The 'Extreme': Philosophical and Socio-anthropological disquisitions

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Abstract

The "extreme" is a hyper-connoted but not well-defined word. A reductionist conception of the environment as a mere "ecological system" (environmentalism) influences the answer given to the question about what the "extreme" is. It is a phenomenon containing negative conditions that are difficult to survive for most known life forms; these conditions, mainly obstacles, may be: extremely high or low temperature or pressure; high levels of radiation, acidity, or alkalinity; absence of water or water with high concentration of salt or sugar; presence of toxic substances, and so. Consequently, examples of extreme environments are the following: geographical poles, very arid deserts, volcanoes, deep ocean trenches, high mountains, outer space. But "extreme" is also the result of the dialectic between the *homo viator* and the *stabilitas loci,* in terms of internalization of the extreme environment -natural or constructed- in the everyday life, and the exteriorization of the landscape of the soul of such a subject and local community. In sum, it emerges the interdependence and dialectics between the Subject's and the Socio-cultural worlds.

To capture what *extreme* is, presents more questions than certainties: is it a point of arrival or a starting point? Is it an abysmal limit as a sort of *finis terrae* or, instead, should be considered as setting in motion of the place? Confines, radicality, memory, uncertainty, silence, reflexivity are dimensions to be considered when analyzing the "extreme", because this phenomenon not only deals with the environmental, geographic and climatologic features but also with socio-cultural, anthropological, political & power relations, and socio-economic variables.

Keywords

Extreme, confine, space & time limits, circumpolarity, ecological system, *milieu,* heterotopia, utopia, radicalism, silence

1. Preliminary considerations

It is necessary to go beyond the original concept of environment, which was predominantly centered on its physical and natural specification as "ecological system", and then favoring the emphasis on the anthropological, socio-cultural and philosophical dimensions- which are inextricably integrated into any concept of extreme environment (cf Acebo Ibáñez & Costa, 2010: 257).

In fact, the human environment is constituted by a selection of objects which have existential importance for the subjects, they are meaningful and make sense (cf Rothacker, 1948, 1930), together with the historical memory possessed by a given town, city or local community, together with their collective representations, myths and beliefs.

The distribution of extreme environments on Earth has varied through geological times, where there are organisms (*extremophiles*) that do live in such conditions and are so well-adapted that they can readily grow and multiply.

But the historical subject has been dwelling along different areas or spheres (cf Peter Sloterdijk, 2013, 2005, 2004, 2003, 1988), namely: a) the founding proto-spatial experience (the maternal womb: the *being-entering-in-the-world*),b) the places later inhabited by said subject (house, town, city: the *metoikesis* mentioned by the Greeks as mobilizations of the *homo viator*), and c) movements to distant scenarios (deserts, extreme environments, unknown confines which lead, in a circular movement, to the self-absorption of the subject) (cf Vázquez Roca, 2009).

Deleuze and Guattrari (1994) prefer to talk about *milieux,* territories, assemblages and cosmic planes, which help us to consider these phenomena as "movements": i) territorialization, ii) deterritorialization (relative and absolute), and iii) reterritorialization. We are thus not only facing an original theory of becoming (*ritornelo*), but also a new conception of space and time: time no longer as "measure" but as "difference", and no longer space only as extension but as intensity (cf Borgi, 2014).

The "extreme" is a hyper-connoted but not well-defined word. It is just like with other everyday concepts; it is said that when someone asks us, for example, "what is 'time'?", we know what it is if we don't have to explain it, but when we have to express it in words, we hesitate in answering. Consequently, a reductionist conception of the extreme environment as a mere "ecological system" *(environmentalism)* influences the type of answer given to the question about what the "extreme" is, leaving aside some of its qualified dimensions.

An extreme environment contains *per se,* at first, negative conditions that turns difficult to survive for the most known life forms. These conditions, mainly obstacles, may be as the experts point out: extremely high or low temperature, pressure, levels of radiation, acidity, alkalinity, and also the absence of water or the presence of water containing high concentrations of salt or sugar; or the presence of toxic substances in the soil or main sources of water, etc. Consequently, examples of extreme environments are the following: geographical poles, arid deserts, volcanoes, deep ocean trenches, high mountains, and outer space. Living organisms under these conditions during a long-term evolution and the respective natural selection, are often very well adapted to their living circumstances (Lorenz, 1965).

2. Questions about the extreme

The "extreme", beyond any epistemological reductionism, implies a *total radicality* that refers to its multi-dimensionality, namely: environmental, geographical, aesthetic, historical, social, economic, political-ideological, normative-axiological, anthropological, literary, artistic. We are speaking about a dramatic realm where the subject's and the socio-cultural worlds intersect within a supposed environmental determinism.

Now, aesthetically or geographically, the extreme always implies an implicit heroism for its dwellers. Consequently, this heroism may be a sort of *citizenship letter* from the extreme, a source of identity for those who "inhabit" it, and also a source of admiration for those who observe and perceive that phenomenon from their "*right here*". Let's remember that the "hero" is one of the archetypes mentioned by the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, and that the term "archetype" refers to a construct that Jung elaborates to explain all those dream images and universal fantasies belonging to religions, myths, legends: autonomous ancestral images that constitute what he called the collective unconscious. Precisely, that "individual heroism" would be opposed to a given geo-climatological determinism.

In any of the cases, it is the dialectic of the *homo viator* and the *stabilitas loci*, in terms of "internalization" of the extreme environment -natural and constructed- and the "exteriorization" of the landscape of the soul of such a subject and such a local community (cf Bachelard 1975).

If the extreme is "heterotopia", this is verified only if it is seen from a cognitive otherness, although perhaps with potential ethnocentric deviations. If the extreme is "utopia", it emerges as a "necessary" and

"functional" place for the modern and postmodern mentality, an eventual flight from both the hyper-consumerist and "risk" societies. Thus, the extreme could represent a forced "exile" of the "otherness"; sometimes we perceive as extreme what we do not reach because we cannot or do not want, or sometimes representing a distance that we just build ourselves.

But does the extreme imply "distance" -spatial, cultural, social, economic, geographical, ideological? It depends on how the observer of the extreme defines distance or proximity. Because the one who defines or describes as "extreme" a given territory or socio-cultural world, does it from his/her own place and world of belonging.

Likewise, how do those who live in a space or qualified territory define themselves as "extreme"? For example, a socio-anthropological researcher who lives in a western metropolis and needs to study an environmentally extreme socio-cultural world could face the surprise, pity or anger of the natives of that extreme area, who could reasonably answer: "You are the one who lives in an extreme environment, highly polluted and with a stressful urban daily life. Unlike us, that we are living in this environment and community many centuries ago and we are totally rooted".

3. The extreme landscape: point of arrival or starting point?

The landscape is generally more than the landscape itself. Simmel (1998: 175) glimpses and expresses it in a simple and complex way: "Our conscience must have a new whole, unitary, above the elements, not linked to its isolated meaning and not mechanically composed from them: this is the landscape." It means that it is not just the given, it is not a piece of the planet that we contemplate immediately "[...] it can only be a transit point for the total forces of existence". It would be "a vision experienced as a self-sufficient unit, interwoven, however, with an infinitely more distant extension, that flows further, understood between borders that do not exist for the totality of nature, which lives below, in another stratum" (*ibidem*: 176).

Once it is separated from nature, the "civilized" man returns to it, making it landscape. For Simmel (1998: 185s) this is a tragedy of the spirit, that is: to say that the part of a whole becomes an autonomous whole, because for the German philosopher and sociologist "feeling of the landscape" and "visual unity of the landscape" are but two moments of a single phenomenon.

Simmel (1977) made important contributions to a sociology and psycho-sociology of space and its properties (cf Acebo Ibáñez: 1996, 1985),

as well as on the concept of *limit,* implicit -or explicit- in his aesthetic essays. Hence are mentioned the contrasts between the mountain as a boundary, border and division, and the sea as a union, link and facilitator of human contacts. Paradox between the (apparent) proximity on the other side of the mountain that nevertheless maintains a given distance, and the (in)apparent distance of the maritime horizons, where its horizontal immensity accelerates the vocation of encounter and bridge (cf Acebo Ibáñez 2008).

4. The extreme and the limit

The extreme implies a kind of abysmal limit, which calls for silence to better contemplate it. Hence the need for the intuition of the extreme emerges as contrary to an "ideology of linearity" (Dotolo, 2013).

The border (the extreme) identifies a being-in-common as a *space of a lack*, oriented towards the creation of bonds that help to overcome it.

The tendency or need to cultivate a culture of the border, finds its reason of being by helping to understand the enigmas of life, beyond the threshold of knowledge (Dotolo: 2013: 125s).

The narration of the "extreme" emerges as confirmation of the *extreme as limit* beyond which emerges alienness, exile, mystery; because in the end the *terra incognita* is always a need: to know it as an utopia or, at least, to confirm our identity and place from precisely that immeasurable distance attributable to the extreme and the unknown.

What is the degree of compatibilization of the narratives of the extreme developed from within (*ad intra*) and from outside (*ad extra*)? Dialectics between proximity and distance, ego and alter, known and unknown. It would seem that to speak, describe and to move to "the extreme" supposes to be confirmed as an outsider coming from (perhaps) a "not extreme" place. Anyway, as Oubiña states, "[…] the narrations of the extreme allow the spectacular appearance of the effort that implies 'confer a sense'" (Oubiña: 2011: 33).In short, the end is *finis terrae*, the last point, but still a part of the continent (cf Sarlo,2011: 21).

5. The extreme as "setting in motion of the place"

The extreme is path, movement and approach: never "arrival" in the strict sense, but confirmation of the departure and the path "between".

The extreme grows and is justified from the lack (of the ordinary) and the wealth (of the extraordinary). Hence, the presence of its everlasting founding relationships with heroism (and resilience).Dialectic of the

"beyond" and the "right here": does the extreme exist because someone perceives and calls it that way from a "right here"? Are there any ways to communicate the extreme? Or better: is it communicable?

Extreme does not represent only a place because it deals also with *time* and *memory*. The strategy of the "fleeting instant" arises from the experience of finitude, where the awareness that there are other worlds and other visions of existence breaks with the ethnocentric and geocentric illusion.

In fact, to better understand the subject-territory-world holistic relationship, it is necessary to consider the temporal dimension, which structures, constitutes and sustains both the socio-cultural world (history) and the subject's world (biography). *Being* and *time* must be taught together (Nietzsche, Heidegger), beyond the forms that can be acquired.

Extreme and time are also uncertain and mostly unknown. Ergo, the narrations of the extreme are seen with the need to "narrate uncertainty". Consequently, *perplexity* emerges within the subject's world, assembled in a now chaotic cosmos that moves between the longing of the Greek *kosmetikós* and the apocalyptic ambush of a post-cosmic chaos, as Peter Sloterdijk (2013, 1988) would say. Thus, the "liquid" society criticized by Baumann (2002) when speaking of modernity and its uprooting and deterritorialization processes, would be nothing but the prolegomena of the said chaos.

6. The silence and the edges of the extreme

That abysmal limit that constitutes "the extreme" extends and calls to silence. Also works of art or literature can be called extreme when working at the edges of that silence: they are constructions on the edge of an abyss (cf Oubiña 2011).

In fact, the extreme has as constituents the "silence" and the respective "edges", and both are needed. Every space has (needs to have) its own edges, otherwise at least we need to ask those who inhabit it from their imagination. In addition, what space can claim the property rights of "its" edges is a question of insoluble result.

Silence is not the lack of sounds but what it is said without saying, atrocious echo of the word predicted or to be said. It happens that all "extreme" is more to be "meditated" and dialoged (in terms of interconnection of senses: *dia-logós*) in silence. It can be observed that those living in extreme environments tend to speak softly, while we can "hear" their gestural dialogues.

7. The extreme properly said

The extreme has no opposite: it is not possible to oppose the extreme to the non-extreme in the same way in which the illegible is confronted with the readable, or the excessive with the harmonic, simply because the extreme does not circumscribe a pole but defines an orientation.

It means that the *radicality* of the "extreme" could be a beginning and not the last frontier. Because thinking about "the extreme" implies "finding a space there to understand the modes of production of meaning" (Oubiña2011: 44).In an endless dialectical movement, "the extreme is the always renewed promise of an afterlife. As soon as it manages to settle in, it becomes a new starting point "(*ibidem*: 47).

To inhabit the extreme implies "to be", accentuating "its effect of permanence and highlighting its sovereignty in the occupation of a place, the repetition through the gerund confers to the fixity of the verb 'to be' an attribute of resonance" (Oubiña, 2011: 73). Thus, "*to be being*" defines or describes well the ways of inhabiting the Antarctic continent, oscillating between the extremes of "forever" and "never again", between "the whole" and "the nothingness". Where the limit no longer limits, it invites to overcome it, which does not mean its elimination given that it is constituent of the "extreme" phenomenon. That's why also in human beings, as limits are constitutive, they cannot be eliminated but they are to be overcome, from their re-knowing in a dynamic opening to the whole.

Ergo, the extreme would disappear if the look that sees and defines it, also disappears. It would only be, then, the *being- in-the extreme*, without depending on the look of the *alter* (looking-glass Self). Anyway, reaching an extreme space "does not necessarily imply a greater knowledge [of it], because things and places do not abandon their secrets" (Oubiña, 2011: 121). So that knowledge does not suppose a revelation but a deepening on one's limitations. Once again: *the extreme, especially in the geographical and mythological realms, remain as such not abandoning their "secrets".*

In the artistic and literary works that border on the extreme, it could well be argued that perhaps they are already *extreme works*: "It is still narrative; but what they tell -their structures of meanings- lies at the edges of every narrative, on a limit beyond which it would no longer be possible to tell. Apparently refractory to any interpretation [...], in these narrations of the extreme the effort that means to confer a sense dramatically appears" (*ibidem*: 33s). The same must be said about the extreme environments given that

inhabiting the confines implies veiling and de-veiling a *grammar of existence* (cf Dotolo, 2013).

8. Realms of the extreme

Although we have mentioned universal features of the "extreme", it is also possible to find different realms of the "extreme", depending on the observer's approach, namely:

a) *Geographic-environmental approach:*

As we have mentioned at the beginning -following different authors-, there are two extreme environments representing exactly the opposite: *cold & high-altitude environments* (circumpolar, glacial and periglacial areas, tundra, high mountains in non-polar latitudes), and *hot & arid environments* (deserts and semi-arid areas, and also the multidimensional process of desertification caused by uncontrolled population growth, human depredation through deforestation and climate change, another direct consequence of the lack of the environmental preservation).

Although these environments tend to be seen as *inaccessible* and *inhospitable*, they do provide adaptable possibilities to settle down and develop specific socioeconomic activities to help the survival of the inhabitants in spite of their low demographic density, in spite of their difficulties for the access to their remote location.

b) *The geopolitical approach:*

This approach considers the different and changeable international power relations and conflict interests occurred along history between peoples, nations and regions, which not in few cases leaded to colonialism and wars. Among the various theories developed for the analysis and study of the international relations, we will focus for our purpose on the *center-periphery* theory developed mainly -but not only- in Latin America, which speaks in terms of central or dominant countries and peripherals or dominated countries (Cardoso 1974, Cardoso & Faleto 2003, Keohana & Nye 2001, O'Donnell 1997, Prebisch 1981a, 1981b, Stiglitz 1998). Facing these historical processes to better understand what is and represents geopolitically the "extreme", we must be aware of who is defining it because, as we know, the act of naming also represents power and dominance over the phenomenon named.

Following this conflict approach, the periphery would be more easily located or named as "extreme", as it is "far from the center", geographically,

socioeconomically and culturally. As dominance and colonialism are phenomena historically well known, we'll not deepen in here. Anyway, during the last part of the 19th century the dominant political class in Argentina used to speak in terms of the dialectic between "*civilization and barbarism*". The first, *civilization*, corresponded to the dominant, modern and modernizing societies; the second, *barbarism*, referred to peoples of societies dominated or to be dominated, as it happened with the Latin American indigenous peoples.

c) Socio-cultural approach:

This approach let us to better perceive and consider what we can call "pockets of extreme", also within a modernized country or even more in developing and underdeveloped ones.

c.1) Global risk society:

Authors, such as Beck (1992), speaks in terms of the "global risk society", stating that it has to do with the development phase of modern society in which social, political, economic and industrial risks tend rapidly to escape from institutional control and protection. Risks, often irreversible, are distributed unequally at the social level, covered by an increasing political and institutional orphanhood. This process is inextricably related to other phenomena, such as the "disenchantment" suffered by citizens in terms of collective meanings, the process of "individualization" linked to a continuous disengagement from the traditional social forms (*Gemeinschaft*) and a re-linkage to modern social forms (*Gesellschaft*).

Risk and uncertainty are based on the recognition of the unpredictable and threats of global society. The individual and collective existence appears suspended over extraterritorial areas such as virtual networks, hyper-connectivity, the multiplication of messages *urbi et orbi* that do not always represent authenticity and depth in communication, tending to privilege the "message" many times to the detriment of the alter (cf Järvelä & Wilenius, 1996).

c.2) Immigration, discrimination and social inequality

Immigration processes, mainly the undocumented ones, represent movement from and towards a sort of extreme. In times of national societies and the fear of "otherness", before a narcissistic view that feeds back on fear (and hatred) towards what is not known, the "extreme" as a "movement of

the place"-as we mentioned *ut supra*- emerges again where migrations (try to) generate their own space. But as perceived as a threat, the immigration movements have transformed the foreigner in a danger (cf P. Sloterdijk, 1988). But in parallel the undocumented immigrants suffer extreme living conditions in the different stages of the migratory process, namely: i) the structural expulsion from their local communities of origin, because of poverty and/or the lack of opportunities; ii) the extreme difficulties to arrive safely to the new locality elected and then be allowed to enter to the new country; and iii) the obstacles and impediments, once living in the new country and place, in terms of being accepted, suffering discrimination if not inhuman treatments, and potential identity problems.

However, the human being migrates ever since he sets foot on the planet, so if migration is a "human" characteristic then discrimination and confrontation against the immigrant should be understood more clearly as "inhuman" forms of behavior, independently of the national interests involved.

c.3) Normative-axiological framework: the anomie as extreme socio-cultural atmosphere
Many debates took place in social sciences around the *anomie*, being it individual or structural. It is an important sociological and psychological category that designates a state in which the individual perceives the absence of rules or norms by which to govern their behaviors. The term was introduced in Sociology by Durkheim (1897) to designate this growing loss of norms as an effect of the division of labor and above all, as a consequence of the limitless increase in expectations. The destabilization of relationships conditions the loss of norms, and anomie arises as a state of uncontrolled aspirations.

According to Durkheim (1893), anomie is linked to the passage of a pre-modern type of society, with little division of social labor and wide consensus, to a modern type of society with an extended division of labor that, in itself, does not imply a disintegrating process but rather a centripetal, integrative and supportive process. Due to the process of historical acceleration, unforeseen changes at the cultural, social and economic levels usually generate an anomic division of labor: new functions are orphans of normative regulation. More than a prolonged structural state, anomie appears, for Durkheim, as a characteristic conjuncture of advanced industrial society, only surmountable through continuous adjustments.

R. Merton (1949), R. König (1958) and R. Cloward (1960) develop the theory in terms of breakdown of the cultural order as a consequence of the incoherence between ends or goals that a society proposes and the means offered to reach such goals.

In fact, cultural ends and norms do not always operate in coordination: the disproportion between means and ends generates deviant behaviors, which operate, according to Merton, as forms of adaptation of behaviors in a society where success through money as a goal does not find parallel adequate access to the means to rich it.

McIver (1950) in his analysis of *anomie* puts the accent on the "state of mind" of the individual, whose moral roots have been annulled: he is perceived as spiritually sterile, becoming skeptical of the affirmation of universal values and entering to a philosophy of negation, without future or past, anticipating by many years the formulations of several representatives of post-modernity. McIver's characterization of anomie ends by pointing out the loss of the sense of social cohesion, the main source for the individual's moral life (cf Acebo Ibáñez & Brie 2006c).

One can ask if it is possible to consider the structural anomie as a socio-cultural phenomenon that leads to a sort of "extreme society" consequence of this structural orphanhood emerged because of the lack of a clear, stable and legitimized normative-axiological framework. Perhaps Durkheim (1897) has already answered this question more than one hundred years ago when in his classical and outstanding essay about suicide, included as one of the four types he pointed out, the anomic one.

c.4) Extreme and the Art

The extreme often tends to be mediated by art (films, photographs, plastic arts, literature, etc.) which tends to confirm and validate the characteristics of "the extreme" (Oubiña 2011). Because the narration is not *prima facie* experience but intuition from the art and its avatars, and also from the myth.

In an extreme work in literature or cinema, the concept of extreme allows us to think an author's work from another side: "Instead of being the *non plus ultra*, it is, in some way, the point from which one returns" (Sarlo 2011: 25).

d) Anthropological-philosophical approach: the "acedia"

The *acedia* (lat. acidia) implies the renunciation of one's own human vocation, becoming alienated and exiled from every heroic attitude. Inhabiting the

extreme tends to be a link with authentic heroism practiced in everyday life without almost knowing it, leaving aside any alienating linearity.

In a technocratic landscape where the subject's world has been blurred to give it a secondary role, emerges this phenomenon very well studied by medieval scholasticism: the *acedia,* a human vice that represents a kind of "laziness", a "deep boredom" in the subject's interiority that prevents him/her from acting in the most intrinsically proper and non-transferable, facing its most authentic needs and self perception. *Acedia* implies the renunciation to the most existential vocation of the *homo religious,* its call to be human creature existentially rooted and generously open *to be-in-the-world* in a space-time that constitutes him/her in terms of territorial or spatial roots *(being by dwelling in a meaningful territory),* of social roots (*being-with-the-other*) and of cultural roots that give framework and sustenance to the coeval conjugation of the *being-oneself* with the *being-with-the-others* in the core of *being –in-the- world.*

Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*: 2-2, Q. 35, A. 4) and Cassiano (*De Coenobiorum Institutis*: L- X) warned that *acedia* consists in *becoming sad in the face of spiritual good.* It is an "inner inaction" of the subject. Aquinas observes the immediate consequences of *acedia*, namely: desperation and instability of purposes (*vagatio mentis*), the instability of place (*instabilitas loci*), resentment, routine and pusillanimity. We have referred to *acedia* when analyzing the types of suicide in the Sociology of Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1897, Acebo Ibáñez 2015). In sum, as an "existential rootedelessness", *acedia* impedes the subject to have firm social and cultural roots.

9. Towards some (in) conclusions: reflexive extreme and identity

The *desert* (literally but mainly figuratively), and also the *extreme* are territories of anguish and sometimes could have been of punishment or the vision of a *homo faber et consumens* inhabitant of a hyper-consumerist capitalist modernity; but they are also, and fundamentally, *territories of self-recovery,* areas that allow mediating transit towards the authentic and strictly necessary (Benjamin, 1921). It means that the restrictions present in a given extreme realm or environment however they provide room for reflection and reflexivity so they are restrictions that broaden the horizon and the perception of space.

Through different approaches to the Arctic issues, some authors refer to the *"reflexive North"* (Aarsæther 1997, Bærenholdt 1998) to stimulate the discourse on *local level development*, which can be related to circumpolarity as

total phenomenon, where the relation between territory, inhabitants, social relations, cultural productions and environmental conditions are inextricably united. Unit reinforced by roots, community attachment, meanings, values, memory and representations of reality. To speak in terms of *"reflexive" extreme region*s implies to deepen the knowledge of those local communities and their internal and external dimensions.

Reflexivity presents two dimensions or meanings, namely: a) *structural reflexivity*, involving the process of change of social structures through social practices, and b) *self-reflexivity*, referring to the process where social actors consider and question their own social practices and processes of change (Lash 1994: 115).

Reflexivity is not related to local development but -as different social scientists affirm (cf Castells 1997, Vattimo, 1999, Acebo Ibáñez 2010, 2006, 2000) to the ways the local communities emerge as meaningful responses to globalization and individualization.

It is our conviction that the heroic attempts to inhabit the Antarctica need to reinforce a *locality approach* to survive over its restrictions and climate obstacles. In fact, the Antarctic everyday life shows new routines and adaptive strategies where new forms of localities and identities are established in a gradual process of institutionalization.

Meanwhile the *coping strategies* to survive and develop social life in extreme circumpolar regions present at least three dimensions, namely:

a) *innovation:* the process of change resulting from new solutions to local problems, as responses to the transformations of a globalizing and increasingly knowledge-based world; b) *networking:* the development of interpersonal relations that permit to overcome any temptation to get fixed in institutionalized limits; and c) *formation of an identity*: the active formation of identities that can reflect on cultural discourses from the local to the global (Bærenholdt & Aarsæther 1998b: 27-36). Consequently, we can affirm that *the extreme becomes close, and the confine just another border.*

Last, but not least, to inhabit the extremes implies at least the search of an *extreme identity,* just in case it was not already got by their dwellers (cf Lash 1994, Aarsæther 1997, Bærenholdt 2000).

As Friedman (1995: 86) affirms, "[…] the practice of identity is about identification of an existential world, the attribution of meaning to the world, to objects, persons and relations. This practice identifies the self as it identifies the world."

Furthermore, shared meanings and identities have been constructed by national-level processes. Thus, identities are stretched out not only over space, but also over time. We still find this kind of social practices performed and symbolized locally, so everyday life in peripheral localities should persist as a central component in the heritage of circumpolar identities, a really core phenomenon to enrich and deepen the local/global and north/south debates.

In short, the extreme is not (it should not be) something external to us, a socio-geographical-existential otherness that (potentially) "alters" us. It is that the crisis of the public space with its pockets of inequity and social conflict, as well as of the territories or extreme areas are, in reality –in the words of Sloterdijk (1988: 124), "[…] a crisis of coming-to-the-world, a crisis […] of the belief that men are beings capable of coming absolutely, becoming part of it ".

Self-restrained in territories of sterile dominion, gentrified in a self-indulgent *being-without-being*, the subject abandons the edges, without realizing that are not precipice but expansion and adventure, because this is precisely the sign of our time: "A time of resignation and *show,* a time of official privacy and apocalypse of privacy. Those who still want to escape in a big way today, look for scandal in something that is no longer an outside ... Until the cave is in an uproar "(ibid., 123s).

Having is enthroned, even what one already has, and above all if it flows from a territorial and subjective strength that is not such but a flattening once heroism was exiled. Virtue, the latter, alien to a petty-bourgeois representation of (own) reality, only recovered from recognition of the extreme insofar as they are "distant": the more, the better. It is about the "postponement of what is important." To the extreme of distancing as far as possible "the extreme" itself, whose presence generates in the contemporary subject a kind of *agoraphobia* that only implies a drive to "return to the cave."

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