

Towards a Complex Model of Interpretation of Recognition

Towards a Complex Model of Interpretation of Recognition:

The Sense of Belonging

By

Isabella Corvino

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Towards a Complex Model of Interpretation of Recognition:
The Sense of Belonging

By Isabella Corvino

This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2023 by Isabella Corvino

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-0480-8

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0480-6

Nothing human is alien to me.

—Terence

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One.....	14
Self and Identity	
De-sideribus	14
Self and identity, dynamic realities of a body.....	19
The self	23
The desire for stability	27
Identities	31
The eternal questions	36
Chapter Two	43
Otherness	
Together or not.....	43
Otherness	45
Why migration	53
The monologue of identity and attempts at integration.....	58
Prejudice and racism	64
Chapter Three	78
Recognition	
Alice's mirror, recognition	78
Recognizing myself and the other: identity and skills	88
The price of recognition.....	94
Chapter Four.....	102
Citizenship	
Razor's blade.....	102
Citizenship, <i>Civilitas</i>	105
Citizenship, transmission models for the recognition of equal rights .	111
Citizens on the move.....	115
Citizenship and its enlargement	119

Chapter Five	124
Belonging	
The imperfect ideal	124
Belonging.....	129
Belonging and citizenship.....	134
Mobile boundaries	139
Concluding Remarks: Living Together	146
Bibliography	152

INTRODUCTION

This book is the result of years of reflection and constant confrontation with reality in the field. Recognition is a fascinating, immense subject, and trying to understand the mechanisms that animate it is no small matter. I tried to immerse myself in this subject by observing it in the practice of relations between different groups, but I soon realised that in order to clarify it, I would have to look beyond the original question. The confrontation with oneself and with the other is usually carried out as a declination of a paradigm that makes it possible. The analysis of social action and the comparison with its practical applications brought out problems and phenomena that needed a deepening of the question relating to the relationship as a generative environment of identities, diversity and otherness. It was clear to me that in the conception of relational processing at the micro level, up to the macro level with the design of policies for cohesion and social integration, there were a series of limits and weaknesses caused by the lack of consideration in the theoretical apparatus of reference for the creation devices of the self as well as that one relating to the perception of others that can invalidate the possibility of recognition.

Political, as well as philosophical, reflections on the topic are often value-oriented and divided in their support or opposition to social solidarity and intercultural relations – where “intercultural” is understood to mean the case of relations between cultures and sub-cultures in the same society, which is internally very divided, as is the case in western communities. Sociological reflection has the advantage of being able to take in contributions from a wide range of disciplines to find the keys to understand the issues underlying the social action to make them explicit, so that the new awareness itself creates the conditions for social change. In light of my work, the themes dealt with in this volume are the following: the self and identity, otherness, recognition, citizenship and belonging. These issues are deeply interconnected and describe a complex dynamic that unfolds in different fields, offering – when coordinated – heuristic paths that are more relevant than if considered in their usual disciplinary

separateness. Even though each theme has a very long history, the mechanisms behind them are largely ignored and almost never put into a system. Each theme influences the other, and isolating one of them undermines a broader understanding. For this reason, I have opted for a presentation and discussion as free as possible from the consolidated school distinctions, which will make it easier to jump over the features consonant with my discourse.

It is not surprising that knowledge needs new practices to recompose its elements: modernity has asserted itself under the sign of an autonomous subject, marvellously isolated in its independence. In the same way, the knowledge it expresses has moved towards what Morin calls “hyper-specialisation,” characterised by quantitatively precise sectoral knowledge which is incapable of relating to other knowledge in addressing the complex and global issues that constitute the crucial challenges of the twentieth century (Beck 2011).

Although the idea of social change for the improvement of everyone’s life has been a recurring concern throughout history, it becomes more and more urgent as inequalities increase. Unfortunately, the hyper-specialised knowledge does not make it easier to address an equal social change. We are faced with a systemic crisis that requires us to reconsider the approaches to knowledge and the premises of living together. We need to rework the ideas relating to the good, justice and freedom as sometimes they hide the need to disavow that which does not fully reflect us, and deny part of the very premises of the modern rhetoric:

In the basic conception that runs through Simmel’s pages, individual freedom increases with the enlargement of the social area of reference. Deprived of freedom is the individual who shares his entire biographical life with the destiny of the social group to which he belongs, while freedom is above all the loss of bonds of identification, the loss of relationships of coincidence. (Stagni in Martinelli and Giudicini 1993, 272)¹

The retreat from the ideals of cosmopolitan openness and hospitality follows the devaluation of primary bonds. The pervasive economism of

¹ All non-English text has been translated by the author.

the last phase of modernity revived ancient anxieties, the only answer to which has been the constant search for a scapegoat, each time different but always identified in someone “different from us.” We have regressed to archaic societies, engaged in apotropaic rites invoking the “blessing of the equal” as a rite of protection from every misfortune. We can no longer conceive the idea that it is impossible to evolve without external stimuli and without accidents, as happened with fire, Newton’s apple, the discovery of the New Indies, etc. These were accidents that opened up new dimensions of possibilities, but they are hardly remembered today. The discourse about the “different one” has come to polarise negative meanings after an imprudent simplification of most of the speeches that have sung its praises, passing from wonder, curiosity and amazement, and lately transformed in fear of the other and the consequences of their coming.

In order to live together, it is necessary to know how to limit one’s own freedom, recognising the other’s right to express themselves, accepting the gift of the other’s presence, which can be a cure or a companionship in a well-managed process. Recognising the other on a *human, moral and normative* level means in the first instance dealing with self-knowledge, not in a static way but in motion, in evolution, in other possible configurations. Perceiving oneself as *embodied difference* can be the undeniable proof of the relativity of one’s own culture and identity; doing so, the other would be normalised in their contradictory role: simultaneously a promise and a threat. Living with the other has always been a problematic question and has therefore been much discussed; one can pretend or believe to know oneself, but when one finds oneself in a relationship with the other, everything tends to become more tiring. Resistance and reluctance to the encounter easily emerge. Self and Other are two complex and complementary “cosmos”; they are different but feed off each other, and are necessary for their own construction and understanding. They can cooperate or come into conflict, and it is not certain that the latter is a less fruitful act than the former for the development of coexistence and recognition strategies. The question can be tackled at different levels. It can imply the addition of the most disparate variables, but in the end the difference between you and me, us

and you, is the pivotal theme that has articulated the distinction and construction of the paths that have animated history.

In order to highlight the extent to which these themes are chained together, the first chapter will begin with an examination of the concepts of self and identity, which are often mistakenly understood as synonymous and conceived as the exclusive elaboration of the individual. These concepts are instead the result of continuous confrontation with the other and therefore are changing. The self is a construct that can be related to the characteristics, beliefs, values and feelings of an individual, while identity refers to characteristics that are rationally elaborated, also in a relational key, and represents an attempt on the part of the subject to give themselves coherence and meaning. Identity stands between oneself and others as if it were a screen that allows us to read the behaviour of others and be understood. It is a prism encompassing various dimensions: personal, social, collective and cultural. According to Sciolla:

Identity has above all a locative dimension in the sense that through it the individual places himself within a (symbolic) field or defines the field in which he places himself. In other words, the subject assumes a system of relevance, defines the situation in which he or she finds him or herself and draws boundaries that delimit the territories of the self. Identity also has a selective dimension in the sense that the subject, once he has defined his boundaries and assumed a system of relevance, is able to order his preferences, to choose some or defer others. Finally, identity has an integrative dimension in the sense that through it the individual has an interpretative framework that links past, present and future experiences in the unity of a biography. (Sciolla 1983, 22)

We could define identity as the idea that an individual has of themselves at a singular level and in society; it is the set of characteristics that distinguish us and make us different from the other. Identity is a border concept between the individual and society, which are not separate spheres but are contiguous and in a continuous dialectical relationship. Through this filter, one can choose whom to keep with oneself and whom, on the other hand, to remove, understanding to which community one belongs or wants to belong. The other that challenges individual boundaries, insofar as they are different, will propose different systems of

relevance, preferences and interpretative frameworks, calling into question certainties and acquired ways of doing things, which are often taken for granted; it is also thanks to their diversity that profiles of the self and identity emerge. As the differences between subjects or groups grow, it becomes necessary to try to understand how to regulate relations: to do so, it would be necessary to exercise that capacity of the individual already discussed by Mead: to become an object to oneself, the reflective capacity of which would imply the possibility of identifying oneself with the generalised other in order to have a vision and perception of oneself. In a game of mirrors in which the self is both subject and object of the experiences of others, there is the possibility of not excluding the acts of others as impossible, unreasonable or absurd. The relationships we are willing to enter into are not infinite; each of us can relate the self to a certain kind of *alter* – other, while maintaining a “safe distance” from the radical Other².

The second chapter is focused on the topic of otherness. The other is often perceived as a danger to personal and collective identity, their diversity representing the possibility that values, relationships and norms may be conceived in a different way. The confrontation with the unknown brings with it the fear of being challenged, threatening the solidity of the ego (D’Andrea et al. 2004). As the differences increase, the fear grows, the radical Other (the one who carries within themselves several levels of negative diversity: physical, cultural, etc.) subverts every single certainty of the self, threatens its security and arouses horror and bears the mark of all unacceptable matters. It would be desirable to remove the other from one’s own sight and from society. One’s identity is offended by the presence of the radical Other to whom one does not want to offer any kind of role. In every society, there has always been a group or individuals with these characteristics, and an unreasonable, blind hatred has been unleashed on them. While underlining the uniqueness of the Holocaust, Bauman

² In the text “other” is written in lower case, as it is a normal and natural state, always present at different degrees among people. Only in the case of “radical Other” it will be capitalized, to refer to a situation in which its radicality causes differences to be perceived in such a way as to make relation impossible. It is not a question of quantity but how these differences are felt as an attack on one’s own identity.

acknowledges the painful spread of these practices and their close connection with modernity:

Another way – apparently pointing in an opposite direction, yet leading in practice to the same destination – is to present the Holocaust as an extreme case of a wide and familiar category of social phenomena; a category surely loathsome and repellent, yet one we can (and must) live with. We must live with it because of its resilience and ubiquity, but above all because modern society has been all along, is and will remain, an organization designed to roll it back, and perhaps even to stamp it out altogether. Thus the Holocaust is classified as another item (however prominent) in a wide class that embraces many “similar” cases of conflict, or prejudice, or aggression. (Bauman 1989, 3)

The most recent radical Other is the migrant. They are not the same as the foreigner or the expat, they are a person who contains within themselves the double otherness (Ambrosini 2011) of being a migrant and being poor. The other suffers an attack on their diversity to reduce it and break it down. Usually, for migrants, the price to be paid for joining a new group will be the rejection of parts of cultural identity. Living together is imagined as the affirmation of autochthonous characteristics: this desire gives rise to prejudice and racism – from the conception of one’s own identity as an absolute standard – as good, which relegates what is different to the sphere of what is not good. Differentiation becomes discrimination, and this distinction is related to the ratio of distribution of power and resources, while differences are loaded with negative meaning, creating distance and arousing barriers.

The theme of the third chapter is recognition, the relational nexus that is fundamental for a deep and authentic connection between subjects. This device tends to be applied to those who maintain a certain degree of similarity with respect to one’s own identity, so as to be a mechanism of self-recognition. The need to be recognised is a powerful spring; according to Honneth (1996), it is necessary to build personal identity. Its denial is perceived as humiliation and rejection, a wound to self-esteem and a possible cause of exclusion. Misrecognition can generate the struggle for the affirmation of one’s own subjectivity that demands justice. In history, the struggles for civil rights, for recognition, have often been the translation

of antagonisms into economic negotiations and redistribution of wealth and opportunities – a fundamental but not decisive issue. The production of identities linked to the struggle for work, the style of consumption and for citizenship has certainly been a fundamental and unifying element of society, but the political project – partly disconnected from the social one – was perhaps too strongly connected to the theme of the protection of groups that needed to be stabilised and better received by virtue of their “usefulness” and “convenience.” The emptying of the meaning of the person as such has culminated in the development of liberalism, which recognises the market as the main regulatory space for social and relational issues. The unifying element is not a social or political project, but an economic one. Self-realisation translates into the realisation of human capital, relationships into relational capital, and the status and role of a person increasingly overlaps with their economic weight.

The fourth chapter aims to address the concept of citizenship as a catalyst for the components of identity, otherness and recognition in the construction of a normative order founding the rights of the individual. This theme is particularly thorny to deal with nowadays, as we live in a globalised world in which the nation-state is experiencing an ongoing crisis of meaning. Owning a citizenship implies the creation of a plural identity, the possibility of being a member of a group, the recognition of certain rights. There have always been limits to the naturalisation of residents, linked to the length of stay in a place, the possibility of keeping a job or the emotional or blood bond with members of that society, to name a few. Citizenship regulates the relationship between the subject, the political system and other subjects. This form of belonging legitimises one’s presence and gives value to one’s actions and political participation in the creation of the country’s future. This is “a good to be distributed and a condition of distribution, a right in itself and a requirement for access to rights” (Baggio 2013, 14). Citizenship, which is crucial for regulating life in common, is based on the union of many and appeals to a commonality of characteristics, becoming a principle of inclusion or exclusion. The concept of citizenship is stressed between instances of social control – tending towards the homogenisation of the population and instances of emancipation in support of equality and freedom – of every single individual in their uniqueness. Immigration lays bare the concept of state

and citizenship regarding the management of otherness, and it calls for the explication of recognisable cultural models and the scale of undesirable otherness of foreigners.

The last chapter deals with belonging, an ideal link that concludes the discourse, encompassing all the topics previously discussed. This feeling can drive changes, the affirmation of identity, the perception of otherness and the possibility of recognition, and makes citizenship effective by freeing the desire to participate in the construction of one's society. This constraint can be extremely powerful, activating resocialisation paths for individuals who can choose which and where the group that will facilitate the achievement of happiness is. Modernity – with the idea of the autonomous, independent subject, detached from contexts and groups – has emptied the splendid idea of belonging, of meaning, and the possibility of rootedness, even though dynamic (Maffesoli 2017). The freedom celebrated in recent years has become isolation, a dark scenario in which the strongest closure to the other has been loaded with fear: the other and the different have become potential enemies. The concept of belonging, on the other hand, originates from a substratum of trust, solidarity and possible collaboration; it counts for more than the possibility of enjoying rights, of citizenship. Belonging is the cement between subjects, so strong as to create a shield against the sense of fragility caused by the constant becoming of the world. When belonging is not radicalised, it is multidimensional, multiform and contradictory. Just like the self and identity, belonging can conceive multiple expressions of being for a common root and suggests a common direction for a shared path. Belonging is that part of identity that can be chosen and with which one can confront oneself in order to realise the project of the self by overcoming otherness in virtue of a common project.

Why the Theme of Migration

Using migration as a theme to test the theory seemed to be a good expedient as the otherness that characterises migrants is illustrative. Migration is a product that produces: it is produced as a result of processes while producing changes that in turn trigger other processes. Migrants are often children of uncertainty and generate uncertainty in the destination

countries: “We know the other by stereotypes, we know him by his role, we renounce the experience of his humanity and our point of reference in him remains limited to his character: we foreclose any relationship with the person” (Mongardini 1983, 32). Voluntary migrations start when one is able to face the tangible and intangible costs of this project, if, to start over, one is willing to invest in new relationships that are able to enhance and strengthen a different part of the self. In the search for satisfaction of these desires and the need for recognition, belonging and participation in the new group, one will be confronted with one’s own individual identity and the construction of a new social identity that is continually problematised by virtue of one’s own diversity. Inequality is a cultural construction, the bogeyman image that isolates individuals, that marginalises them, that empties them of value.

Usually, the first objective of the study of migration is to investigate causes and phenomena linked to human mobility; in sociology it is a subject of recent interest, but in other fields it has been studied for a long time. Reflecting on humankind and its evolution and discoveries has almost always implied a link with movement: the search for unknown lands, resources, aggregation or struggle with groups that lived in free lands; followed by the relationship between groups with identities defined by the places to which they belonged, the states which in some cases had migration laws. Trying to understand why we migrate is a bit like trying to understand why we breathe or walk, yet this movement is sometimes perceived as a “subversive” or “dangerous” act, always to be controlled. The level of individual and group mobility over the centuries has been increasingly regulated and restricted. Nomadic people have been under pressure to settle to conform to the order of rights/duties/welfare that comes with the territory. The departure and eventual admission to a new territory is only the first part of the issue, and the encounter and relations between natives and foreigners are not always easy: regulations, pathways to citizenship acquisition, integration processes, the birth and development of social networks, the fight against exclusion and the defence of human rights are the processes that start upon the arrival of a new resident.

In the sociology of migration, much importance has been given to the direction of movements and the location of individuals: origin, destination, possible returns and new departures were the basic questions that led to

subsequent elaborations on the reasons for movements such as socio-economic analyses and its push and pull factors, supply and demand theories, the construction of migration chains and so on. As is often the case in specialist sociologies, the influence of the paradigm has shown itself most clearly there, in its pros and cons. While on the one hand the categories and frames of reference are usually clear and well established, it is precisely this structuring that risks forcing thoughts along predictable tracks, with outcomes that confirm the first approach, carefully avoiding critical deviations or openings towards more complex perspectives. In the predominance of economism, the calculating and instrumental dimension assumes an importance that in certain contexts appears alarming; the ethical-relational aspect suffers from a problematic eclipse, which transforms the whole dynamic into a question of reciprocal conveniences, advantageously unbalanced in favour of those who exercise the selection of the incoming subjects in their own society and into an exercise of distinction: the types of migrants are named differently depending on whether they are immigrants (coming in); emigrants (going out); transnational migrants (who move across the border); internally displaced persons (who move within the border); returning (at the end of the migratory experience). They are sometimes also delineated by the context of origin: asylum seekers (coming from a country that violates human rights or is in conflict) or environmental migrants (from countries experiencing the consequences of climate changes). The data on the location and possible residence of migrants is very important for defining them, even if the level of “liquidity” of movements has become so high that the level of significance is somewhat lost.

According to the World Migration Report, by the International Organization for Migration, the number of international migrants has continued to grow rapidly in the last fifteen years. Compared to the interest in the geolocation of the subjects and the mechanisms of access to the countries, the attention paid to reception and integration mechanisms towards potential new citizens is considerably lower. Since a large part of the rights have been linked to residence or citizenship – providing resources for people who are willing to “stay” – no reading of the phenomenon addressing the management of coexistence beyond cost-benefit forecasting has emerged as these publications were guided by the

instrumentality that could justify a foreign presence in countries that are increasingly connected and increasingly closed. The twentieth-century migrations caused an initial crack and then the overcoming of the modern concept of the nation-state; unlike other historical periods where it was the states that changed shape and size, now states remain the same while people move, mingling, announcing a future in which the consolidated concepts can only change: “It is not only societies, but also people who are multicultural [...] The eruption of difference represents the sign of entering a new era in which we invent and will invent our identities more and more” (Wieviorka 2002, 10).

There are those who perceive migrants as victims of globalisation – passive subjects whose lives are swept away and moved around the world – but the roughness or curiosity that drives them to leave are triggered by an autonomous choice. For Castles (2004, 209), who coined the concept of “migrant agency,” “migrants are not just isolated individuals who react to market stimuli and bureaucratic rules, but social beings who seek to achieve better outcomes for themselves, their families and their communities through actively shaping the migratory process.” As already noted by Levitt (2001), Vertovec (1999), Portes et al. (1999) and Glick Schiller (1999) among others, the lives of migrants, like those of all others, have become more transnational, albeit to a much greater extent. In the last twenty years, the idea that more and more migrants leave “home” (wherever that may be, even after the second or third foreign country of residence) for a transnational life is gaining ground (Baas 2010).

The principles of legality and legitimacy of movement and the founding principles of the nation-state are in many cases at odds with this new trend; although the inalienability of rights is still upheld, in practice the power of institutions (state and market) tends to curb or prohibit movement. The right to mobility is far from unequivocal, and the question about who can migrate, under what conditions and in which way, is one of the key points of the migration narrative, and there are different possibilities according to the regulations or the gaps in them. Some migration laws provide that this right can be based on an idea of identity, so that, for example, the descendant of an Argentinean “inherits” an Italian nationality due to having Italian ancestors; when it comes to partner countries with mobility agreements (as with many European countries), it

is not even necessary to have a visa or show a passport; you can cross a border, even on foot.

According to some policies inspired by neoliberalism and economic nationalism, the migrant has a value and is allowed to migrate in relation to the benefit they bring to the host country. According to Aihwa Ong (2006), this thinking assigns a value to people according to their marketable skills: it will therefore happen that some people have a quick and easy integration at the expense of others, who are less “useful.” Another obstacle to mobility, especially for migrants with low marketable skills, is the so-called time trap (Cwerner 2001), which derives from bureaucratic visa policies and regimes that impose a power imbalance between the migrant and the potential host state. This trap dictates the possible period of time in which labour for seasonal workers should be provided, the rhythms between work and rest in certain areas, or the possibility of having contact with family members abroad, giving rise to a structure that leaves subjects with little or no control over their own lives, almost returning to the old “arms not people” Germanic model. Other research, such as that by Griffiths (2013), focuses on the waiting time, which is becoming increasingly important in the literature on the migration phenomenon; it is perhaps the most terrible situation since, as long as it lasts, one does not leave one life to start another but remains in limbo. This is true for economic migrants and even more so for forced migrants who, after leaving places to which they cannot return, remain suspended, waiting for a judgement on their asylum application.

In recent years various reports from all over the world showed that the gap in social inequality was widening; this and other indicators are affecting the conditions of the community and its attitudes, which are becoming more hostile or tend towards antisociality. According to recent assessments, 63% of Italians would be “hostile” to migration from non-EU countries, and 75% of those interviewed said that immigration would increase crime, which is something to be defended against. According to Wacquant (2000), the neoliberal project of society envisages social control based on the exclusion of those segments of the population that have been expelled from the labour market – whether they are vagrants, poor, homeless, unemployed or migrants is irrelevant. The excluded must disappear from sight and be relegated to the margins. For the author,

neoliberalism is based on the assumption that the laws of the market are the best instruments for producing and redistributing wealth, while asking the state to guarantee their operability, and the “dangerous classes” built on statistical parameters based on work and income are controlled through the restriction of freedom of movement in ghettos and prisons. In the workfare society, the main integration mechanism is the work: those who are outside the labour market find it difficult to (re)enter it, thus being unable to access the fullness of citizenship. Clara Valverde, a Spanish political activist, uses even sharper words, talking about neoliberal necropolitics (Valverde 2017), blaming neoliberalism for creating a policy based on the death of the excluded through policies of austerity and exclusion. For the scholar, the only antidote is sharing a “radical empathy” with the others.

This brief introduction gives a clear impression of how we are looking for new keys to interpreting relationships and bonds between similar and different people. The sore point, however, is in the assessment of the problem, which often distorts the analysis by isolating desirable, fixed characteristics. Human movement, when linked to undesirable diversity, increases the difficulty of relation. However, Benhabib (2008) states that the nation-state is crumbling, and the boundary between human rights and citizenship rights is tending to disappear as new forms of deterritorialised citizenship are emerging. The multicultural enclaves of the great cities show the new faces of a citizenship no longer based on exclusive adherence to a territory and a tradition.

Stefano Rodotà speaks of a “variable-geometry citizenship” (Rodotà 1992, 45), a fragmented citizenship, a condition of possibility, and Benhabib (2008) reminds us that we have reached a stage in political evolution which marks the end of the unitary model of citizenship that intertwined residence in a defined territory with the administration of a population perceived as a more or less cohesive entity. The end of that model does not imply the end of its hold on our political imagination or its normative force in guiding existing institutions. Rather, it means that we must be ready to imagine forms of agency and political subjectivity capable of anticipating new forms of political citizenship, new types of cohabitation and hospitality. This book aims to be the first step in this direction.

CHAPTER ONE

SELF AND IDENTITY

De-sideribus

Human history is often told as a series of discoveries and growth paths, as an endless series of struggles against nature, the animal kingdom and fellow human beings. The search for a paradise in which to live and bond with fellow humans has always been a great desire. The verb “to desire” derives from the Latin *de-sideribus*. “De” in Latin has a negative meaning, while “sidus” means stars, thus “lack of stars,” as well as “good wishes” and therefore “desire.” This way, the stars become the human’s confidant, revealing the lack of something they eagerly await in the hope that they will make their wishes come true. And it is from the lack and the hope of filling that void that one begins to imagine somewhere else, and someone or the instrument that will transform their reality.

The perception of lack seems to be one of the most powerful expansion mechanisms of behaviour. The human species ceased to belong exclusively to nature and to be one animal species among others when it became capable of producing languages and was able to represent lack symbolically, together with the tension to overcome it. Culture is the symbolic universe that contains the gestures, actions, and words with which it is possible to define the fundamental experiences of lack, in other words the limit, death, and otherness. (Melucci 1992, 31)

From the articulation of lack into desire, the human began its journey; it problematised its limit, the other and itself. Desires are the basis of the self, of the will to act and relate to others. But what is the object of human desire if not something that does good, gives pleasure and makes everything better? The unexpected and the worst situation are rarely desired, except for strategic reasons. In fact, the continuous efforts of human beings have been directed towards anticipating and preventing

what might be the tricks of fate, trying to foresee risks in an attempt to cancel or minimise them. To have the illusion of control, an order has been imprinted on the land by altering landscapes, tearing crops from the water, building houses and cities, and imposing borders. It is for this purpose that the human has invented a series of systems to manage time, resources, people and the relationships between them. Order comes from the division, compartmentalisation and administration of units that are individually manageable. Diversity remains the land of chaos, doubt and risk. The fear of what is unknown and different from oneself is so deep-rooted that it has come to regulate the relations between people, groups and tribes, and has been shaped by the management of this. The root of fear lies in the individual, which only takes shape in the encounter and confrontation with the other. Yet it is precisely the other that one fears, and fear tends to close off spaces of contact more and more. However, today we can observe how:

Societies that are richer than ever in practical means and instruments appear to be hopelessly prey to anxiety, so much so that psychoactive drugs and antidepressants are at the top of the list of the most commonly consumed medicines in Western societies. The problem lies in the fact that man has deep-seated needs for meaning and relationships [...] the individual has to control himself constantly in order to effectively suppress doubt and therefore cannot accept any external interference. We are moving towards the dominion of the equal, which has always been the obsession of totalitarian regimes, because only what is equal does not contain the explosive charge that can precipitate us back into the anguish of formlessness, the Other, from this point of view, is whatever can threaten the solidity of the ego. (D'Andrea et al. 2004, 24–5)

Modernity has been the heir, more or less consciously, of a powerful current of Western thought that immediately embraced the primacy of immobile stability and the choice in favour of disjunction as the privileged operation in logical processes. The combination of these biases has led to an increasingly articulated and pressing attempt to force reality to coincide with itself, of which the universe – instead of the possible multiverse (Galimberti 2005) – and the undivided, monolithic individual are eloquent examples. The latter process has pursued the elimination of any potentially

original and heterodox dimension of the subjects through their spatial immobilisation (La Cecla 2000), and the progressive expropriation of competences has made them increasingly dependent on a system of services rich in implications in terms of consumption and power. This has led to an essential impoverishment that has consequences which have probably not yet been investigated, including the attempt to systematically annihilate the existential territories of a frontier where, on the contrary, one might discover points of contact and similarities with the other. This impoverishment is related to the unproven conviction that it is only possible to understand what is perfectly still and therefore predictable. Humanity claims to be increasingly deprived of tools of animal origin such as instinct, and has entrenched itself in the claim of rationality. For this reason, humanity is no longer trying to understand complexity, but is instead reducing it to non-contradictory rationalisms, going so far as to trivialise reality by attempting to remove anything that is not beautiful, reassuring or that simply raises questions. Everything that is not rational has been degraded to something akin to waste. The use of Paretian derivations to justify the irrationality of action is the deception that underlies this type of knowledge. One ends up desiring only what is the same as oneself to reinforce order; one wishes to consolidate the boundaries that are already fixed in one's identity. The more that diversity increases, the more the alarm grows, and thus it becomes difficult to have peaceful relations.

Difference makes possible the realisation of the encounter with the other. The relationship has primacy over differences because each person does not exhaust the possible way of expression of relationality. This disposition opens up to risk, to the unexpected and, in the final analysis, to recognizing our limitedness in confront the fact that the Other is the Infinite. The Other can never be taken for granted and led back to predetermined models. The face of the Others marks the path of a transcendence lived in the society, in immanence. (Malizia 2008, 71)

Sometimes it can happen that the differences are so radical that no relationship is possible. Malizia (2008) points out, however, that this position is symmetrical to the obsession with identity. It is possible to overcome this stage by practising pluralism, opening up to the possibility

of dialogue on an equal footing: “there is no dialogue without identity, and identity is structured and transformed in dialogue” (Malizia 2008, 72). Dialogue is understood as two-way interactions and not one-way communication.

The crucial question is why it is so difficult to live together with those who are different from us, and why it is not possible to manage coexistence in a peaceful way, imagining what new spaces can be created for the improvement of the whole society when new people arrive. Limits and boundaries in any field, however much they have been constantly and teasingly moved one step further throughout history, remain reassuring and necessary. The relational problem arises when boundaries become the basis of an oppositional logic, a catalogue of what does not describe “what it is” but “what is good and right,” as opposed to everything outside the boundary itself.

Self-knowledge has been replaced by self-affirmation, exchanging the possibility of a social pact for the premises of exclusion. Baudrillard (1979) underlined the fact that the dynamics favoured in our culture arise from implicit presuppositions as harbingers of problematic consequences, which, however, we do not confront. The aspiration to the universal is emblematic of this, in its postulating a secret opposite that satisfies the dichotomous requirement of the aut/aut (or/or) paradigm. Every principle ideally affirmed as valid *erga omnes* cannot be realised in practice because its implementation would negate the negative term that gives it value, since, as Galimberti recalls:

There is no reality in the West whose value is not the result of its prevailing. This is not only true for the rational/irrational pair, but also for good/evil, true/false, just/unjust, healthy/unhealthy, sensible/insensate, where the positivity of the first term arises from its ability to separate itself from its contrary as from its negative absolute. (Galimberti 2005, 37)

This way, the frenzy to define the human results in more and more subjects being expelled from the theoretically universal sphere. For Baudrillard, in dichotomous thinking, the human can only be asserted as such by means of a necessary term of comparison: the non-human. With the refinement of discriminatory categorisation – which is essential for satisfying the need for constant reassurance of what one is – the scope of

the feigned universality becomes ever narrower “to the point where one can glimpse the time of Man’s definitive universality, which will coincide with the disappearance of all men – and in which the purity of the concept will shine alone in the void” (Baudrillard 1979, 137). The Procrustean bed once again shows the impossibility of staying within the limits set by oneself. At first, it may seem easy to decide that those who are very different from us – a description of us from which much of the very definition of the human descends – are not enough to be defined as such; the logic of division and selection cannot stop, even in the extreme consequences. The self, as has already been said, is born in the confrontation with the other, and diversity is a necessary ingredient of this process. However, the moment difference becomes the prerequisite for inequality, and instead of giving rise to a generative act, it affects the mechanism underlying the self itself. Being in contact with others, creating and discovering parts of oneself, sharing ideas and ideals, socialising, belonging, are possibilities that are weakened by living in the swamp of the same. We need only think of how often the mere fact of undertaking a journey or making a discovery drives the human to feel the need for change, to feel the desire to deal with life in a different way. It is then that the self takes a breath and changes. This mechanism, which is valid both for opening up to something new and for closing down, requires a living, dynamic self, constantly stimulated by questions, able to question itself and ready to accept the idea that placing oneself on a higher plane than someone else is wrong. In this sense, questioning means accepting the possibility of being equal. Arrogating to oneself the right to choose whom and to what extent defining a human being cancels this possibility and identity goes from being a bridge to a wall. In the following paragraphs, we will see how identity, that part which is proposed to the other, tailored for that particular moment operates, what the self feels and how it is linked to the role, the context, the space which gives the human the possibility of expressing the parts of the self in a differentiated manner. If the other is not recognised, they lack the authority to commit, participate or simply be, and are reduced to their use, their function. Rationalistic and economic logic become two instruments of closure and dehumanisation. Dividing people into categories is the step preceding discrimination: the engine of desire, however, could overcome all this as it is more powerful than fear. It

is necessary to return to the desire to free one's own potential, to the desire to live with others. To understand what has been said, it is necessary to take a step backwards, starting with the conception of the self and identity: from there, the path that leads to the definition of everything else begins.

Self and Identity: Dynamic Realities of a Body

It is not easy to know oneself: some part remains in the shadows, and the others are constantly evolving, forming and changing in contact with the external environment and through relationships with others. Although modernity has attempted to affirm the certainty of being rational and steady individuals, doubts have not ceased to perturb the majority of consciousnesses, fuelling anxieties based on facts that are treated as harmless, but that are far from being so: who we are when we sleep, where our instincts come from, if they are the form of expression of uneducated and uncivilised people, if we can be both culture and nature, if the latter is well cultivated. Moreover, this awareness, however blurred, does not respond to the imperative of the coherence and continuity of the self, being an indivisible monolith – as the term “individual” proclaims – but something changeable and processual, closer to a lively and sometimes quarrelsome assembly in which some members are familiar, while others are complete strangers. Self and identity are closely related concepts that attempt to answer the question “who am I?”, an ancient question which, although apparently removed from public discourse in homage to modern imperatives, retains a core of mystery and often destabilising uncertainty. Attempts at an answer come from various disciplines: the concept of self has been the subject of studies in philosophy, religion, social sciences and psychology, but since it is a contradictory reality, and therefore alien to one – with dimensional solutions – the road to a satisfactory agreement still seems long. Another set of problems emerges: the true self in classical philosophy as well as in religion corresponded to the soul, to the life-breath, to that indivisible nucleus that carried life and was separated from the body in one of the constitutive dichotomies of the Western worldview. When we begin to overcome this radical schism, as various authors from different specialisations are strongly calling for, the question of corporeality and its experiential, cognitive and relational importance becomes

unavoidable, and the failure to consider it in contemporary knowledge is a gap with many consequences. On the unquestioned foundations of the Cartesian distinction *res extensa/res cogitans*, an essential component of the human being – its body – has been transformed into an increasingly accessory and cumbersome tool, as it is simply a support for the superior intellectual function and, moreover, a bearer of limits and weaknesses (D’Andrea 2017). We have thus lost sight of the wide repertoire of sensations and emotions that is inherent in it and that plays a role in the processes of recognition and acceptance of the Other.

Awareness of corporeality gives voice to the other dimensions of being, those linked to perception and emotions, which have deliberately been side-lined, leaving on a pedestal only the intellect and not the mind, a dimension much broader than thought. Awareness of the body is of fundamental importance in psychology and is considered to precede the birth of self-awareness. Experiments with specimens of primates, such as those by Gallup (1970), aimed to observe whether certain species were able to recognise themselves in the mirror. Orangutans, chimpanzees and bonobos were not only able to do so, but were also able to observe their own facial expressions or explore parts of their bodies that they could not see without the help of a reflection, showing that they had self-awareness, undermining one of the foundations of human exceptionalism, which can also be traced back to the Cartesian dichotomous approach, namely the idea that they are the only living creatures endowed with intelligence and self-awareness:

By foreshadowing the interdependence and inseparability of the inner and outer worlds, Groddeck not only overcomes the dualism between mind and body, but also that between mind-body and world: the whole body is the subject and object of an interaction with everything that happens inside and outside it; everything and everyone is connected at the same time; this interrelationship shapes each moment and generates a rapid succession of mental states. (Macchia 2010, 54)

This statement is of crucial importance. Mind, body and world are an inseparable triad: everything is generated by this, and it is not possible to isolate one of its parts otherwise any object or process observed would be misunderstood. Following Maffesoli’s (2017) call for the rediscovery of

the importance of bodily perception, it is an interesting issue and goes in this direction: the scholar, in order to show concretely how much the current mechanical and rationalistic approach misses the understanding of the many dimensions of sociality, stresses the insufficiency of the modern calculating subject within the dynamics responsible for social cohesion and ethical ties. Against the unrealistic claim of a full subjective awareness of one's own action and impulses, they highlight the need to care for others – the others of whom we are often unaware. This need arises from shared experiences constituting a common ground thanks to which it is easier to overcome the abyss of otherness and establish mutual connections. Maffesoli's *Ethics of Aesthetics* (2017) proposes the importance of the body, emotions and proxemics as the foundation of the social cement and the underground bond that maintains and stabilises the group well beyond the overblown explanations of mutual utility. Thus, the body is no longer an outsider but becomes a bridge or a door between oneself and the other, laying an unconscious but solid foundation for cooperation. The ethics of aesthetics generates a bodily dimension and a relationality based on a useful perspective for understanding the processes of confrontation and coexistence that does not leave behind the importance of these cornerstones.

William James in his *Principles of Psychology* states:

We are not only gregarious animals, liking to be in sight of our fellows, but we have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and noticed favorably, by our kind. No more fiendish punishment could be devised, were such a thing physically possible, than that one should be turned loose in society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof. (James 2007, 184)

Human beings need sociality, which implies, above all, the fact of being seen and addressed by the other – the need to be seen as useful members. The fundamental role played by the body is therefore fully manifest: without being seen, without that interaction that includes what the body says, one would experience the worst of conditions and much of the message would be lost by the mere absence of the body.

The concepts of self and identity will be outlined later in order to better understand how these are anchored in the body and the world, but for now a premise must be made. According to Alsaker and Kroger (2006), a large

number of authors in the last fifty years have confused the two terms, but they should remain distinct concepts since the self is a construct that can be referred to the attributes of an individual – individual characteristics, beliefs, competences, feelings and self-awareness – whereas identity refers to the biological and psychological aspects of an individual in relation to the context to which they belong. For this reason, if a person is in a state of equilibrium with the environment, they can have a stable identity – here, we go back to emphasising the link between mind, body and world – otherwise, they will experience a state of instability. In the most common meaning and in literature, the term and concept of self are often accompanied and confused with that of identity. In this regard, some scholars (Leary and Tangney 2003; Jackson and Goossens 2006; Harter 2003; Alsaker and Kroger 2006) have worked to clarify the use of these two terms. The clarification – although it concerns the field of psychology, which is not of interest here – is absolutely necessary in order to reach a sociological elaboration regarding the modalities of relationships’ articulation between the self and the other, and the motivations that push scholars to consider them as generators of meaning. Leary and Tangney (2003) have proposed five ways of using the word “self” by psychologists and scholars of social sciences: 1) the self as the complete person, mostly used in the common sense – because in the psychological field, it would be incorrect – where it is said that in fact the person has a self (Olson 1999); 2) The self as the set of temperament, values, preferences (Tesser 2002); 3) James (1890) introduces the difference between I and Me and differentiates a knowing self – subject – from a known self – object; 4) after James’ works, since the 1970s there has been a great use of the self as agent (Fonagy et al. 2002); Finally, 5) the self as a complex of beliefs that the individual has about themselves and that makes it possible to understand themselves as an object of their own attention and to be aware of themselves. Identity, on the other hand, turns out to be a composition of different aspects that give the individual the feeling of continuity, of always remaining the same. Identity manages to be a barometer that keeps the self, the other and the environment in dynamic balance. In fact, in the manual *Self and Identity* (Leary and Tagney 2003), identity is included in the category of “Self-related constructs” almost as a sub-element, while the self appears as a multidimensional construct. In this text, the self is