

Ubiquitous Utopia



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Perspective

Ubiquity is the anthropological concept that emerges transforming its traditional meaning. This change in the meaning of the word is determined by a metropolitan subject (in the extended sense) who is everywhere inserted in the flows of digital communication and so lives the constant experience in which the classical space/time coordinates are mixed and transformed. The result is an acceleration of the ubiquitous identities that presents itself as one of the most complex events of the new millennium which must be analyzed according to an *undisciplined* ethnography. The researcher who anticipated the theoretical process about ubiquitous computing was Mark Weiser [1]. In 1988, he wrote that ubiquities characterize space/time relations in digital communication, stressing that such emerging digital ubiquity involves both humans and not-human. The traditional dichotomic paradigm about human and not-human - thanks to internet-of-things or the smart commodities - is going to melt in the air of pixel. "Ubiquitous computing names the third wave in computing. First were mainframes, each shared by lots of people. Now we are in the personal computing era, person and machine staring uneasily at each other across the desktop. Next comes ubiquitous computing, or the age of calm technology, when technology recedes into the background of our lives" [1].

And Mark Weiser was facing another even more uncanny perspective, perhaps influenced by Gregory Bateson's ecology of mind: "The computer should extend your *unconscious*" (ibidem). Bateson criticized the well-known Freudian distinction of ego-id-super-ego inside the same subject, affirming that the ego is expanding itself outside the subject along the channel that are connecting the human "mind" to a forest or mineral "mind". Such an ecological pattern of communication is crossing and mixing

the traditional distinction between human and not-human. The nature is a living being that is exchanging mental information with every creature through technology. A wheel or a computer. This is the reason why Norbert Wiener together with Gregory Bateson invented the cybernetic. Feed-back and schismogenesis are the empirical results of the alliance between informatics and anthropology. The consequences of such a visionary predicament or prediction are so visible both in everyday experiences (unlimited youporn and surface resentment, fake conspiracy and uncontrollable haters). The current digital revolution and the accelerated pragmatics behaviors are foreshadowing ubiquitous identities that can favor divergent results: the beauty of crossing the space/time limits in a process of multiplication of one's own subjectivity; and a tendential fragmentation of the ego in relation to the loss of territorial certainties. The possible consequences are presenting ambiguous and conflictual scenarios: *the cosmopolitan ubiquitous subject coexists with the digital-authoritarian personality*. Therefore, the question is to face ethnographically this challenge and to resolve it in a progressive way, revealing the complexity of indifference, prejudices, racisms that affect many persons in their anomic morality [2].

The psycho-cultural as well as socio-political problem are growing because digital cultures and communication are going to transform the classical distinction of space-and-time, favouring a decentred and non-linear experiences of spacetimes or, better, of ubiquitous times, a restless montage of syncretic concepts and synchronic narratives. The ubiquitous concept revolves around a method of field research, ethnography, which has long been moving among different disciplines, establishing a privileged relationship with culture, communication and consumption. Ubiquity also

expands syncretic concepts and methods presented in the digital culture. This chapter is not about this concept's history or how it has evolved over time (and spaces) well, ubiquity is a concept so dynamic that is restless when facing itself. A strong metaphorical use of this term has been used recently to identify operating modus through the web-culture. A somewhat shared affirmation is that the web is ubiquitous and communicational ubiquity characterizes internet's space-time relations. In contemporary times, ubiquity plays a logical-sensorial immanence to a material/immaterial condition; it expresses tensions beyond dualism, that simplified human prejudice in which binary oppositions are reducing the everyday's complexity into the hegemony of a dichotomous ratio. Ubiquity remains aside from any vertical political control, mono-logic rationality or any space-time linear determination. In this perspective, it is possible to cut its theological traditional appropriation and consequently affirm some ubiquitous visions towards a not-anthropocentric humanism: where the unlimited poetic and political visions are wandering beyond any fix identity of things and humans.

Ubiquitous is imagination's potentiality connected to digital technology. The ubiquitous patterns of communication have been expanded in recent years and ethnography must change its methods of research. The fieldwork is - at the same ubiqutime - material and immaterial. This ethnography's ubiquity involves any identity. Also, my own identity as a researcher does not remain the same, as it simultaneously develops diagonal and dissonant relations, using expressions from different areas, which happen to be increasingly less geographically but more subjectively characterized and connected. This identity is more flexible in relation to its industrialist past. My fluid identity is seated on some sort of unstable raft, oscillating between different subjects or contexts co-existing at the same frame. Hence, the ethnographic glance must be ubiquitous if he/she wants to decipher the conflicting codes (written, visual, musical, mixed and etc.) whilst practicing different dialogical narratives. The ethnographer (or the fashion designer) must be in syncretic, polyphonic and...ubiquitous. From an anthropological point of view, the *divergent affinities* between utopia and ubiquity could be explored. If the first concept invents an inexistent and ideal place, the second expands everywhere the presence of a generally divine and controlling entity. Between being nowhere and everywhere moves the current graft of potential ubiquitous utopias thanks to the diffusion of digital communication through an animated individuality. The concept of utopia oscillates in Western time and changes its meaning in different historical contexts, so trying to stop its concept is rather difficult. I remember that utopia was born to deny ("ou") the places historically known when various navigators began to "discover" other spaces and to meet radically different cultures. For this reason, the date of publication of the book by Tomas Moro means to focus the historical-cultural context of the nascent modernity: 1492-1516, that is only twenty years after the so-called *descubrimiento* of the Americas. The adventurous

journey and the discovery of the unknown are constitutive of this phase. But not only. Since then the conflict between the experience of the traveller and the sedentary in writing has begun. Moro standing still invents the name Utopia; Vespucci sailing gives the name America [3].

For Moro, the other is not a savage to be civilized, converted or exterminated, but a premise to decipher the happy potentialities (eutopia) within the culture of the writer and his countless readers. So, the sedentary invents an unreal place that, just for its unreality, is perceived as the most concrete space that can be imagined. For him, the utopian centrality of agriculture derives precisely from the still imaginative news on the conditions of the "native" populations who lived "according to nature". And it is well known that it was the Jesuits who remained not only fascinated as to actually organize their utopia in that vast area in today's Paraguay which is still today called *missiones*. And the missions were precisely concrete utopias, at least until their expulsion. The journey defines the imaginary utopia. Only by traveling in unknown spaces can one find the unknown as fascinating and perturbing. Traveling and the self-traveling are constitutive of what will become utopia. Yet it is the sedentary writing that elaborates its vision [4].

The concept of ubiquity has a history that precedes utopia: because of their divergent affinity, I thought of connecting the two terms. To the ubiquity that flows in every place is added the utopia that, instead, lies nowhere. In the transitive gap between these two apparently aporetic propositions, the contemporary ubiquitous utopia moves. The current meaning of the ubiquitous concept is immersed in the flows of digital culture, so - if you type ubiquity - there is an infinite phantasmagoria of sites. The reason is simple: this term identifies the modus operandi in the web-culture. A shared affirmation is that the web is ubiquitous and that the subject that uses it absorbs the communicational ubiquity of the space-time practices of the Internet. In contemporary times, the spatio-temporal coordinates become tendentially superfluous and expands a type of ubiquitous subjective experience. The researcher me is placed in this situation of ubiquity immersed in his personal experience and in the instantaneous relationship with the other; and this other is equally ubiquitous, in the sense that he lives where his digitalized communication system is at that moment active. This experience does not mean the dematerialization of interpersonal relationships; attests a complex psycho-corporeal network, optical and manual connections, certainly cerebral and imaginary that move the experience of the subject even in the apparent immobility.

The obvious psychological implications would require a specific research, together with a self-research by the subject-ethnographer who experiments on him/herself these accelerated mutations. The concept of subject manifests itself fully in such ubiquitous connections. And the ubiquitous ethnography expands a connective subjectivity. They are plots that connect fragments

of spaces/times lacking that “normal” identification and that multiply temporary identities. The subject of the ethnographic experience is ubiquitous. And the divergent ubiquitous utopia may be the perspective for a not-anthropocentric anthropology.

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