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Italian Alterdisciplinarity

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the consequences, problems and possible opportunities derived from the absence of Cultural Studies as a specific and autonomous 'discipline' in the Italian University, despite its wide diffusion across various academic subjects since the 1970s. I start my analysis from two 'rupture texts': Mario Perniola's relevant essay entitled 'Chi ha paura degli studi culturali?' (2000) ('Who is afraid of Cultural Studies?') and the website/volume entitled *Studi Culturali* (2003-2004), edited by Michele Cometa. Both texts focused on what had (not) happened in the Italian University in the last decades of the 20th century and envisioned inter- or alter-disciplinary perspectives for the future. Over just the same period, however, from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, a problem occurred: the Italian university started its structural transformation from the Humboldtian model to the neoliberal model. Thus, is there a possible actuality for Cultural Studies in Italy? What resistant pedagogical and interventional practices already exist, and what need to be built in totally different forms? I will try to respond to these questions focusing, above all, on the communicative dimension of the critical method of Cultural Studies, choosing Fashion Theory and Social Semiotics as case studies.

Contributor Note

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Cultural critique and social and language sciences between the 60s and the 70s.

When, over 50 years ago, in 1964, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was founded, cultural critique was developing, at the same time, in many places throughout Europe and the world. The critique arose from society, as well as from different social movements organised around class, nationality, gender and generation, but it would change the way of doing research within the academic world. As shown in an exemplary way in the film *The Stuart Hall Project*, dedicated to the late great scholar, who was one of the founders of CCCS, the main factors of the changing cultural climate from mid '60s to early '70s were the drive to decolonization, youth revolt, the search for a 'third way' in Cold War politics, and the struggles to improve living and working conditions of subaltern classes.

In those years, cultural critique expressed itself in Europe through different trends and theories. While in the UK, Cultural Studies deemed it fundamental to consider the issue of the 'popular' through the mediation of Gramscian concepts of 'people', 'folklore' and 'common sense', in the German language context, Marcuse and the Frankfurt School radically critiqued what they defined as 'mass', rather than popular communication and culture'. In France and Italy cultural critique was more politicized in the sense that it arose from the locations of politics, rather than from the locations of intellectual speculation. May '68 in Paris, the Italian Student Movement and the working class 'hot autumn' in 1969 in Italy are some of the emblematic events of this pathway from politics to academic thought, publishing and cultural

production as a whole: cinema, music, fashion, literature. Undoubtedly, theory played an important role, but this happened outside academic institutions rather than inside them, especially in Italy. Journals like the Italian *Quaderni Rossi*, for example, played a fundamental part. Published from 1961 to 1966, the journal aimed at analysing the working conditions of neo-capitalism by means of the innovative method of the 'investigative report'. Also, the 'dissent' of the New European Left towards the political parties of the traditional Left, like PCI and PSI in Italy, had a major function in cultural critique. This was linked to the radical critique of the USSR in Eastern Europe and to the ideal of commonality with 'The Prague Spring' in 1968, suppressed by Soviet tanks. Some academic disciplines within the realm of Humanities and Social Sciences were not only drawn into cultural critique, but were also its incubators and driving force. Among these were Semiotics (or semiology), particularly its post-structuralist methodological perspective, as it was defined in the Anglo-Saxon world, and Sociolinguistics.

Since his *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes suggested a theory capable of deconstructing collective representations of mass culture, considering them as systems of signs. For Barthes, a simple sign like a 1950 magazine cover ('Paris Match'), portraying a black soldier saluting the French flag, can be read as a 'form' able to imply an idea or even an ideology (in this case, in France just before the Algerian revolution, the ideology is a rhetoric of colonial *grandeur* that would unite all people beyond ethnicity). In the Italian context, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi's sociosemiotic theory has revealed its specific value since the '60s. Rossi-Landi starts from the awareness that communication and

social programming seem to have homologated human needs. According to Rossi-Landi, social reproduction – articulated in production, exchange and consumption – provokes human flattening and deformation through society's unconscious repetition of communication programmes. In this sense, semiotics is closely linked to social critique, as material production and sign production, verbal and non-verbal, are characterized by homologous and convergent forms of alienation.

Sociolinguistics was founded more or less in the same period (early 1960s) as an independent discipline from General Linguistics and addressed its attention to the study of the language used within the working and proletarian classes of urban communities. In this case, as it was for Cultural Studies, 1964 is an emblematic date. It was the year of the first Sociolinguistics Conference, which took place at the University of California, Los Angeles. In the UK, Bernstein carried out his surveys on working-class children's school performance, proving that there exists a relationship between language production and social condition.

This relationship determines the differences in the use of language between the 'restricted code', typical of working-class families, and the 'elaborated code', typical of middle and upper classes. In the same years, in the USA, Labov carried out similar research within the suburbs of large cities, especially among African American or black American people. In the francophone context, in contrast, in the early '60s, new developments in sociolinguistics were directly connected with decolonization issues and power relationships built by France, like all other modern colonialist countries. With reference to the intersection between

language and power, in France Luis-Jean Calvet's *Linguistique et colonialism* (1974) was fundamental. As the German linguist Norbert Dittmar wrote, sociolinguistics was a 'source of great emancipation expectations' (1973), namely as a critical science, characterized by marked openness and involvement in social practices, especially in the working-class and students' movements which, over the same period, were articulating the reasons behind struggles against social inequality and the modalities of knowledge transmission and reproduction in educational institutions.

In his Preface to Dittmar's *Sociolinguistics Handbook: An International Handbook of the Science of Language and Society*, Italian linguist Tullio De Mauro focused particularly on the tradition of Italian language studies including the names of Vico, Leopardi, Vailati, Gramsci and Pasolini, among others (Dittmar 1978: IX). According to De Mauro, the peculiarity of this Italian 'tradition' has always been its focus on the relevance that 'civil and social choices have in the history, shaping and life of a language'.

Could this have been, perhaps, one of the reasons why the Italian academy, with disciplines so close to Cultural Studies and its concerns – linguistics, sociology, semiotics – has sometimes taken for granted its acceptance of the same ideals and issues, without feeling the need to name the field? Has this allowed the growth of aversion towards the very name 'Cultural Studies', which has lasted for many decades in these and other disciplinary contexts?

Italy is no longer afraid of Cultural Studies

In 2000, in his article published in *Agalma. Rivista di estetica e studi culturali*, philosopher and editor of the journal Mario Perniola asked who had been afraid of Cultural Studies in Italy until then. He denounced the fact that under some academic circumstances it had not been possible to name Cultural Studies without associating it with the words 'eclecticism', in a disparaging sense, and 'shallowness'. On his behalf, in an article published by *L'Unità* in 2001, Iain Chambers – who has dedicated a pioneering work to Cultural Studies in Italy, together with Lidia Curti and a very active group of collaborators and researchers at the University of Naples L'Orientale – related the resistance of Italian studies in Italy towards Cultural Studies to the persistence of a kind of repression which has often been present in the linguistic and literary national tradition; a repression which has dismissed the translation of other identities, languages and cultures from Italian identity and tradition as a possible path. In the last decade of the 20th century, all the contradictions of this repression emerged because of the changed geo-political condition of Italy. This included, for example, migrations from within and outside Europe, as Italy had become the landing place of citizens from Eastern Europe (notably Albania, Russia and Ukraine), as well as from Africa and Asia, who started to build their lives in Italy. Thus, in the early 2000s it becomes possible to pronounce the phrase 'Cultural Studies' in Italy, without the fear of being charged with injuring the academy. Many books that can be listed within this subject area were published during this period, especially by Meltemi, the prominent publisher in this field (just a few of the foreign writers

Meltemi publishes include Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, and Rey Chow). Publisher Il Mulino founded a journal titled 'Studi Culturali'. Edited by a Germanist, Michele Cometa, in 2003 the *Dizionario degli studi culturali* (Dictionary of Cultural Studies) was published online first and then on paper for the same publisher, Meltemi.

As already explained, in the postwar period, disciplines like sociology, semiotics and anthropology in Italy oriented themselves toward Cultural Studies in the Anglo-Saxon vein. To this end, we could name a few scholars: Ernesto De Martino's anthropology; Umberto Eco with his studies on television and advertising in the Sixties; Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, in the semiotic field, and later Alberto Abruzzese and his 'mediology' as a perspective of the Sociology of communication and cultural processes. Also across literary studies, especially English and American studies and film studies interpreted in a semiological perspective, ethnomusicology, aesthetics and the 'presa diretta', to quote the title of an important book published by Perniola in 1986, many parts of Italian culture have been and still are the interpreters of Cultural Studies, despite not naming the field explicitly. In addition, great importance must be assigned to the influence of feminist thought on different disciplines exerted in a transversal way. Italian feminism, at least between the 70s and the early 90s, typically combined political practice and academic speculation, perhaps more than in other European and North American feminisms.

The rapid transformation of Italian post-industrial society from the '90s until today has fostered the development of Cultural Studies following the influence

of the most recent generation of scholars, with a theoretical and pragmatic perspective we can generically define as critical and postcolonial. This perspective rethinks the knowledge devices and cartographies of power in history and narration, searching for new connections, new research horizons and new fields that our age claims in the colonial past, including the Italian one, in the transnational present, in cultural texts and in the signs of the collective imagination.

Also in Italy, in the disciplines with a 'strong' epistemology (especially Italian studies, history, social sciences and philosophy) new Cultural Studies consider the limit of 'belonging', as in every national and identity belonging, as the limit of the construction of an utterance position. From where does one speak? From what position does the intellectual say 'we'? I deliberately use this Gramscian term here, with reference to the connection between intellectuals and power, to underline the relevance, in our age, of Gramsci's work, which has been underrated or dismissed from the dominant culture of the Left. Unfortunately, indeed, in the second half of the 20th century a 'Crocian' interpretation of Gramsci prevailed in Italy, a rhetoric of the 'popular' in the sense of a 'nationalistic', or – even worse – of a regional 'tradition', an interpretation of the 'quistione meridionale' ['Southern question'] as an assumed backwardness of the South of Italy. Gramsci's modernity, the possibility of reading his works *vis-à-vis* the transformations of post-industrial society, 'pop' Gramsci, as intended by Stuart Hall – to summarize his work in a slogan – has not arrived in Italy except in the translations of classical British studies on Gramsci, starting from Hall, and with the

renewal of Southern studies thanks to postcolonial studies.

The new order of the academic discourse

The theoretical and methodological expertise of Cultural Studies was introduced in the Italian academy just when the academy itself starts to change its model definitively from the 'Humboldtian' one, in which the university is perceived as a noble place of knowledge and learning, to a model of the university in which results have to be measured in a quantitative way. Obviously the process towards a neoliberal academy has not been accomplished yet, although the University reform carried out under Berlusconi's government has set forth this change in legislation. In my view, complete neoliberal transformation is actually impossible unless one wants to destroy the university's public function, and also because knowledge, culture and the very concept of 'discipline', intended in an 'alter-disciplinary' sense, do resist this kind of process.

I will try to explain my belief here. A spectre is haunting Europe (and other continents, too) in the second decade of the 21st century: it is not the ancient spectre of communism: it is – to say it better – the spectral system of the evaluation of knowledge in the age of neoliberalism. The idea is that disciplines, from humanities to social sciences to the so called 'exact' sciences, should be evaluated by 'neutral' and 'objective' parameters that could translate the quality of academic research into numbers. This idea corresponds to the necessity of re-organizing disciplines in the light of what

we can shortly define as their 'usefulness' in societies. And this would be a good thing, in the abstract: we need theories and research able to produce results outside the debates of scientific communities; we need new discoveries that could help the progress of humankind.

This 'positive' sense of evaluation can be found in lower and higher education thanks to some strengthened international and local programs for pupils' and schools' assessment that have been introduced over the last decades. Thanks to programs like OECD-PISA – the Programme for International Student Assessment of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – and other national programs, like INVALSI in Italy (Istituto nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema dell'Istruzione – National Institute for the Assessment of the Educational System), national educational systems can improve and become able to confront disparities. Such systems of evaluation in education were planned with a different aim compared to the present academic evaluation, namely to promote a real literacy all over the world, with a special attention to the assessment of both mathematics and reading skills.

On the contrary, in the realm of academic research the aim is, above all, to re-discipline disciplines. Numbers and digits are often stupid: while they can easily manage evaluation in restricted fields, in well-defined and specialized disciplines, they do not work in complex forms of knowledge in which borders and connections are highly relevant. This deadlock of numbers is evident in the difficulty in establishing parameters that can work in the same way in different disciplines. In Italy, ANVUR (the National Agency for the Evaluation of the

University Research) has been recently highly criticized by many intellectuals and columnists because of the dissonant ways in which it evaluates Italian universities based on parameters such as the number of graduates who find a job after their BA and MA degrees. It is evident that the Universities located in less developed areas – above all in the South – are penalized by this standard. Still in Italy, the same criticism is being directed toward the VQR (the Evaluation of Research Quality), which is the condition for receiving certification within university institutions (schools, courses, PhD programmes, etc.) from the central government: eligibility for an institution to receive funds, and indeed, to survive or otherwise, is grounded upon this evaluation. In addition, many articles, websites and academic societies are criticizing the way in which scholars' work is assessed according to a publisher's positioning of their books, the A, B or C classification of the journals where the scholars publish, as well as the international impact factor of those journals – which is very difficult to evaluate in humanities and social sciences. It seems that these strategies of control aim more at making cuts than producing new intellectual elites in state universities. Cuts may be a good thing where there is wastefulness of money, but in the neoliberal view, cuts often correspond to a reduction in disciplines. The number of schools and faculties decreases because of mergers, but, paradoxically, this does not produce an increase in interdisciplinary knowledge; on the contrary, it introduces a new rigidity of the strongest disciplinary canons and reinforces the power of control from the top. As Tarak Barkawi writes in a recent article,

One consequence is the mania for mergers of departments and

faculties in the US and the UK. In both the university and corporate world, mergers are not only demoralising for staff, but they also break up solidarities and destroy traditions and make staff much more amenable to control from above. (Barkawi 2014)

I would like to clarify here that my criticism towards the new order of academic discourse is quite distant from the defense of both institutional privilege and what in Italy is known as 'baronage'. In fact, there are lobbies and near 'guilds' that fight any system of evaluation free from influence peddling and nepotism. On the contrary, my criticism is based, above all, on the inability of the neoliberal view of knowledge to translate into meaningful evaluation for disciplines that are constitutively beyond pre-fixed borders and that assume trans-disciplinarity as their own epistemological statute.

In order to ground my argument, I will outline some of the theoretical references upon which notions such as discourse, culture and discipline are based. In *The Order of Discourse*, Michel Foucault defines discourse as a system of procedures of both exclusion and control. The exclusion concerns what must be rejected as false and foolish; the control concerns the principle of authority and the instauration of rules through which it is possible to produce the so-called 'true' discourse. The 'social appropriation of discourse' is displayed in different ways, among which is the institutionalization of disciplines. According to Foucault, a discipline is defined

by a domain of objects, a set of methods, a corpus of propositions considered to be true, a play of

rules and definitions, of techniques and instruments: all this constitutes a sort of anonymous system at the disposal of anyone who wants to or is able to use it (Foucault 1981: 59).

The word 'discipline' refers at the same time to both the field of knowledge and the way in which this knowledge is regulated (disciplined). Using again Foucault's words,

The discipline is a principle of control over the production of discourse. The discipline fixes limits for discourse by the action of an identity which takes the form of a permanent re-actuation of the rules. (61)

This process is realized in the society at-large, but in particular in education. Although education is the means by which any individual is supposed to have access to any kind of discourse, according to Foucault this 'does not prevent it from following, as is well known, in its distribution, in what it allows and what it prevents, the lines marked out by social distances, oppositions and struggle' (64).

In this sense, both education and disciplines are the forms of a ritualization of speech in which order is established by means of two strategies: 1. the distinction among disciplinary statutes; 2. the power relations between those who can have access to speech and those who cannot. In the second half of the 20th century, a kind of self-consciousness of this rigid organization of knowledge arose and developed within human and social sciences. Disciplined knowledge was radically critiqued in Europe by many different but essentially convergent schools of thought, which were often also

connected to political practices in the main centres of education, such as schools and universities. Let me name briefly some of these main schools of thought: the Frankfurt school, on the one side, which focused on mass culture and ideology; Cultural Studies, on the other, that elaborated an original concept of culture starting from Antonio Gramsci's thought; and finally, of course, post-structuralism, within which Foucault's work has been placed, and which also includes Roland Barthes, on whom I will focus later. Particularly, Cultural Studies introduced the concept of 'culture' as something that involves many aspects of social life. In Stuart Hall's words inspired by Gramsci, culture is the 'actual, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society.' (Hall 1986: 26). In this sense, the disciplines that contribute to the analysis of 'culture' cannot but be inter-, or better, trans-disciplinary; Cultural Studies was a 'field of studies', not a discipline in the institutional sense. This has been its strength but also its weakness in some national scientific communities, as in the case of Italy, where Cultural Studies was not officially acknowledged by the academy until the beginning of 2000, as I have argued above, and only within some disciplines. These included the sociology of culture, semiotics, comparative literatures and aesthetics, thanks to some scholars who were, so to say, outside of the canon or on its border.

Today the neoliberal model shows all of its contradictions, and it is imperative to find a kind of 'third way' which, without reproducing the old university system typical of the 19th and 20th century, does not mechanically equate 'modernity' with a total blindness towards the complexity of the present age. New Cultural Studies

offers a mobile paradigm, eclectic but not in a disparaging sense; eclecticism is rather the source of Cultural Studies' foundations and openness. Cultural Studies enables disciplines to interrogate themselves, their underlying genealogy and the subjects which have built their foundations. In this sense, Cultural Studies itself is exposed to 'contamination', to the reversal of the enunciatory position, and, as a consequence, to the conflict deriving from all this. Therefore, an idea of radical alterity and of communicative and pedagogical displacement of the human and social sciences also forces its way in the theoretical realm.

Although many things have deeply changed today when compared to the 'golden age' of cultural critique some decades ago, I think in our times it is critical to show how some fields of knowledge cannot be disciplined in the sense I have explained above. Nonetheless they can be very interesting and productive in a more innovative view of the relations between academic discourses and society, between academy and industry, and between theoretical research and projects grounded in the material world. Among these, fashion theory.

Fashion Theory

Fashion theory and fashion studies base their birth as autonomous fields in the second half of the 20th century on the fact that they have been recognized as studies of culture, as Cultural Studies. Fashion is a form of popular culture; it is part of everyday life, in the sense that fashion, and more generally dressing, cover the whole sphere of the 'popular', of common sense, which I conceive,

following Gramsci, as a contradictory and ambivalent strength. Fashion is a social discourse, a system of signs, as it was defined first of all by Roland Barthes, who wrote both about 'real' fashion, namely fashion considered as a social practice (in most of the collected essays of the English book *The Language of Fashion*, 2006) and about 'written' or 'described' fashion, namely fashion totally converted into language as it happens in specialized magazines (in *The Fashion System*).

As a discourse, fashion is involved in the procedures of its own order, in Foucault's sense of order, those procedures that Barthes recognized when he devised the fundamental semiotic opposition/binarism 'in fashion/out of fashion' and asserted that this opposition/binarism sets up the way the system of fashion itself works. This opposition/binarism is reproduced in all the fields where fashion signs express themselves: colours (for example blue in opposition to green), seasons (Winter in opposition to Summer), jewels to bijoux, Chanel to Courrèges, language to clothing, etc.

However, the order of discourse is based on ambivalent forces, indeed, if we follow Foucault's words themselves when he says that the role of these procedures 'is to ward off its discourse's powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality' (1970: 52). Thus, the order of discourse contains the conflict against its own materiality within itself, and when we talk of a system like fashion which has a direct relation with the body – the clothed body – this materiality is tangible, almost literal, and involves the role of human senses. Human senses, in their complexity and reciprocity, are in fact at work in the reproduction and communication of

fashions. There are stereotypes of common feeling, but there are also ways to exceed the common feeling and to use even the intrinsic fetishism of fashion, the living power of objects and garments, in order to invert and humanize their meaning. The clothed body is both the product of fashion as a discourse and the subject who generates the fashion discourse, even beyond fashion itself. For this reason, fashion theory cannot but be a multiple, complex and trans-disciplinary field of knowledge reflecting the force of the human body as a producer of both undreamed-of significations and, at the same time, a site of the constrictions, stereotypes and object-ifications that human bodies live even through fashion and its imagination.

Fashion theory considers fashion as a meaning system within which cultural and aesthetic portrayals of the clothed body are produced. From a connotative point of view, 'fashion theory' recalls such expressions as 'film theory', 'gender theory', 'queer theory', etc., in which the word 'theory' implies a positioned knowledge and theory is implicitly seen as the deconstruction of universalistic canons. The 'theory' sees its 'subject' – in this case contemporary fashion – as a system in which roles, social hierarchies, the models of imagination and the figures of the body are produced. Fashion theory represents an epistemological 'jump' from the traditional history and sociology of clothing; it points to a transverse theoretical and genealogical approach which constructs favourable conditions and theoretical filters by selecting from human and social sciences (including literature, philosophy and the arts) to conceive of the fashion system as a special dimension of material culture, the history of the body, the theory of the tangible.

The clothed body is the physical-cultural territory in which the visible, perceivable performance of our outward identity takes place. This composite cultural text-fabric provides opportunities for the manifestation of individual and social traits that draw on such elements as gender, taste, ethnicity, sexuality, a sense of belonging to a social group or, conversely, transgression. Fashion studies on gender show how the history of clothing has also been the history of the body, of the way in which we have constructed it, imagined it and divided it between men and women on the basis of its productive and reproductive functions, its discipline, the hierarchies written on it, and the discourses that have generated its passions and meanings. Fashion, or rather fashions in the plural, organize the signs of the clothed body in time and space, almost as if forging its language, and at the same time they represent possible ways of mixing reference codes by constructing hybrids between signs, just like the linguistic and cultural hybrids within which the very idea of identity is constructed.

The materiality of the clothed body implies disciplinary inter-connections, jumps and translations among the borders of knowledge. I use the expression 'translation' in a metaphorical but also literal sense, as a cultural inter-relation, following Walter Benjamin's idea of translation as a practice where language considers the 'strangeness of languages' as its own limit, but at the same time as the only possibility to enter a higher and purer area. Trans-disciplinarity, in this sense, is a more complex and more open view than that of flat multi-disciplinarity.

Let's think for example of the way in which gender identity *plays* through

fashion with the canonical, stereotyped ways of portraying the male and the female, on the one hand, and the challenges to the dominant discourse that are conveyed by the signs of the body, on the other. Let's think of the complex relationships between styles of appearance and the forms of resistance and pleasure in which subordinate identities are expressed. As bell hooks says, there is a close relationship between style as expressed in clothing and subversion, i.e., the way in which the dominated and exploited peoples use certain fashions to express resistance and/or conformity (hooks 1990: 217).

The current model of disseminating fashion thus pursues a 'horizontal' course through society, sometimes taking its cue from segments of the population, anti-establishment groups or cultural avant-gardes, and mainly relying on generational affinities and experiences of everyday life. In this sense the semiotic network model has entirely replaced the trickle-down model, also because social mobility, the blending of different sign systems, the opportunities for encounters between cultures, and the diffuse translatability between signs that 'travel' all around the globe are all elements that determine the pace and mechanisms of the present-day dissemination of fashion. Today Fashion theory works on subjects like sustainability, ethics, the role of fashion in the construction of multiple identities, the relation between fashion and ICTs, fashion and mass media, and the cultural and economic role of luxury in our age. These key factors of our age shape the unpredictable, chaotic, sometimes contagious dynamics of fashion.

In this context gaze of Cultural Studies on fashion in Italy is peculiarly set, as an

area in which over recent years, publications and publishers' attention has largely increased. Fashion has had a highly relevant place in the Italian economy between the '80s and the early '90s. The 'Made in Italy' brand has been a flagship and has given a boost to the economic and cultural transformation of late 20th-century Italy. The Italian imaginary abroad, even in its most second-rate and kitsch forms, has often been transmitted through the ideas of luxury and fashion. Still today the name 'Italy' resounds in the world's ears as the origin of timeless style and beauty, the place of an ancient luxury and 'manner' with solid origins and delicate charm.

Whatever its current situation of crisis is, since its origins the Italian fashion system has been grounded on a heterogeneous cultural backdrop and on a humanism which has characterized the history of dress, elegance and distinction cross destinies with craftsmanship, figurative arts, photography, cinema, design and the new communication technologies. Nowadays this local complexity embraces the transnational dimension of fashion, which is also, according to Gayatri Spivak, the form in which the narratives of the transnational capitalistic domination organize themselves (Spivak,

2004). For example, a problem like the delocalization of fashion industries is not simply an issue concerning the destiny of 'Made in Italy' from an economic and productive point of view, but also, in a kind of upset perspective, an issue of an assumed discrete hierarchy between 'the society with fashion' and the 'society without fashion' which manifests itself just when the contrast between luxury and misery is harsher all over the world.

Conclusions

Thus the Italian specific 'differentia' that allows the combination of Cultural Studies and fashion studies is set in the same direction that, as Chambers has written about Italian studies, allows it to 'host the challenge emerging from a removed complexity to suggest a polyphonic sense of cultures and literatures (here I add of all artistic and stylistic expressive forms) carrying the adjective 'Italian' (Chambers 2001: 22). In conclusion, my proposal is to consider how fashion disciplines can work for fashion as a cultural industry, in both a material and a planning sense. And to do this, we must preserve complexity and trans-disciplinarity and resist both reductionism and totalitarianism in knowledge.

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