

# Transdiscipline vs. Culture loss

We live a reality of fear and hope...globalisation is considered contradictory on different aspects, it pursues human unification and homogenization of lifestyles, production, consumption and exchange all over the world, and everything it implies.

On the other hand, globalisation transgresses the culture, environments and identities, leading to the dissolution of the communities that are part of a society, and turns them all into one with no identity.

The big sphere where we develop as individuals suffers fast and constant changes. We have lost the capacity to choose and decide over the quantity of objects, products and things that surround us.

Sometimes we do not know how to use them or if they have to be part or not of our life, nevertheless, we make them ours, for not feeling marginated. The design of some of these objects does not pay attention to values and cultural meanings which could establish empathy with users, although we live in a time that speaks about innovation and research of users needs, as a priority for making design.

The reconstruction of its methodology, since 1980, has explored the integration of social sciences, for developing new methods and tools, as well as new ways of sources, and material management. But this view has focused on the importance of the consumer's power to create new forms to reach the clients.

We can lead this methodology further, the evolution of interdisciplinary workgroups has marked an important step, but the next one is focused on the defense of communities cultures, for not losing what has taken so long to build our identity.

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For two decades or so, "the world is no more exclusively a group of nations, the world's center is not mainly the individual, nation and individuals have continued being real and themselves but have been absorbed by global society"[6]. This did not appear suddenly, on the contrary, its origin comes from international history evolution.

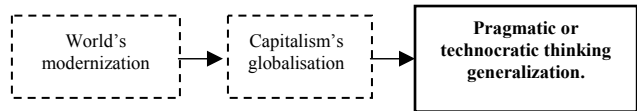


Fig. 1. World's Evolution Main Phases

This global system is characterized because "relations, procedures and economical, political, demographical, geographical, historical, cultural and social structures, developed on a world scale, acquire preeminence over relations, procedures and structures developed at a national scale." [6]

Its pursued ideals and objectives are neither previously defined, nor respond to determined parameters, since it is a system never experienced before. Each day becomes consolidated after one another and occasionally contradictions are fallen into.

Despite this, its main objective is very clear, the homogenization of life, production, consumption and exchange models all over the world along with its implications. Something described by Ramonet (1998) as "a same life style in every earth corner: the same movies, the same TV shows, news, songs, publicity, objects, clothing, cars, urbanism, architecture, departments, furniture and decoration"

In this paper i will discuss and critique the rol of globalisation in structuring the future methodology of design, and the necessity for working crossdisciplinary in a globalising mode of production. Arguing from a model of global center-periphery structures and considering a total commodification of design is well on its way, so that design production must be seen as a broad concept covering material and immaterial production. This paper also argues that multicultural approach must be taken to design, and design must be seen as a prime mover in the production of new structures of meaning. It proposes the potentials of local community cultures as resources of design innovation. Transdiscipline is suggested as a proactive solution to design complexity under global production, as it makes the interaction of various life world spheres culturally visible and productive. A greater integration of user-studies and social sciences in design work is advocated.

We should not recognize and analyze only global system contradictions, because it has also propitiated development on information and knowledge with an impressive speed affecting the dynamics of discipline's work and thus changing their direction, towards innovation, particularly on design, pushing for the testing and use of new materials, as well as the creation of experiences and services.

Information and knowledge have become new production raw materials, their use untie the immateriality and virtuality of time, getting to a point where “information consumption grows faster than raw materials consumption.”[8] This way “digitalized speed turns the traditional step by step logistic chain into anachronism, contributing to the esthetization and culturalization of all social reality.” [11]

Nevertheless, despite design’s materialy or immaterialy, Goldfinger (1997) has recognized that design “molds our emotions, perceptions and cultural and spiritual values. It transports the constitutive elements of our society’s daily imagination. All this has a price, everything turns into mercantile objects: education, culture, art, creation, including well-being”. Objects become merchandise that is bought, sold, kept and returned at our own will.

Material	Immaterial
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objects</li> <li>• Products</li> <li>• Merchandise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services</li> <li>• Images</li> <li>• Information</li> <li>• Knowledge</li> </ul>

Fig. 2. Design products

What has been stated confirms once again that every global system event implies “the capital’s dynamism, in all its forms, the breaking or exceeding of geographical frontiers, political reigns, cultures and civilizations.” [6]

This far, I have done a quick review of globalisation advantages, disadvantages and contradictions, however, authors whose work has focused on related issues, coincide on certain key system patterns. Francisco Pérez (2003) refers to them as “the 4 new globalization supports aids”:

1. Wisdom and knowledge
2. Market and financial activity
3. Information and communication systems
4. Intricate organization of every human living and their experience

These support aids summarize global system interests, but we have to keep in mind that, at international level, they are going to be inserted under two different main perspectives. The first, central countries; the second, peripheral countries.

Central countries are the flux joint, because of their high interconnectivity levels and aversely the periphery is the network’s end, this is why their interconnectivity is weaker. [8]

It is necessary to recognize that “globalisation protagonists are not new technologies themselves, but mega global enterprises who have promoted economies integration, political breakup, employment reduction or displacement to third world countries and who have also unshackled a proletarian wave of medium

sectors and a profound impoverishment of low sectors, while private ones continue their way to enrichment.”[12]

*Corporations are no longer centralized on ruling or metropolitan countries, also called central countries. Productive units and organizations, that include technological innovation, influence zones, cultural adequacy and other merchandise demands on production, distribution, exchange and consumption which attend to real and imaginary needs move into developing countries and are distributed over continents, islands and archipelagos. A new international work and production division is growing, it involves the end of fordism procedures and homogeneous products in assembly lines. Work organization and production processes are developed by flexibility means, highly accelerated by automation, robotics, microelectronics and computer science. This is how capitalism generates itself, transforming the world into something that looks like a global factory. [6]*

So far, I have just used some essential ideas in order to look into globalisation and its implications as well as a global business panoramic; where objects, services and experiences that surround us are produced. A segment of a network formed of various phases, one of these directly related to design. Thus, design becomes the origin of an interactive link among human beings and objects or services that are part of our contexts.

All along its existence, manhood has replied to its survival needs, as a consequence, we have developed our inventive abilities, looking for ways to make activities easier. These means are body extensions, tools and objects that, as time goes by, have evolved and nowadays have become machines and sophisticated systems, whose finality is make life handy.

But besides human inventive capacity, we count on a receptive one, this means, everything that is around us is interpreted in our mind, thus generating patterns and looking for language, ideas, beliefs and other identities that make us part of a culture.

That is to say, tools and objects are linked to our culture and, at the same time, they are individual and collective behavior modifiers; during its evolution they acquire symbolic effects, strengthening their relation with the environment. This confirms that design is a social phenomenon. Its concept has become large and complex and it replies to an individual or collective human need.

But the big sphere where we develop as individuals and collectivities suffers fast and constant changes. We have lost the ability to choose and decide over the quantity of objects, products and things that surround us. Occasionally, we do not know how to use them or decide whether they have to be part of our life or not. Nevertheless, we make them ours, for not feeling marginated. The design of some of these objects does not pay attention to values and cultural meanings, potential factors which could help designers to establish empathy between users and objects, despite the fact that we live in a time about innovation and research of users needs is spoken about, as tools for designing, we have forgotten the cultural factor.

Here grows the main concern of life models homogenization and the global system. This will imply homogeneous design

proposals and the possibility of emphasizing the adoption of incompatible objects or services that deny our identities in a very extreme scene that might end in the loss of culture.

A few lines written by Octavio Paz's work pictures contemporary life perfectly: "People live immersed in a time that blinks constantly and gives us the sensation of a continuous movement, constantly accelerated. But are we really moving or are we going just around the same place? Illusion or reality, the past goes away dizzily and fades out. At the same time, the loss of the past causes, fatally, the loss of the future".

Globalisation transgresses culture, environments and identities: devastates them; leads to the dissolution of communities that are part of a society, and turns them all into one with no identity. "Integration of different horizons implies renouncing or destroying one in favor of the other"[11], "everything is present, placed without origin and happening without history or memory...little by little global society subsumes national society, characters that could identify with what is called "the national" are valid but simultaneously join the dynamic and contradictory global society configurations and movements."[6]

"Every time is more obvious that the objects and services we use and which are produced on a world scale, nevertheless, just satisfy an individual's consumption way"[8] and, at the same time, we are experiencing a slow detachment from our origins, which is not perceived, but still happening.

Maybe in central countries this fact is less perceptible, because contemporary life models have been similar for longer, but in the periphery everything is different. Our societies are formed yet by a whole diversity constituted by groups and communities, which have their own manners and traditions, life models are not generalized.

At this point i will take an example for trying to join some ideas i have mention until now, within a real situation that has been developing during last 3 decades in India, who represents the newest case where design has become a generator for evolving.

India's case importance, lies on similarities with many Latinamerican countries, where all nations share the same background, all of them were colonies earlier. These places deal with a conflict between the import of new products and technologies that as a result brings out effects on the cultural diversities.

By growing under the colonial rule, our countries have been exposed to the western world including education, ideas, thinking, products, technologies, even industrialization, part of them have been directly transplanted or adapted to local structures.

India as an independent country has found the way to support her growth endorsing nation projects visualized as possibly succesful, and little by little she has positioned on a respectful

level, entering to many areas like design to push up community development and social change.

Despite the efforts for developing a grass-root level economy, India can not live isolated from the outside world, it is a fact that globality influences her, so it worths to mention a particular example for supporting the ideas mainly related to design concern of this statement.

Products of new technologies imported from western are adopted by Indians but they do not fit their needs, it happens all the time everywhere, this is the case of microwaves and refrigerators which have little to do with local foods or cooking and storing practices, here is where i reinforce my statement about identity loss. There are lots of objects which have no meaning for us, we use the incorrectly sometimes, cause we just adapt them to our life styles.

After this peripheral situation example, i would like to review other perspectives suggested to reach a solution against global system.

Mario Vargas Llosa in his article "The Culture of Liberty" expressed: "the most effective attacks against globalisation are usually not those related to economics. Instead, they are social, ethical, and, above all, cultural."

This idea could be qualified as extremist, because it has no sense formulating attacks against globalisation The indicated action, in this case, would be to follow a strategy based on the idea that "for a global economy, there needs to be a global culture".[8] This global culture has to think about **pluralism** as an immovable value, because "its obligation is to respect cultural multiplicity." [10]

This is an important step for avoiding the weakness or loss of identity. Finally, we can not stop global systems, we are already part of them, but we can look for alternatives to equilibrate system strengths and debilities, intensifying the attention on cultural heritage threats, because it is important to never lose the origins that distinguish us from each other.

Life models homogenization search must be defined, or it may reach negative scenarios, strong enough to make a society forget its origins. And then pretending to establish a global society with no past, as we have emerged from nothingness.

To pluralism, homogenization is evil and assimilation is a benefit, instead of thinking of humanity as a mass, we should start getting to know the groups that are part of our society, for ensuring intercultural peace.

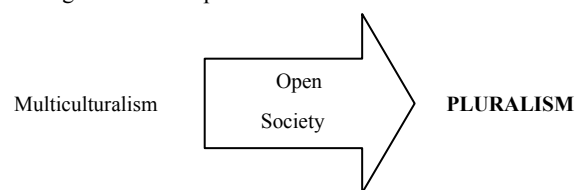


Fig. 3. The sequence for reaching pluralism.

The previous includes also, restructuring the wide culture concept, which “essentially is the identity representation sense produced on a community, and that ends with a symbolic universe.”(Altez, 2000)

“This new organization mode of fully industrialized societies, tries to integrate cultural goods production and consumption to the capital gathering movement on a monopolist and transnational scale. Culture serves as a growing direct way to the extended reproduction of capitalist relationships.”[11]

At present, **culture** has become another resource for global system performance, that is why we should take up again its definition as the battle for the meaning.

Individuals are animals inserted into a meanings network built by themselves, Clifford Geertz (1996) considers that culture is that network and the analysis of it, it is not an experimental science looking for laws, but an interpretative science looking for meanings.

In line with anthropologist Geertz I see culture predominantly as a field producing meaning. This way it will turn into a potential strenght in order to face transformations in every sphere globalisation gets into.

It is undeniable that response dynamics in face of the global system evolution, in every context, has tried to synchronize with rhythm variation. During the last decades, design methodology got reconstructed since 1980, it has explored the integration of social science so it can develop new methods and tools as well as new ways of sources and material management.

At the inside of the design discipline, the concern on giving priority to users has become evident, understanding their real needs and making connections with other disciplines that can help to know human beings better and therefore use the information obtained on marketing improvements. But this view has focused on the importance of the consumer’s power to create new ways of reaching more clients.

By not having previous knowledge of the global system, complexity has solved part of the problems. Now that we are acquainted with the system, as the result of growing along with it, we realize its true dimension.

We can lead this methodology further. Evolution of interdisciplinary workgroups has marked an important step, but the next one, once we have a clearer globalisation background, is focused on the defense of the culture of communities, in order not to lose the identity that has taken so long to build.

Interdisciplinary work has adopted research as its main tool, “addressed to describe expressive mediations, understood as the result of mediations between a group’s techno cultural system and socio cultural heterogeneity, with its sub cultural diversity and plural expressive forms.”[11]

The goal is not to forget about the progress we have reached. We have gone through the dynamics of knowledge simplification and sectorization, to interdisciplinary workgroups supported by research as an irreplaceable tool and now we are at the very beginning of transdiscipline which represents knowledge unification.

Transdiscipline has the answer to globalisation complexity, making the pattern of life spheres interaction visible.

The Italian writer Carlo Emilio Gadda (1957) used to say: the inappropriate catastrophes are not ever a consequence or an effect, of just one motive, from a singular cause; before them there is a vortex, a point of cyclonic pressure in the world awareness and a part of the causes have been against it, it means that the world is a system of systems. This system of systems called by Edgar Morin: the Complexity Theory, “substitutes the disjunction / reduction / one-dimensional paradigm for the one of distinction / conjunction that allows to distinguish without separating, allows to associate without identifying or reducing.

Fig. 4 Mechanicist vision.

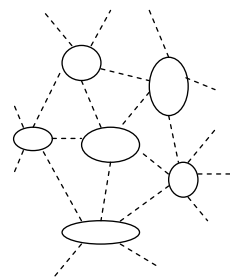
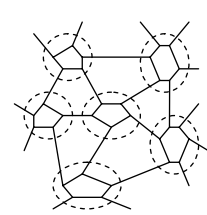


Fig. 5 Systemic vision



I therefore see it as important that we should stop thinking that knowledge is unidimensional and partial, because only complex thinking will guide us to civilize our knowledge.

To Edgar Morin, “complex thinking integrates the simplification thinking modes as much as possible, but rejects the disabled, reductive, one-dimensional and blinding consequences of simplification.”

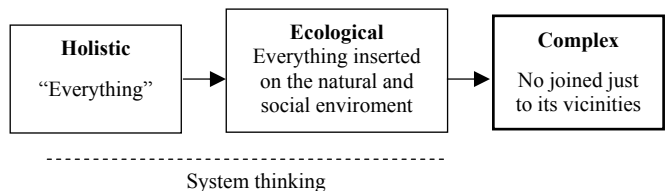


Fig. 6 Thinking evolution

“Globalisation is a net that interlaces systems, occupies territories, and makes frontiers porous, it assigns function specializations and relatively connects every indispensable reality.”[8]

Just a few global society studies and interpretations formulate general approaches; wide and integrative. There is a continuity on paying attention to certain aspects, but we have to keep in mind that: "Globalisation is a complex sequence of processes and not just one..." (Giddens)

Thus, **the objective** of this theoretical statement is to raise the interest on the transdiscipline view, so we can get some help to understand our world complexity and, in regards to design, it may be the integrator of culture, nature and object.

Transdiscipline will open our mind to look for link up fields with other spheres (areas, disciplines and contexts) not necessarily next to us, and collaterally to make our task transcendent with the non-stop world changes. "The possible fertility that comes from global society meditation, on its configurations and movements, gets bigger if knowledge does not remain in the same place and allows itself to look around freely and sharply, over next and ancient, present and past, real and imaginary places". [6]

It is thus my argument that the **way** to reach this objective is inserting complex thinking into design cases, approaching every single one of its phases and methodology. Giving special attention to the deep study of social sciences, particularly to Anthropology as a link up, not unique but as a discipline that has demonstrated prominent results and has an essential character for rescuing identity and cultural heritage.

For a couple of decades until now, "social sciences have been challenged to think the world as a global society" [6], a P. Levy statement related to this says: the ideas come from social interactions.

Anthropology as a part of social sciences but applied to design, "attends to uses and ideas about objects, and objects conforming material life and ideas; cases whose environments are daily nature, imagination and tangible beliefs and paradigms. Its purpose is to explore the link between the human and the object; what guides things creation, their uses and the their place inside the community memory where they are kept." [7]

The **aim** is to generate a strategy with the goal of stopping or offsetting cultural devastation that might result from globalization if we keep on allowing its on-going flux and without limiting its reach.

The essential interest is strengthening identity as part of defense of diversity and think over the use of the concept "glocal", which "gathers the words global and local to describe the fine balance between the two approaches in international management".

All this complexity involved with globalisation and transdiscipline needs a strategy, which from an initial purpose allows to imagine any kind of action scenes, and can be imposed over unexpectedness and uncertainty. Strategy takes advantage from chances, gives us flexibility and a narrow response opportunity. Regarding economics, this must be

considered the key to competitiveness (David and Malore, 1993)

Something important to take into account within the strategy I have proposed is what Martin Barbero (1992) has defended: media can recover the prints that allow for recognition of cultures and a dialog between generations and traditions. Studying the changes of national images and metaphors, of devaluation, secularization, myth reinvention and rituals by which this contradictory but still powerful identity, erases and rewrites itself from local and transnational perspectives.

The most optimistic scene we can wait for must be similar to the one described by Fernando Martin Juez:

*In the future only the mechanical and electronic pieces will be produced in high masses; according to the community, the final tool will be constructed on narrow series, who will incorporate the random in the formal combinations, as well as function adaptation and the needs for the especific comunity users; it means that, the pieces and accesories are going to be industrial and the final object handcrafted. Designing will be the consequence of modern and old technologies, of the most advanced ideas and the most intimate wisdom. The objects, its appearance, manipulation and use are going to be as singular as there are users ready to require a design. [7]*

However the scene nature, we have not to forget that the best solution for a specific need can not be found in a panacea capable of being used in any part of the world. The right answer is rather a function of cultural, social and economical local patterns, an element inside a complexity of related factors.

Therefore, I invite you to think about this reflection I have exposed during this conference, and to consider its transcendence and value for the disciplines that are part of our growing global sphere.

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