from an elsewhere into being neutral or even curious and enthusiastic about them. It is the typical semantic path of those who, initially bewildered by difference coming from an elsewhere, progressively see it turning into a constitutive element of their “here,” their environment of belonging.

Indeed, the semantic path going from sedentary estrangement to nomadic belonging means not only crossing the frontiers of the world without feeling it, but also letting other subjects do the same without us feeling it. In other words, “curious” texts express the idea that when I, the static subject, come across someone or something coming from a distant elsewhere, I do not interpret this encounter as resulting from crossing the frontier between her/his/its environment of belonging and mine (that is, her/his/its environment of non-belonging), but as resulting from moving across a common environment of belonging in which the intensity of the transition of frontiers is constantly downplayed (Leone 2006b).

Whereas in “cosmopolitan narratives,” the intensity of transition is systematically diminished as the dynamic subject crosses the frontiers of the world, in “curious narratives,” the intensity of transition is systematically diminished as

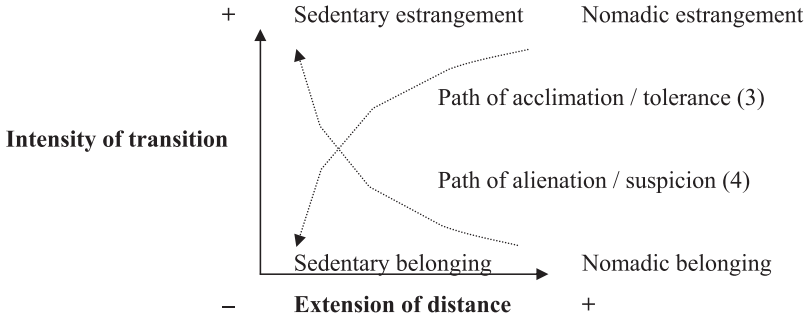


Fig. 3: The tensive diagram of the paths of belonging, part 2

the static subject sees the dynamic one crossing the frontiers of the world. The result of this systematic downplaying of the intensity of transition implied by the crossing of frontiers is that the static subject and the dynamic one can no longer be the anti-subject of each other as it was in narratives of exile and invasion. On the contrary, in this case, the phenomenological and semiotic positions of the host and the guest blur to the point that the cosmopolitanism of the dynamic subject feeds the curiosity of the static one and vice versa.

The third and the fourth “path of belonging” are visually represented in the diagram of figure 3.

The third path, denominated “path of acclimation/tolerance,” underlies those textual narratives in which the experience of a subject (be it individual or collective) is manifested by increasingly replacing figures of nomadic estrangement with those of sedentary belonging. From the phenomenological point of view, such replacement implies the gradual substitution of the figures of crossing characterized by maximum intensity of transition and extension of distance by those entailing minimum extension of distance and intensity of transition. The path of acclimation/tolerance, therefore, summarizes the semantic features of those narrative patterns that evoke a dramatic passage between two “regimes of belonging”: one in which the experience of frontiers is magnified as regards both its extension and intensity, and one in which, on the contrary, such experience is downplayed as regards both its extension and intensity.

This semantic path underlies, for instance, narratives of “cultural integration” in which a dynamic subject progressively becomes the static subject of a new environment of belonging. The passage between the experiences of frontiers of first- and second-generation migrants is frequently manifested through narrative texts characterized by a semantic path of acclimation: the intensity of transition and the extension of distance entailed by the arrival and the presence of first-generation migrants in a new environment of belonging is gradually

downsized by the permanence of second-generation migrants in the same environment. For second-generation migrants, that same environment becomes their environment of belonging to the extent that they can sometimes act as “static subject” vis-à-vis new first-generation migrants and therefore consider them as “invaders” (according to the logic visualized by the first tensive diagram).

That which from the dynamic subject’s perspective is the semantic path of acclimation, from the point of view of the static subject is the semantic path of tolerance: in narrative patterns underlain by such path, insiders gradually come to see outsiders as belonging to their own environment and therefore to obliterate the frontier between “us” and “them.” As in the semantic path of cosmopolitanism/curiosity, here too, the relation between the dynamic subject and the static one is non-antagonistic, since in both cases the intensity of transition is downplayed.

However, the semantic path of cosmopolitanism/curiosity differs from that of acclimation/tolerance as regards the extension of distance: although in cosmopolitanism and curiosity the static subject and the dynamic one consider each other as belonging to the same environment, they do not obliterate the distance between them. In other words, in cosmopolitanism/curiosity, the outsider belongs as an outsider and not as an insider because the difference between in and out is blurred.

In acclimation and tolerance, on the contrary, the static subject and the dynamic one consider each other as belonging to the same environment exactly because they obliterate the distance between them. In other words, in acclimation/tolerance, the outsider belongs only insofar as she turns into an insider; she does not belong as an outsider because the difference between in and out is maintained.

Finally, the fourth path, denominated “path of alienation/suspicion,” underlies those textual narratives in which the experience of a subject (be it individual or collective) is manifested by increasingly replacing figures of nomadic belonging with those of sedentary estrangement. From the phenomenological point of view, such replacement implies the gradual substitution of the figures of crossing characterized by minimum intensity of transition and maximum extension of distance by those entailing maximum intensity of transition and minimum extension of distance. The path of alienation/suspicion, therefore, summarizes the semantic features of those narrative patterns that evoke a dramatic passage between two “regimes of belonging”: one in which the experience of frontiers is magnified in extension but downplayed in intensity, and one in which such experience is downplayed in extension and magnified in intensity.

The experience of the subject who “no longer recognizes the society in which she lives” is, for instance, a typical narrative embodiment of the path of alien-

ation. In this case, the subject does not have to move into distant (physical or conceptual, “real” or virtual) spaces in order to feel that she does not belong; instead, such feeling of non-belonging surprises the subject while she is at home, surrounded by her own environment, insider among insiders.

That which from the dynamic subject’s point of view is the semantic path of alienation, from the perspective of the static subject is the semantic path of suspicion. However, as in the semantic path of cosmopolitanism/curiosity the role of the dynamic subject and that of the static one blur due to the fact that each feeds the semantic position of the other, so do the same roles blur in the semantic path of alienation/suspicion: each subject suspects that other subjects in the same environment do not actually belong, but in doing so they also feed each other’s own feeling of non-belonging. Just as in the semantic path of cosmopolitanism/curiosity each perceives the other as an outsider but they all share the same environment of belonging, in the semantic path of alienation/suspicion each perceives the other as an insider but nobody shares the same environment of belonging (and, therefore, they all share the same environment of non-belonging). For instance, if the semantic path of cosmopolitanism/curiosity is typical of those “migrant societies” in which social cohesion results from finding common ground in differences, the semantic path of alienation/suspicion is typical of those “national societies” in which social disintegration results from finding differences in common grounds.

As in the semantic path of exile/invasion, here too, the relation between the dynamic subject and the static one is antagonistic since in both cases the intensity of transition is magnified. However, the semantic path of exile/invasion differs from that of alienation/suspicion as regards the extension of distance: in the first case, insiders feel that their environment of belonging is threatened by outsiders coming from a distant elsewhere that cross its frontier. In the second case, on the contrary, insiders feel that their environment of belonging is threatened by other insiders.

6 Rhetorics of belonging

The tensive diagrams described above help visualize not only a plurality of semantic paths but also a multitude of dynamic operations. In other words, the diagrams provide schematizations of the ways in which different kinds of discourse can promote such or such transition between regimes of belonging by proposing a more or less rapid replacement of figures of crossing.

A rhetoric strategy of cosmopolitanism and curiosity will consist in producing discourses that gradually substitute figures of crossing characterized by

maximum intensity of transition and minimum extension of distance with figures of crossing characterized by minimum intensity of transition and maximum extension of distance. Such replacement will result in a passage from alienation and suspicion to cosmopolitanism and curiosity.

According to this rhetoric strategy, individuals in a group will be more and more encouraged to consider that other individuals in the same group are each endowed with peculiar characteristics, which make them all different from each other in terms of, for example, ethnic background, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, religious persuasion, etc. Through rhetoric strategies of cosmopolitanism and curiosity, the members of a certain environment of belonging will learn to perceive differences between themselves and other individuals in the same environment, and thus stop perceiving this environment as a monochromatic block and start detecting nuances in it. At the same time, through rhetoric strategies of cosmopolitanism and curiosity, the members of a certain environment of belonging will learn to react to such internal variety not with suspicion but with curiosity, not with antagonistic aggressiveness but with cooperative hospitality.

Multicultural nations such as Australia and Canada annually invest important funds in the elaboration and development of programs meant to encourage citizens' awareness and appreciation of the socio-cultural variety of the population. The success of such programs strictly depends on the extent to which they manage to create persuasive figures of cosmopolitanism and curiosity capable of replacing those of alienation and suspicion. Needless to say, these costly programs are at times less effective than fictional texts such as novels, movies, songs, etc. that bring about the same inversion of regime of belonging through the power of their poetical discourse (Leone 2010b, in press a). Thanks to these fictional texts, individuals in a group sometimes begin to believe that every other individual in the same group is in fact a source of endless surprise to be cherished with enthusiasm. The ultimate result of successful rhetoric strategies of cosmopolitanism and curiosity is *multicultural trust*.

On the other hand, an opposite rhetoric strategy of alienation and suspicion will consist in producing discourses that more or less gradually substitute figures of crossing characterized by minimum intensity of transition and maximum extension of distance with figures of crossing characterized by maximum intensity of transition and minimum extension of distance. Such replacement will result in a passage from cosmopolitanism and curiosity to alienation and suspicion.

For instance, according to this rhetoric strategy, individuals in a group will be more and more encouraged to consider that other individuals in the same group are each endowed with the exact same essential characteristics, which make their ethnic background, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, religious persua-

sion, etc. totally irrelevant. Through rhetoric strategies of alienation and suspicion, the members of a certain environment of belonging will learn to obliterate differences between themselves and other individuals in the same environment. They will stop detecting nuances in this environment and will start perceiving it as a monochromatic block. At the same time, through rhetoric strategies of alienation and suspicion, the members of a certain environment of belonging will learn to react to such absence of internal variety with suspicion and antagonistic aggressiveness.

Anthropological theories that depict human beings as all prone to the same socio-economic egoism usually spend important symbolical resources in the elaboration and development of ideas meant to encourage citizens to believe that they should all be wary of the incredible monotony of motivations behind other people's behaviors: greed, greed, and more greed. The success of such ideas strictly depends on the extent to which they manage to create persuasive figures of alienation and suspicion capable of replacing those of cosmopolitanism and curiosity. Needless to say, at times these anthropological theories are less effective than, for instance, economic and political propaganda that brings about the same inversion of regime of belonging through the force of the media discourse. Thanks to these media, individuals in a group sometimes begin to believe that every other individual's behaviors in the same group confirm their suspicion. The ultimate result of successful rhetoric strategies of alienation and suspicion is *mono-cultural mistrust*.

A third rhetoric strategy of acclimation and tolerance will consist in producing discourses that more or less gradually substitute figures of crossing characterized by maximum intensity of transition and extension of distance with figures of crossing characterized by minimum intensity of transition and extension of distance. Such replacement will result in a passage from exile and invasion to acclimation and tolerance.

For instance, according to this rhetoric strategy too, individuals in a group will be more and more encouraged to consider that other individuals in the same group are each endowed with the same exact essential characteristics, which make their ethnic background, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, religious persuasion, etc. totally irrelevant. Through rhetoric strategies of acclimation and tolerance, the members of a certain environment of belonging will also learn to obliterate differences between themselves and other individuals in the same environment. They will stop detecting nuances in this environment and start perceiving it as a monochromatic block. At the same time, differently from the rhetoric strategies of alienation and suspicion, those of acclimation and tolerance encourage the members of a certain environment of belonging to trust and cooperative behaviors.

Social policies of assimilation and integration usually spend important symbolical resources in the elaboration and development of ideas meant to encourage citizens to believe in overcoming their socio-cultural peculiarities and emphasizing their common ground. The success of such ideas strictly depends on the extent to which they manage to create persuasive figures of acclimation and tolerance capable of replacing those of exile and invasion. Needless to say, at times these social policies are less effective than demographic processes that bring about the same inversion of regime of belonging through the power of numbers: exceptional socio-cultural characteristics become normal as a consequence of the increase in their statistic relevance. Thanks to these demographic processes, individuals in a group sometimes begin to believe that every other individual in the same group shares the same background, and react to this conviction with the attitude according to which “after all, we are all the same.” The ultimate result of the successful rhetoric strategies of acclimation and tolerance is *mono-cultural trust*.

Finally, a fourth rhetoric strategy of exile and invasion will consist in producing discourses that more or less gradually substitute figures of crossing characterized by minimum intensity of transition and extension of distance with figures of crossing characterized by maximum intensity of transition and extension of distance. Such replacement will result in a passage from acclimation and tolerance to exile and invasion.

According to this rhetoric strategy, individuals in a group will be more and more encouraged to consider that other individuals in the same group are each endowed with peculiar characteristics, which make them all different from each other in terms of, for example, ethnic background, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, religious persuasion, etc. Through rhetoric strategies of exile and invasion, members of a certain environment of belonging will learn to perceive differences between themselves and other individuals in the same environment, and thus stop perceiving this environment as a monochromatic block and start detecting nuances in it. At the same time, through rhetoric strategies of exile and invasion, members of a certain environment of belonging will learn to react to such internal variety not with curiosity but with suspicion, not with cooperative hospitality but with antagonistic aggressiveness (Leone 2009b).

Xenophobic political leaders usually invest important symbolical resources in the elaboration and development of ideas meant to encourage citizens to believe they should all be wary and fearful of the socio-cultural variety of the population. Similarities have to be trusted and differences feared. The success of such leaders depends strictly on the extent to which they manage to create persuasive figures of exile and invasion capable of replacing those of acclimation and tolerance. Needless to say, at times ideologies of this kind are less effective than, for

instance, television programs that bring about the same inversion of regime of belonging through the power of their media discourse. Thanks to these media texts, individuals in a group sometimes begin to believe that every other individual in the same group is in fact a source of endless surprise to be shunned with terror. The ultimate result of successful rhetoric strategies of exile and alienation is *multicultural mistrust*.

7 Conclusion: The axiology of belonging

Although the typology of semantic paths and rhetoric strategies of belonging proposed above has been constructed from a strictly phenomenological and semiotic perspective and with no particular ideological intentions, it nevertheless clearly entails an axiology. Semantic paths and rhetoric strategies moving from social mistrust to social trust are meant to be perceived as more desirable than those moving in the opposite direction. After all, it is difficult to support the idea that societies in which social mistrust is more common than social trust are more desirable, because the very nature of a society is indeed based on cooperation.

As regards the movement from semantic paths and rhetoric strategies of monocultural trust to those of multicultural trust, its axiology is more ambiguous. Some might claim that a society in which people are mutually aware and appreciative of each other's socio-cultural peculiarities, reacting to them with curiosity, trust, and cooperation is in fact nothing but a utopian society, which will never become a reality. They might claim that trust and cooperation in societies do not stem from the curious perception of differences but from the comfortable awareness of similarities. All the debate about integration versus multicultural policies might be reformulated as a debate about rhetoric strategies of acclimation and tolerance versus strategies of cosmopolitanism and curiosity.

Nevertheless, it may also be claimed that societies in which subjects (be they individual or groups) can fit in a social environment of belonging without renouncing their identity are more desirable than societies in which outsiders can fit only if they start behaving like insiders. Indeed, if one admits the assumption that societies, just like languages, are characterized by bottomless capacity of inner differentiation, one should also admit societies' capability to constantly recreate those differences between insiders and outsiders that are temporarily smoothed out through rhetoric strategies of acclimation and tolerance (Leone 2009c). After all, it is difficult to support the idea that societies in which cultural variety is not a hindrance but an instrument of social trust and cooperation are less desirable, because the very nature of a society entails a constant production and reproduction of cultural differences.

However, before jumping to conclusions as what regime of belonging is most desirable for present-day and future societies, the empty diagrams depicted above should be filled with concrete case-studies. In subsequent articles some of the most common rhetoric strategies of belonging of modern and contemporary societies will be described and analyzed in-depth.¹¹

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¹¹ Cf., for instance, Leone (in press b).

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