



4. The construction of meaning: an historical perspective

by Renata Salvarani (European University of Rome, Italy)



interactions. As place of experience and conscience, the body is both a constitutively open space, and as a border permeable to pain, pulses, sensations, stimuli. It is the boundary limit of the self and a contact area, an interpenetration with the outside world and with others. At the same time it is presence, force, organic consistency. In the act of staying, just existing, it marks, fixes, determines. His movement, when it is perceived and acted as a gesture, has a creative power: it gives life to reality, displays, performs and, what's more, makes it present.

The word "liturgy" can be used not only in a strictly religious way, but also with a large meaning, as system of symbolical gestures giving a sense to a group or a space, as a codified community experience creating a specific meaning or marking an identity and a belonging.

Body, rite and city are interacting elements in order to create a syntax of meaning into a community. They generate a living symbolic space that mirrors and influences mental images, behaviours of individuals and groups, ideas and models. At the same time, they are also the points of a debate that, during the last fifty years, have interwoven different lines of analysis now composed in a problematic way in the context of Historical and Religious Studies and in the debate around new forms of social cohesion.

The same interpretative and methodological tools can found cultural valorisation's strategies based on historical coherence links and on a community vision of the society inspired by values of cohesion, inclusion and positive dynamism.

The body, considered a hub of cultural signification, is the fulcrum of any discourse about space and spatial

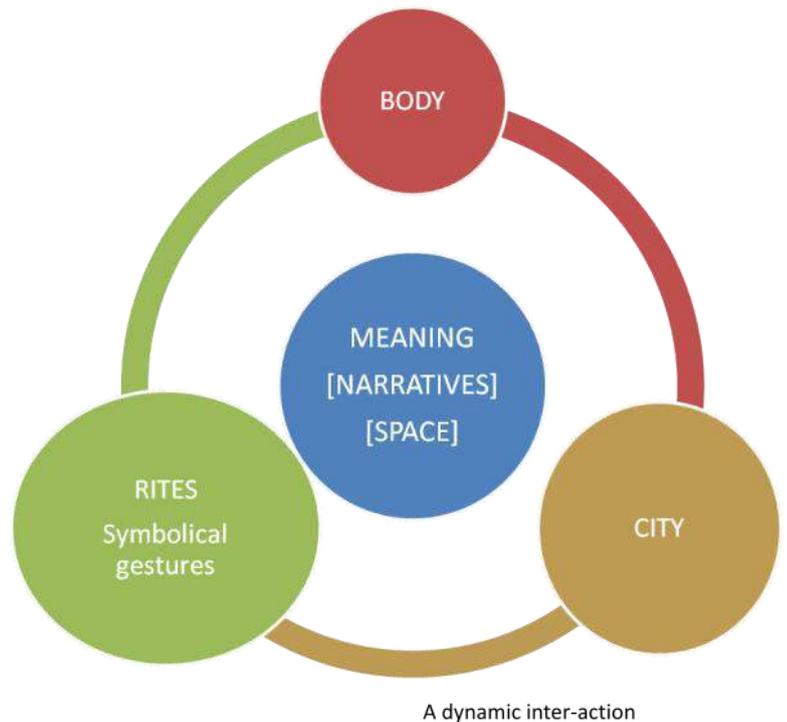
A definition of space borrowed from Henri Lefebvre focuses on the human being, who perceives the world and gives sense and meaning to things. By doing so he builds an interpretative narrative interspersed with topological interrelations, distances, hierarchies between places.

Three terms, body, liturgy and city mutually interact, giving life to a cultural syntax based on the experience, specifically on the religious and identity one. The genesis of a sacred symbolic space is dynamic, open to changes and overlapping meanings. Its centuries-long development is rooted into liturgical actions and devotional paths, both centred around the body, considered as an actor of change and, at the same time, a subject open to transformations, even at a neuro-perceptual level.

Contemporary global cities are both places of coexistence and spaces of creation and re-creation of meaning.

The great migrations and the emergence of multicultural society unfold their effects in creative, open and problematic ways: generating deep changes, originating identity and religious conflicts, or composing new processes of integration. This latter kind of transformations involves directly also sacred and sacralised spaces, rites and gestures, considered as chances to build, to deconstruct and re-build meanings. Acts of semantisation and re-semantisation impact on shared memories, open identities, forms of identity and cultural belongings including their differences, but composing them in a common higher belonging. Similar processes are evident also in the past. Today migrations, overlapping and replacement of different populations can be associated with new establishing of symbolic codes in a perspective of coexistence. This process of building of meaning, oriented by common shared values, passes also through the valorisation of cultural heritage.

Therefore the study of the space's implications appears more and more relevant: a reading key for a cultural discourse. On the side of valorisation, these processes and the key concepts which they are based on, are crucial to overview contemporary uses and reuses of Cultural Heritage, considered as an active element of our global society.



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