

On metaphors, everyday diversity and intercultural education: some further reflections

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This paper aims to clarify and discuss the reasons and limits of three rather popular metaphors that are used to speak of today's complex social and cultural fabric, through references to cultural anthropology, biology and genetics. In her analysis, the author considers not only the linguistic and semantic dimension of each metaphor, but also the pragmatic consequences each entails for the field of intercultural education. In her conclusion, she points out that exploring the many facets of metaphors is a form of intercultural education as it helps to deconstruct some of the current prejudices and stereotypes, and furthermore it encourages a disposition to creativity and intellectual openness that intrinsically belongs to the *interculture*.

Keywords: metaphor; enculturation; diversity; individual–culture; relationship; metissage; hybridization; mestizoed societies

Take a little bird (...) it is made to fly. If the little bird is kept in a cage, how does it know it has wings to fly? How? (...) The book [*Jonathan Livingston Seagull*] is about a seagull but in fact it talks of a human being who feels, who knows he's different from others of his kind. (...) It's the story of the little bird (...) I could find part of myself in that character. I felt I was looking at myself in a mirror. (Roma cultural mediator, in Gobbo 2004b)

Introduction

The metaphor used by the young Roma cultural mediator to express a human aspiration that she recognized as her own is both touching and telling: a protective environment – the family's or the ethnic group's, in this case – can become a limiting one if the subject wishing to go beyond it, to learn and have new experiences feels constrained by it (and by the lack of actual opportunities society should provide – we must add) rather than reassured or comforted. If we translate both the aspiration and the metaphor into cultural anthropological discourse, we can understand how the process of enculturation initially taking place within the family and the ethnic group should continue *also* outside the web of close relations in order for a person to try her/his own potentials and pursue different goals. As I noticed (Gobbo 2004b, 636), 'Jonathan Livingston Seagull soaring higher and higher in the sky provides an example of how crucial imagination is for all of us in order to think of other life options, of different life prospects each of us-as-agents can first envisage and then try to enact', since one's human potential need not be restricted to a so called culture's *script* (cf. also Greene 1978; Hanson 1986; Appiah 1996; Nussbaum 1997; Gobbo 2003, 2004a).

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Indeed, the reasons to pay attention to the role imagination can play in education are even strengthened in our contemporary multicultural societies (Greene 1995).

The pulsating images of the *exergo* offer a good opportunity to realize how metaphors are a productive and challenging way to release the imagination, and make it work at the symbolic level; however, metaphors ought to be appreciated and analyzed not only for their expressive power but also, and equally importantly, for the pragmatic side they entail. Almost fifty years ago, such a side was pointed out by philosopher Israel Scheffler (1972 [1960]) who made educators notice how metaphors enjoy a prominent, if not inherent, position in educational discourse: historically, they have allowed educators to put forward – or to understand – different ideas about childhood and accordingly related ways to achieve the goals of their educational activity. We only need to think of venerable, albeit questionable, metaphors depicting the child, and its mind, as a clean slate, an empty container, or malleable material (wax or clay), to visualize *at the same time* both the kind of educational relation *and* the educational program each of these metaphors indirectly represents. Precisely because of the complex message educational metaphors convey, they are an invitation to educators to reflect on the linguistic meaning *as well as* on the indirect practical indications accompanying it: thus, and unlike the previous metaphors, those that refer to the child as a living organism (e.g. a plant) or, on the contrary, as hard material (a slab of marble, a piece of wood to be carved) assign different responsibility and plans for actions to educators. In the first case, the latter will acknowledge the child's independent capacity to learn (i.e. to grow) that they are to attend, support and orient but *cannot* determine, while in the second one they will of necessity have to single out and respect the child's own characteristics so as to avoid disastrous consequences (as when the marble or wood vein is not taken into account by the artist).

Today, and especially in intercultural education, a number of metaphors have become popular that intend to express the contemporary social and cultural complexity of multicultural societies. Thus, as a way to valorize diversity and at the same time to underline what is common between migrants and the host population, namely culture, intercultural education has since its inception recognized the relevance different cultural traditions can have for education, urging that migrants be referred to not just as mere work force or manpower but as metaphorical 'carriers (or bearers) of culture' (cf. CDCC 1983; also Gobbo 2004c).

Another metaphor that has gained wide popularity is the one representing our multicultural societies and cultures in terms of 'hybridization' or '*métissage*': what results are '*mestizoed*' societies and cultures, and even *mestizoed* classrooms (when a growing population of migrants' children attends them), all of them metaphorical expressions underlining how the effort to symbolically *define distinctive* cultural traits, values, beliefs, customs within the contemporary cultural complexity appears rather pointless before present historical and social heterogeneity.

At the same time, a widespread awareness that a population increasingly composed of young persons born of immigrant families in the host countries – a considerable number of which already participates competently into the various local linguistic and cultural scenes – is at the origin of another metaphor: the 'bascule' or '(unstable) balance' expresses the delicate, even fragile, cultural equilibrium in which those young individuals find themselves. Since they cannot be defined as immigrants or foreigners, they are figuratively represented as oscillating, or wavering, between two cultures (their family's or group's, and the local one), and in difficulty to decide to which of the two they will eventually give their allegiance. Likewise, their cultural

identity is imagined as suffering from the lack of firmness apparently considered indispensable for a self-assured life, instead presumably enjoyed by their peers.

Theoretical background

This article intends to analyze the above metaphorical representations of people and societies and indicate both the reasons in favor of their use in intercultural education and the limits they entail, following the philosophical interpretation of metaphors by Israel Scheffler (1972, 1979, 1988, 1997) who regards metaphorical expressions as theoretical assertions generally worthy of serious consideration since they are able to communicate relevant and unexpected truths. The latter are expressed through a factual analogy or a significant similarity that metaphors suggest with regard to phenomena and events pertaining to the social, cultural and physical world. He posits that they are symbolic ways to organize a person's reflective activity, provide explanations of philosophical or scientific questions and offer practical, though often implicit, indications for educational practice.

In his philosophical perspective, Scheffler acknowledges the valuable role metaphorical expressions play in poetry, science and everyday life, on the one hand, but, on the other, he points out – especially to educators – that metaphors may also have serious limits, and firmly indicates that their semantic and linguistic analysis should be complemented by an indispensable critical appraisal of the social, cultural, educational and moral situations referred to, and by a close consideration of the responsibility and choices they require of people. Furthermore, if metaphors are an ever present, useful and artful way to communicate a certain idea, or to approach an elusive thought, their interpretation cannot but be grounded in 'ingenuity' and on interpretive discontinuity,¹ since 'the interpreter cannot rely on the record of past metaphors. He must rather try to understand the fresh metaphorical inscription through recourse to its literal counterpart' (Scheffler 1979, 81). This is because 'in no case' the interpreter has to do with 'regularity that, once learned, eliminates the need for ingenuity thereafter, leaving only routine inquiry into specified contextual features. On the contrary, metaphors always poses a fresh challenge to the interpreter' (Scheffler 1979, 82).

Because 'understanding a metaphor requires interpretation and investigation in context' (Scheffler 1997, 72), the metaphors briefly presented in the introduction must be situated against the changing contemporary socio-political landscapes and the diffuse awareness of their cultural boundaries' increasing fuzziness. The way social researchers, educators and policy makers speak of culture, and question its relation to reality, resonates of a debate that started at the end of the 1970s, when world societies were ushered into 'a postindustrial, post-Fordist era marked by a new capitalism of flexible accumulation and a shift from the production of commodities to consumption. We were seeing' – according to anthropologist Silverman's succinct yet pointed overview – 'an erasure of political and social boundaries as a result of transnational migration, greatly intensified information flows, and the spread of mass-media culture; a disruption and dislocation of social relationships, which were now all subsumed by capitalism; and new forms of consciousness expressed, among other ways, in global social movements' (Silverman 2005, 323). Post-modernism was charged with intellectually answering those changes: its response to the world transformations:

was marked by several features: a rejection of totalizing meta-narratives and foundational theories and an emphasis instead on fragmentation, pastiche, and blurred genres;

a denial that truth has an objective reality and an insistence that truth is always positional, which entailed a denial also of universal standards; a dissolving of boundaries of all kinds; and a conjunction with the linguistic turn in the human sciences which locates social practices in how people talk (that is, in discourse) and how they think and write. (Silverman 2005, 323)

Metaphors, everyday diversity and intercultural education: a critical appraisal

Against this wider background, we begin to see why researchers and educators speak of people as ‘carriers of cultures’, of processes of cultural change as ‘hybridization’ and ‘*métissage*’, and of ‘*mestizoed*’ societies and cultures, of youth from immigrant families as ‘basculating’ between cultures. All these metaphors interpret today’s cultural complexity and provide reasons for the intercultural turn in education that envisages *all* educational activity (and not only the one addressing migrants’ children’s specific needs) as an encounter qualified by knowledge and sensitivity to cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic differences. The epistemological turn impressed by multiculturalism about forty years ago brought the issue of diversity and identities to the foreground: **educators’ own next step was to learn to recognize and valorize what made minorities and migrants distinctive – their own religious, or ethnic, or cultural differences – and relate to them, in educational practice, on the basis of such a recognition – the demand of which originally represented a way to attain social justice.**

The first metaphor precisely expresses the recognition that migrants, and their children, arrive in the host countries rich with cultural ways that they have learned and been taught in their diverse cultural contexts, and that such processes of enculturation² has produced identities perceived as different by the others (usually coinciding with the host country’s population). **However, the metaphor interprets the *process* of enculturation in terms of its results – the cultural *products*, or *traits* constituting a person’s collective assets and her/his distinctive diversity.** Accordingly, **culture is conceptualized as separate from the individual and her/his agency,** while the former is exclusively seen as *created* by culture rather than as *also creator* of culture (Gobbo 2008a), when, for instance, one seeks to favor changes (even if only at the personal level) by releasing the imagination, by looking for experiences or opportunities that may open new prospects, by organizing to provoke changes and by taking responsibility for them and for their search.³ **From an educational point of view that reflects on the practical consequences of imagining culture as what people ‘carry’ with them in life, rather than what they have been *taught* or *learned* (at times half haphazardly), this metaphor overlooks the individuals’ creativity and agency.** In fact, educational activities – even intercultural ones – have often been planned by considering the ‘new’ pupils and students mostly in terms of their collective identity, namely as young members of a cultural, religious or ethnic group whose symbolic, cognitive and affective grip on them was seen as a determining and lasting factor. Though helpful in highlighting the *effects* of the process of enculturation, and in stressing their value for individuals, the metaphor has serious flaws that reverberate all the way to the educational level: mainly, it ignores that cultural anthropology had long since denounced the risk of assigning the status of a reified existence to the *construct* of culture (Keesing 1958; Honigmann 1967), on the one hand, and on the other hand had likewise insisted at length on *processual* interpretations of cultural transmission and acquisition (Wallace 1961; Goodman 1967; Wolcott 1994). Furthermore, it had also reiterated that **the *concept* of a culture is *constructed* out of people’s actions, and of reasons for those actions, and that the**

ethnographer's close attention to what people do, and not exclusively to what people say, will make the non linear and creative dimension of the processes of teaching and learning (i.e. change, see Keesing 1958) come into appropriate relief. Finally, to continue to speak of individuals as 'carriers of culture' obscures the extent to which a 'culture' that shaped them – especially in their early years, when dependence from significant others may in fact limit the individuals' capacity for exploration, though it ensures their wellbeing and even survival (Goodenough 1976) – is in turn shaped by the 'carriers' themselves (if we persist in depicting them as cultural *sherpa*). Such process of personal re-elaboration of cultural experiences has been conceptualized as *propriospect* (Goodenough 1976), namely 'the unique *version* that each person develops (i.e. constructs, or forms) of the various cultures he or she experiences or recognizes as distinct. 'Cultures' of this order are not the neat ones revealed in anthropological writing; they are implicit, personally defined, and experience based' (Wolcott 1994, 1726). From this it follows that enculturation is to be theorized as a lifelong educational process, along which a person's *propriospect* is widened and enriched, while cultures are thought 'not as 'fixed' but as continually being (re)formed, just as any individual's version of language(s) – i.e. his or her idiolect(s) – and each individual's version of culture(s) – i.e. his or her *propriospect* – are continually being (re)formed' (1728), and people's *agency* (cf. Herzfeld 2006) is recognized and emphasized even in the most difficult interactional and educational situations (Ogbu 2003). Thus, through the analysis of the meanings and practical consequences entailed by the metaphor of people as 'carriers of culture', a reconceptualization is advanced here of the cultural dimension as *also* effect and index of human action, neither easily compacted nor portable, rather than only as products or traits transmitted from one generation to the next.

The analysis of the metaphor that represent migrants' children as 'oscillating' or 'wavering' between the home culture and the host one, is of particular interest at this point since it evokes and expresses the vicissitudes individuals undergo during the process of enculturation, regardless – I add – of the subject's socio-cultural membership (though of course some – usually members of the host society – have more opportunities than others). Migrants who metaphorically proceed warily, tentatively, through everyday life because they did not, or could not, learn enough about the new country's ways are implicitly contrasted with the stability so called natives enjoy thanks to a process of cultural learning and teaching that would apparently allow them not to search for different answers to everyday questions. On the other hand, the migrants' children did learn, and were taught, different habits, languages, values, desires than the ones their parents were enculturated into – perhaps thus fulfilling the latter's hopes for improvement – but loyalty to the family's ways and little guarantee that the new competence will gain them full participation in the host society keeps them in a condition of uncertainty.⁴ If it is likely, for instance, that nation-states' persisting reluctance to grant citizenship rights more swiftly will not make migrants' children's gait firmer, confirming the metaphor as historically appropriate, the latter's limit lies in attributing the condition of unstable balance, with its weight of anxiety and uncertainty, *only* to those young people. Full membership in the host society is imagined to prevent cultural and personal 'bascule' since the enculturation process would *create* culturally rooted and competent individuals who, because of such condition and conviction, will not have, or want, to look for different learning experiences and risk feeling uneasy and uncertain in front of cultural options. On the contrary, cultural anthropology and ethnographic research reminds us that no individual is ever a mere cultural replica, nor are

cultures transmitted without being elaborated by the learners, nor have the so called natives ever refrained from actively searching to explore and acquire new cultural ways. In this sense, everyone – not just migrants – might oscillate and waver in front of alternative choices to be made, new responsibilities to be taken often without knowing for certain what will come, yet aware of being engaged in a crucial learning/growing experience. The critical examination of the limits of this metaphor has turned the latter around, and far from pointing out what would be distinctive of some individuals has instead highlighted what is truly common to all human beings. Finally (and in deep contradiction with the previous metaphor!), ‘hybridization’ and ‘métissage’ are a good examples of the productive relationship between theoretical constructs and metaphors: such metaphors do not intend so much to describe *visible* changes in a population, but express the cultural, religious, linguistic heterogeneity of contemporary societies⁵ by figuratively evoking what results from processes of contact, exchange and interaction taking place at the level of the body. Besides answering the difficulty of defining our mobile socio-cultural realities, these metaphors have become an important part of the intercultural education discourse, because to speak of *mestizoed* societies and cultures is understood to emphasize ‘the positive value of *exchange and reciprocity ... of openness to cultural contamination as a way individuals and humanity have to grow*’ (Gennai 2005, 111, own translation). However, why bring about the realm of nature in order to interpret changes in the cultural one that has instead been created by human principled action, ingenuity and responsibility?

Terms as *métissage*, hybridization and *mestizo* (the mixture of black and white) not only refer to the body but also to different racial origins, thus legitimizing the re-introduction of racial imagery and discourse into social research and education. In fact, such metaphors are based on two different orders of ideas: the existence of entities (races, species) presumably characterized by homogeneity and specificity of genetic traits, on the one hand, and on the other by the process of cross-breeding whose results are usually positive.⁶ Accordingly, groups or cultures are metaphorically represented as well defined, distinguishable, and homogeneous realities. Contact, exchange and relation with other socio-cultural realities then produce inevitable transformations and effects that have a quite famous, though unexpected, antecedent in the metaphor of the ‘melting pot’. The expression is the title of a comedy whose main characters are two young lovers – one Christian, one Jew – who are able to overcome their respective religious differences and painful family histories through the special bodily ‘fusion’ that love entails. The Jewish writer Zangwill wrote *The melting pot* exactly a century ago, and by constructing David and Vera as ‘two antithetic poles’ (Sollors 1990, 90), initially separated by the great distance between their lives, makes the recognition more dramatic that love is the force able to overcome past and present divergences and to transform the lovers’ union into something that was not there before, celebrating their new selves, once that the no longer meaningful family ties and loyalties have been left behind.

A century after the successful opening of Zangwill’s comedy, the analogy between the human body and socio-cultural change is once more back to allow social researchers and educators to speak pointedly of societies, cultures and educational contexts.⁷ This time, however, the body comes boldly to the foreground,⁸ in the company of nature and biology, and aims to express cultural contacts and encounters in terms of genetic and racial cross-breeding. Thus, ‘cultures, like bodies, “interpenetrate” each other, “permeate” each other, “fuse” into each other and become one, “generating” hybridized, *mestizoed* cultures, and ... today they are sanctified while only some time

ago the “bastard” races (that is the hybridized, *mestizoed* ones) were condemned’, notices Italian anthropologist Leonardo Piasere (2002, 96). He instead believes that metaphorical interpretations of human relations require a different kind of analogy, since ‘biological’ metaphors demonstrate ‘how it can be unconsciously easy to equate the concept of culture with the concept of race’ (97), and how the latter is still deeply entrenched in our minds, regardless of its overt repudiation and condemnation.

Precisely if we agree with Piasere’s conclusion, it is all the more necessary to argue the limits of this metaphorical trend. Biologists themselves are concerned with it, because it is seen as legitimizing – on the basis of questionable genetic discourses – a world peopled by individuals *embedded* in their socio-cultural diversities and intellectual capacity. On the contrary, ‘there is nothing inevitable nor genetic in *ethnic and cultural identities* as we know them today ... We are all related and all different’ (Barbujani 2006, 10). If it is true that ‘our ancestors came all from Africa’, their mobility and fertility favoured their mixing together; human biodiversity, however, ‘depends only in part on genetic diversity. In part it depends on factors that, for want of a better term, can be called environmental or cultural’ (2006, 43). In fact, it does not make sense to speak of human races (often ‘casually’ confused with *populations*) because our species is too young and too mobile, while ‘time and reproductive isolation are needed to have genetically distinguished groups’ (2006, 125).

The fact that human beings have always been mobile and have thus borrowed and lent customs, beliefs, artefacts to each others through trade, warfare, colonization (entailing mating on the side, and seldom on a par) makes biological metaphors appear reasonably true: staying alive demands change, diversity and innovation, since too rigid and homogeneous living systems are extremely fragile (Buiatti 2004). They cannot adapt to changed conditions and historically have a greater chance of being destroyed by the latter. In biology, variability and plasticity – what makes change possible – are intrinsically valuable: the more diversified a population’s genetic equipment the greater its possibility to adapt and live. In this sense, the search for and use of genetic variability – the process of hybridization – *together with* casual mutations taking place across generations are a positive fact as they provide human beings with better possibilities to answer the changed environmental conditions and the ensuing ‘disorder’ threatening our living system. ‘The world’s wonderful diversity’ (Buiatti 2004) gives us another reason to appreciate and respect it: by making the life cycle indeterminate and unforeseen, diversity expresses the degree of freedom proper of every system, and especially of our human system, and it can further save researchers and educators from subscribing to social determinism. However, like Barbujani, Buiatti also warns that processes of genetic change – though important – *cannot* explain satisfactorily the intellectual and cultural richness human beings enjoy and that the brain’s great capacity for invention and improvement (realized for instance through tools, writing and education) should instead be duly acknowledged and emphasized. Thus, if ‘biological’ metaphors may celebrate human and cultural diversity, we do not need them to promote educational programs aimed to strengthen our critical and creative potentials and to recognize and appreciate diversity among us in order to avoid embedment into a mono-cultural model of life.

Conclusions

As it emerged from the analysis of figurative representations of contemporary socio-cultural changes and complexity, metaphors themselves are complex linguistic

elements linked to contexts that provide the reference point – by use of analogy and similarity – not only to a literal object but also to the different mental images⁹ that we form of objects.¹⁰ As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson remind us readers through their book *Metaphors we live by* (1980), metaphors impregnate both our everyday language and our conceptual system, thus playing a crucial role in how we define, and act in, social, educational and political contexts.¹¹ Furthermore, they alert us to the fact that we often do not realize that human actions and thinking are shaped by metaphors, and thus we do not pause to interrogate such taken-for-granted worlds. The two scholars take this task on by not only pointing out that metaphors have a pragmatic dimension (a point that Scheffler had clearly indicated in his 1960 work) but that they influence our experience by creating a social reality effect (as metaphors of *métissage* and hybridization are evidence of). Furthermore, they warn that metaphors – especially political and economic ones – can hide aspects of social and cultural reality crucially relevant to human beings. This is particularly true in multicultural contexts where some meanings and/or values might not be shared by everyone. When this happens (as in the authors' example of 'work is a resource'), the exclusive focus on the overt side of the metaphorical message, and the ensuing lack of criticism it entails, can treacherously blind us to the unhappiness, exploitation and even degradation of human lives that the realization of such message can bring.

Therefore, to better understand the assets and the limits of metaphors it is useful (cf. Gobbo 2005) to consider the myths that have developed around them: metaphors are mere decorative or embellishing expressions, and have the exclusive function of suggesting intense emotions or special atmospheres. These dimensions indeed qualify many metaphors, but they do not encompass all their possible functions or qualities: some metaphors might influence us at the emotional and sentimental level, while others, or even the same ones, provoke original associations of ideas that can lead to truths. Therefore, a metaphor is not less true when in some ways it does not correspond to literal truth; nor is its truth mere 'poetic truth', parallel to literal truth, but fundamentally different. According to another myth, metaphors are often considered, and used, as a mode of communication more effective than the literal one, in the belief that their key function be one of facilitating or improving communication of ideas (*already* quite clear to its creator!) and of 'packaging' them in a more attractive and efficient manner. Conceiving a metaphor primarily as a tool more readily available to its user than to its listeners, or readers, implies imagining that the user has control over ideas or language. From an educational point of view, such a myth is a questionable one, as it cannot account for unforeseen factors that intervene in the process of education. Rather, precisely because a metaphor isn't anyone's possession that – for instance in an educational context – it can play an 'explorative or heuristic' role concerning even the individual who formulated it, as she/he has no exclusive or personal access to language and knowledge (cf. Gobbo 1998).

If a metaphor neither belongs to its author, nor is molded by her/his intentions, it can have the important role of effectively helping those who search for truths and employ a metaphor to formulate a hypothesis, or a conjecture relevant to a set of problems partially, or even totally unexplored. In this sense, a metaphor not only invites its author and audience to develop their own interpretive capabilities but also challenges them to invent new, unheard of, ways of describing problems, events, contexts and activities, and provides them with a significant educational opportunity to exercise one's own potential for analysis and clarification as well as for pursuing processes of empirical validity and predictability. Not unlike the deconstruction of prejudices

and stereotypes so strongly recommended by intercultural education, exploring the many facets of metaphors currently popular among many educators and social researchers will also be educationally and interculturally valuable as it encourages a disposition towards creativity and intellectual openness that intrinsically belongs to interculture.

Notes

1. Unless metaphors have died as such and are heard and understood only at the literal level of meaning.
2. Enculturation is a true educational process taking place within a person's family and reference group, and introducing every newborn into the human worlds of symbols, customs, rules, beliefs, and so on.
3. Of course, if here I stress the individual or collective creative dimensions as well as their agency in a process of mobility or dislocation, I am not implying that society should not be concerned and involved, just the opposite!
4. This situation is often compounded by the fact that youth's new cultural competence makes them able to question, and even reject, the cultural script that families, ethnic, religious groups, and the host society might have prepared for them.
5. French anthropologist J.L. Amselle, whose *Logique meticce* (1999 [1991]) expresses a moral and scientific stand against social and cultural hierarchies produced by researchers' drive to classify, distinguish and order cultural worlds according to a discontinuous perspective that by maximizing cultures' internal consistence and coherence is responsible for their cultural essentialism. The latter implies that neat borders between one culture and another be symbolically drawn as well as the different cultural traits be underlined; by so doing, anthropologists ignore an intellectual approach stressing instead the original continuity among cultures, and the likewise original cultural syncretism. The consequences of cultural essentialism can be counteracted by questioning thoroughly the issue of origins and genealogical purity, and by introducing the logic of *métissage* as a problematic – but supposedly effective – antidote against the notion of race and its use in social research.
French sociologist R. Gallissot (1995a, 1995b, 1995 with A. M. Rivera) instead created the metaphor of 'mass cultural *métissage*' to interpret the condition of young people living in the urban European peripheries, where they participate into, consume and invent a form of cultural *bricolage* capable to liberate them from the origins' cultural or ethnic script. In this case, the metaphor of cultural *métissage* points also to a countercultural function (incarnated by the *mestizo* person in the XIX century) aiming to question cultural conformism, social hierarchies and the acceptance of collective rules.
6. In general, and for a long time, cultural change resulting by combination of different traditions has been considered disorderly and lacking harmony. As for natural cross-breeding, it must be remembered that it can also yield a non-productive exemplar such as the mule.
7. It should be remembered that a well known sociological inquiry of the sixties, *Beyond the melting pot* (Glazer and Moynihan 1963), pointed out how the hopeful ideal expressed by the metaphor of a new American society had been profoundly disregarded. See also Van Ellison, 1968, with particular regard to Black people.
8. As I noticed (Gobbo 2008a), the 'melting pot' is a metaphor within a metaphor, since at the beginning of the twentieth century it was preferable to refer to the lovers' body and their carnal union literally through the process of metal fusion and the container where the latter takes place.
9. Scheffler reminds us that the phrase *homo homini lupus* is exemplary: the ferociousness of man (when not controlled by the Leviathan) can be compared to that of the wolf, or to be precise to the *stereotype* that man has formed of the wolf, since the zoologists inform us that this creature is tame and timid.
10. Metaphors can also be created from linguistic terms having a null denotation (i.e. dragon, unicorn, angel, etc.). This point, that introduces the philosopher's concept of 'mention-selection', underlines the human capacity to operate with symbolic references (pictorial representations, literature characters, mythological narratives, etc.) and not only objectual

ones. This type of operation is a capacity that is gradually learned, and represents a resource for interpretation. (Scheffler 1992).

11. Evidence of this awareness are recent publications on metaphor and education (Stofflett 1996; Mahlios and Maxson 1998; Martínez, Sauleda, and Huber 2001; Saban 2004; Saban, Kocbeker, and Saban 2007; Leavy, McSorley, and Boté 2007), besides my own (Gobbo 2008a, 2008b).

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