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Looking at space-people relationship through the anthropotopy approach

Katiana Le Mentec

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Katiana Le Mentec

Anthropologue
Ethnologue de la Chine
Chargée de recherche au CNRS
UMR 8173 Chine Corée Japon (CNRS/EHESS/UdP)
<http://cecmc.ehess.fr/index.php?2982>
katianalementec@protonmail.com

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Author: Katiana Le Mentec (Centre for Studies on China, Korea and Japan)

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This communication is presenting an ongoing research project in its early phase. The limited length did not allow for much development, hence this communication only addresses a limited amount of issues. It was conceived as a draft (no English editing) and as an introduction to a new research approach. It was not written to be submitted for peer review. Obviously, it does not constitute and cannot be considered as a definitive text/reflection. Any quote should take this context into consideration.

Key words

Anthropology, space, territory, transformation, anthropotopy, human-space relationship



Looking at space-people relationship through the anthropotopy approach

A new gaze to explore affected space: glimpses at examples from Sichuan and Sicily

INTRO

My name is Katiana Le Mentec, I am an anthropologist at the French National Center for Scientific Research. In the last eighteen years my work has mainly been based on ethnographical research undertaken in the Ba-shu area (old Sichuan including Sichuan/Chongqing), in Western China. Today I am presenting a new research project I am working on. The focus is on space-people relationship and, in particular, in contexts of affected space and territorial upheavals. This reflection is not limited to the Chinese world. The horizon is transversal, looking at humans and anthropological processes in general. I am proposing a new approach to look at space-people relationship in the aim of completing knowledge we already have on anthropological processes involved when a space is considered affected, changed, transformed.

The relationship humans have with their spaces have been studied in multiple dimensions and from various disciplinary angles. The words, vernacular notions and scientific concepts to designate these spaces and relationships are numerous and their examination have shed more detailed light on our understanding of the dynamics at work between humans and spaces. My proposal built up on all these achievements while using a new perspective to look at this topic: a gaze from the specific and differential relationships that people have with their spaces. This approach is not intended to be revolutionary. The idea is to test a different perspective in order to stimulate heuristic analysis and help better understand some kinds of contexts and challenges humans are faced with, in our contemporary world.

This paper offers a brief introduction of this new perspective, which I called the anthropotopy approach. I'll also explain how I came to this project and what kind of research it may lead to. This presentation is divided in four parts. First, I will discuss the choice of the research scope, a large scope including any kinds of affected space. Then we'll switch to the core of the approach taking into account, from the start, the different ways in which a same space can be considered by people. This will lead us to the concept of anthropotopy. In a third step we'll move forward to the implications of looking at space-human relationship through this perspective. I will conclude with a selection of research avenues for this approach, based on case-studies and research projects I am currently engaged with in Ba-Shu and Sicily.

1- Opening the scope of the research question

Let's begin with the scope of the research. In the last couple of decades, throughout the world, there has been an anthropology research boom on disaster issues. China did not escape this craze. Research departments were opened, academic associations created, conferences and workshops organised. Most of research projects throughout the world have dealt with the crises management, reconstruction as well as the socio-eco and political consequences. Many of these projects respond to a practical need from an often applied perspective. To the difference, territorial upheavals are not perceived by the academic world as an area of research of its own. Territorial upheavals and more generally contexts in which a space is transformed, affected were not thought to form a consistent research area from which processes could be balanced and compared. This is precisely what I did by opening the scope of my research question to territorial upheaval¹ and affected space. Exploring such contexts from a different gaze and focusing on space-human relationship can be much heuristic in allowing us to better understand anthropological processes involved when people's spaces, places, territories are affected.

¹ This perspective was already at the core of my CNRS application submitted successfully in June 2015 with a research project entitled "Bouleversements territoriaux dans le monde sichuanais (Chine). Programme d'analyse anthropologique des conceptions sociales en transformation".

My research scope includes any event involving the change of a space, whether it is sudden or progressive, induced or not by human's activities (directly or indirectly). The cause of the transformation is merely considered here as a factor, among others. What's important is that people knowing, practicing or inhabiting this space view it as affected, transformed. In this category we find landslides, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, fire but also any urban and rural space development, from water reservoir formation, deforestation to urbanisation, as well as desertification. Spaces can be remodelled, dismantled, destroyed, submerged, burned down, buried or even contaminated. Space pollution for instance can be visual, olfactory or audible. A space can be affected by the presence of a chemical product or the presence of a virus. The common thread here is that a space is considered affected. Such "space affecting" events stimulate a series of anthropological processes that can be explored in a transversal, cross-cutting manner, in particular to analyse humans-space relationship issues. How people view these changes and how they react to them?

It is my work in China which led me to this peculiar perspective. I came to consider "affected space and territorial upheavals" as an area of research of its own after undertaking ethnographic study in China between 2003 and 2018 in seriously disturbed territories. I especially worked in the Three Gorges area while the water was rising upstream of the Three Gorges Dam. Non only the programmed rises of water changed visually the landscape, but it also induced a gigantic work of spatial planning, baring out river banks from trees, big rocks and human structures to allow for smooth river transport while the non-flooded space was being redeveloped for relocated people : new residential, commercial and industrial areas even entire new cities were formed but also in rural areas with earthwork, new villages, not to mention relocation of tombs and cult places and new road infrastructure. After the last rise of water in 2009 these landscaping projects coincided with a national policy reinforcing rural and urban landscaping. In the Three Gorges area, regional space transformation did not only affect local people. When the famous Three Gorges landscape modification was announced a parade of strolling tourists from China and abroad came to "catch its last glimpse". At the time, although I was immersed in this multi-faced territorial upheaval context, this was not my research interest. I was working on other issues such as local popular culture and religion or local cultural policies, while still documenting space issues that came up during fieldwork. From 2015 I came to seriously consider territorial upheaval as a topic of research. Yet pursuing the work in the Three Gorges area I engaged in another fieldwork site near the epicentre of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. There too the topography changed, part of human's structures were destroyed and a broad undertaking of land planning followed.

These contexts - a gigantic water reservoir, a powerful earthquake, restructuration of rural and urban areas - induced numerous effects on various kind of spaces and on the relationship people have with them. Looking at two particularly affected counties: Yunyang and Beichuan, I followed few cross-thread such as : relation to landscape and topographic changes, consideration of lost space, ruins, and sites associated to death, also effects on the sense of space belonging. Since both Beichuan and Yunyang county-seats were entirely relocated after destruction and submersion I also explored processes of urban reconstruction and space stabilisation, including toponymy, legends, rituals and geomantic practices.

These study cases are ongoing. Simultaneously, I launched a more general reflection on an anthropological perspective to look at such events. The category of "affected space and territorial upheaval" is flexible enough to allow a transversal analysis on how humans think, talk about and do when their space is affected, whatever forms and temporality and whatever the reasons people associate to these changes. The goal is not to search for laws on how humans react in such contexts but to examine modalities of processes that may be common or variable throughout humanity, taking into consideration various forms it could take in a giving Time and Space momentum. For that I am relying on my own ethnographic study cases in Ba-Shu and, since recently, in Sicily (Italy), as well as on second hand data.

2 - Space considered affected by people engaged in various kinds of relationship with this space

In 2018 I organised a new course on this topic for Master students and young scholars at the Ehess (Paris)². It gave me the opportunity to initiate this reflection, building up a perspective trough which seize "affected

² Seminar "Anthropology of affected space" (<https://cecmc.hypotheses.org/60569>)

space contexts”, exploring dead ends and, most of all, discussing with young and advanced researchers interested and collecting data in similar contexts. It is during the preparation of the introductory session of this course that I came to consider the category of “affected spaces” and the notion of anthropotopy.

“Space, territory, site, place...” there are many terms with fluctuating definition depending on authors, research currents, not to mention disciplines. My preference went quickly towards the term “space”. More open, more flexible, “Space” allows to include blurry, non-delimited space such as an atmosphere which could be polluted. Also, “Space” allows to take into account non-physical area, dreamed, imagined, even virtual spaces, which are pertinent in this approach, since these kinds of space are also part of people’s life.

I am interested in what I called “considered affected space”. Ethnographic data at our disposal show that when a space is altered - like the Three Gorges landscape - different groups of people might consider and express this event in radically different manners, not only regarding the value of the change (positive/negative/ambivalent) but even on the very acknowledgement of a change. From some people a space is affected, changed and for other it is not. I consider important to take into account the plurality of subjectivities without giving the predominance to one point of view over others.

Data show that the feeling of a space being affected may come from a physical change visible with the naked eye (like a collapse of a building), or materially measurable (like nuclear contamination). But it can also come from an event living no tangible trace, such as a site marked in the minds of people after the event of a death or a massacre. Hence, for the purpose of my research it was more appropriate to use the adjective “affected” rather than “changed” or “transformed”.

Empirical data also show that people feeling affected or concerned by the change in a space are not limited to the local population. It may even include people who never physically reached this space. It was the case for the Three Gorges Landscape and more recently when the Cathedral Notre Dame burned in Paris.

In order to seize the complexity of a situation in which a space is considered affected I think it is important to take into account the various groups of people who are engaged in some kind of relationship with this space. These relationships may be very different from one another, like for instance the signification, value, practices and affects attached to the Cathedral Notre Dame in Paris, for, let’s say, a fervent catholic, an anti-clerical reader of Victor Hugo, a tourist interested in French History or a heritage professional who are neither. The characteristics of one specific space-human relationship inform us on what make people think a space is being affected, and on what reaction (feeling and action) they may develop in such case.

The anthropotopy approach was born from that concern: analysing “affected space” by taking into account from the start specifics and if appropriate differential relationships people may have with one particular space.

Anthropotopy, or space seized in this relation with a people

In that respect, I propose to use a new concept, the word *anthropotopy*, as a methodological tool to designate a space (from the Greek root *topos*) seized in a specific relationship with one or several humans (from the Greek root *anthropo*)³.

The word *anthropotopy* constitutes a language assistance to express an anthropological reality critical to this research project. In the few languages I speak there is not word to express this reality. Also, a new word has the advantage to be free from representations and prejudices which could interfere with the definition I am proposing. Like the *habitus* of Bourdieu, *anthropotopy* is a scientific concept. It is not reflecting a vernacular and emic notion. Nevertheless, empirical experience came before the thought of this concept, since it was born from long term observation in spaces perceived as going through deep transformation, from urban to rural space and landscape.

³ A first description of this concept was published (in French) on line in spring 2021 by *Terrain* (French Anthropology Academic Journal) : <https://blogterrain.hypotheses.org/17231>

An *anthropotopy* designates a space seized in a specific relationship with human. Hence there only can be anthropotopy attached to one human, or a group of humans sharing a similar relationship with one specific space. My anthropotopy, her anthropotopy, their anthropotopy. Each anthropotopy could be distinguished and identified according to a specific set of characteristics such as the way this people think, imagine, represent, narrate the history and name this space, the affects and values associated to this space, the practices considered prescribed and prohibited in this space, the sense of safety, the feeling of legitimacy to be there, feelings of attachment, belonging, even ownership with this space, also entities that should be accepted or not in this space (like “not dog allowed”) and even entities that are considered present in this space. In some cases, only a part of people sees a space as populated by a benevolent ghost, a nasty fairy, an Almighty deity or a corona-virus.

One space can be constituted of a myriad of anthropotopias, when we consider the various people engaged in a relationship with it. The notion of anthropotopy is a tool to distinguished layers of different relationship different people maintain with a space, including all social actors that feel linked to a space and when relevant, affected by a transformative event affecting this space and their relationship.

3 - The implication of the anthropotopia approach for the Anthropology of space

I came to the notion of anthropotopy while exploring contexts of affected space but we easily see that this conceptual tool can do much more. It is in fact a new comprehensive and inclusive way to consider the relationships that our species - Homo sapiens - maintain with its spaces. The notion of anthropotopy non only implies layers of human-relationship with one space, it also implies that each human is engaged in a galaxy of anthropotopias throughout their life.

Galaxy of anthropotopias

This galaxy is constituted of all the spaces a person knows, at a minimum they nurture representation of them, and at a maximum they practice them regularly even claim ownership over them. An ethnographic portrait of a person could hence include a sketch of cartography of their anthropotopias. This cartography could be based on a chronological manner (from birth to death), or based on the specific characteristics of their relationship to these spaces: the ones we call “home”, the ones we go through but never stay, the ones we avoid, the ones that might be consider important but where will never be able to reach (spatially or timely unreachable: like the moon, the New York World Trade Center, the Three Gorges landscape before the rise of water), etc.

Some anthropotopias are connected to each other. For instance, a person friends’ houses, work places, or places they buy food.

Some anthropotopias also physically fit together like Russian dolls: planet, continent, country, ancestral land, hometown, neighbourhood, building, apartment, main room, office area, work table, secret drawer.

Among anthropotopias are spaces from the physical reality: monuments, sites, territories with cleared borders but also other less “fixed” spaces. For example, the air we smell and breathe in a particular place. After the nuclear incident in Tohoku Japan, the air became a potentially contaminated space and triggered new representation, practices and affects, while the air was previously considered as healthy and unpolluted. In Catania City, local people know for generation that the air regularly contain dust from the Etna Volcano, they may adjust their practices accordingly. The air around the volcano constitutes a specific anthropotopia for them.

Imagined and dreamed spaces can also be part of one’s person life. For instance, a Sherpa who never never left the Himalaya may nurture an anthropotopia of the ocean. The space visited by a shaman on her travels in the invisible world constitute also an anthropotopia for her like a territory explored or even shaped virtually for a player of World of Warcraft during her regular online games.

All these spaces have in common the fact that people may engaged in a specific relationship with them, through particular way to think and talk about them but also practice and even shaped them. Looking at anthropotopias allow us to study a people relationship with its spaces through a transversal perspective.

It is clear that mapping a person's galaxy of anthropotopias could only be done at a specific time. Indeed, the way people think, feel and practice their spaces change over time, experiences, events and external constraints. These particular moments of changes might be interesting to study in a transversal manner to expand our knowledge in the Anthropology of space.

Shared schemes attached to some categories of spaces

Although the relationship people have with their spaces are unique and sometimes very intimate (our secret hiding places just for us), the ways they relate to them are influenced by collective manners of practicing, of thinking, of categorizing spaces generally speaking such as "work space", "private space", "collective space", "religious site", "heritage area", "protected area", "polluted area", "site marked by death", etc. Collective schemes regarding spaces circulate in people's living environments and are transmitted - sometimes imposed - by different means, and in particular through practice. In some parts of the world, in some cultures, societies, communities, peer groups and families, one can learn to systematically remove one's shoes when entering a home, to step over the wooden frame of the front door of a Buddhist temple. One can learn to remain silent in a room or a library. One can learn to wear a helmet on a construction site, or how to put on a mask and coat hands with hydroalcoholic gel when entering a crowded supermarket. One can learn to bury a propitiatory stele or to perform a ceremony soothing the divinity of the territory before constructing a building. One can learn to identify what a "landscape" is worth admiring, photographing and reproducing, but also to be attentive to the human and non-human present in a space, to listen, to observe plants and birds or smile to the homeless person. In the same way one can learn to ignore these entities. One can also learn the presence of invisible entities in some spaces and react accordingly, for instance have a respectful attitude - or to be afraid - when walking through a cemetery, or to wear a piece of red cloth in order to be protected from starving souls while participating in a tourist visit in a city buried by an earthquake and whose corpses were not all excavated.

When exploring one's person anthropotopias, we can identify some of these collective framing as well as their level of spanning.

Separate layers of anthropotopy and biotopy

Living in society, humans share necessarily some of the spaces they know with other living beings. Among them, there are others humans carrying their own anthropotopias - specific ways human engage with space. But also, in a specific space there can be other animals like birds, stray cats, domestic dogs and insects having their own ways to engage with this peculiar space, as well as other living entities such as plants, bacteria, etc. Hence the anthropotopia approach can easily be expanded at a multidisciplinary level involving biologists, ethologists, entomologist who are professionally equipped to study the way other entities engage with a peculiar space (such as ornitopy/canitopy/feletopy/apitopy), in what we could call a biotopias approach: a way to study a space from the perspective of the different and plural relationship of living entities involved in this specific space. I won't get into that today. My first focus and professional qualification deals with anthropology: what people think, say and do, to and with each-others.

When we consider a space shared by people we can roughly identified two ideal-typical situation:

- 1) These people's anthropotopy is shared (anthropotopy en partage) when their relationship to a space is in resonance - or at least the main feature of this relationship, feature considered meaningful - are in resonance. When they have a similar way to think, name, evaluate and practice this space. It can be the case for members of a family in a house, a small community of monks in a specific Buddhist monastery or people in their work place.
- 2) There are separate layers of anthropotopias when a space is invested differently by different groups of people who do not view, name, and practice this space in a similar manner, at least regarding the feature that are considered meaningful for these people. A place that constitutes for you a space of risk or relegation (like the catacombs of Paris), can constitute for others (the cataphilists) a valued place, onto which positive affects and attachments are projected, not to mention secret mandatory shared practices. The layers of anthropotopias in a specific space can be more or less compatibles, or can be more or less in frictions that could lead to tension, even conflicts. Urban renewals, construction of infrastructures, heritagization of sites, rebuilding after a damaging disaster countless studies relating

to contexts of space transformation have identified conflicts revealing different ways of thinking, saying and practicing a same space. Disputes and arguments regarding any space, are evidence of separate layers of anthropotopias. Frictions of anthropotopias are observed on a daily basis, in micro-struggles of people trying to impose practice and patterns on others. For instance in a house between parents and teenagers: can this room be or not legitimately strewn with dirty socks? Or in a city suburb: Should this laundering be hanged outside for the all neighbourhood to see?

4 - research avenues

Research avenues for the anthropotopy approach (and more generally the biotopy approach) are numerous and include both fundamental study in anthropology of space (and more generally in environmental studies) and applied - or even advocated/militant - research. When there are problems or conflicts in a space, this approach offers a perspective which can bring a new gazing on underestimate and invisible actors, taking into account as much as possible all entities involved, as well as bring a renew gazing on causes of frictions and ongoing processes.

In France we tend to separate fundamental and applied/militant research. I am for now engaged in the former but do not exclude exploration of the latter in the future. Before concluding this presentation, I am going to present few of the research avenues I am currently engaged in, to show what kind of use can be the anthropotopy approach.

To express a reality, facilitate description and analysis

First of all, at the very least, the notion of anthropotopy can simply be helpful in allowing the possibility to name a reality observed in the field: to express a relation people have with a space. For instance, we can say that the Cathedral Notre Dame fire made us realised to what extent this site constitute an anthropotopy for people who never even came to France. This fact may have some implications to the pluri-facets effects of what can happened to this site.

The notion of anthropotopy also allows us to express with an anthropological conceptual category the variability in ways people see a space, indicate the presence of a resonance, a compatibility or a friction of different anthropotopy. Having a notion to designate these realities can facilitate description, even analysis.

It is currently helping me in that regard with different study cases.

* I am working on ruins of familiar places in Beichuan and Yunyang⁴. Sites which form have been recently modified due do various reasons as mentioned earlier. Fieldwork show that one specific ruin site can triggered various reactions and affects which are linked to the previous relationship people had with the site before its ruination. At the same time, people not familiar with these sites before, may applied different general frame of "Ruin space": for deconstruction workers this space is seen as a temporary work space associated to professional protocols and consideration of specific materials to be dealt with ; for artist or urban-explorer passing by it is viewed as an inspirational or thrilling site, while an entrepreneur see mere rubble that should be quickly cleared out for juicy investments. Here we identify anthropotopy schemes, collective ways to see ruined space in a specific Time-Space momentum. But the familiarity some people had and may still have with a space now in ruins allows to go beyond general sociological categorisation and explore the layers of anthropotopia in presence, who are characterised through the different way people think, talk about, feel and practice this very place.

⁴ An article is currently in processing for a collective issue on ruins edited by Valentina Gamberi and Chiara Calzana at Berghahn Books, an issue following a panel at the EASA Belfast Conference on 2022. My study on ruins of familiar places was previously presented at the occasion of the *International Workshop Ruinscapes in Urban China* at the Chinese University (Hong Kong) in December 2018 and then at the International Anthropology Workshop *Materialities and Emotions in times of disasters* at Sciences PO/EHESS Paris in May 2019.

* The notion of anthropotopia also helps me in a study on space associated to death and the dead in contexts of territorial upheaval⁵. Places recognised as marked by death are not neutral, near a tomb, a cemetery, a memorial or a site where people died, humans may not act the same as anywhere else. The potential presence of ancestors, hungry or dangerous ghosts implies peculiar ways to act and treat these spaces, ways which might be slightly different also when one knows the dead in question (familiarity plays also a role here). In any case, associating a place to death only works for a person who recognised material signs (tomb) or in case of no tangible signs, who is aware that people died, are or were buried here. In that case their anthropotopy includes death, which might not be the case of all the people engaged in a relationship with this space. So even though anthropotopy collective schemes associating a place to death might depend on cultural background for instance, we also need to take into consideration that not all people's anthropotopy might recognise the presence of death and dead entities. It is the same logic with other invisible entities like deities, spirits and even viruses.

* The anthropotopia approach is also useful in another ongoing research dealing with the tangible and intangible reshaping of the two county-seats of Yunyang and Beichuan, destroyed and entirely relocated 30km farther⁶. People from different towns were gathered in these new cities, they carried different anthropotopy of their former city and of the place their new city was built. Identifying them helps me understand how they settle tangibly and intangibly in these new cities, what can ease or complicate this process.

To study a particular space

The anthropotopy approach can also be used as a protocol to examine a site, a place, a territory, any space, through a focus on social actors feeling attached to it. Who are they? What are the characteristics of their anthropotopy - ie the relationship they maintain with this space -, Are there different layers of anthropotopy and what friction and resonance can we identify? This approach might be particularly interesting to decrypt small, medium or large conflicts in a specific space, but also to understand what is going on somewhere, the daily dynamics at play in a particular place. This kind of study can be developed to respond to a need or a problem, or/and to explore anthropological processes in a fundamental research perspective.

This is precisely what I am doing now in the City of Catania, at the foot of the Etna Volcano in Sicily (Italy)⁷. I am beginning the study of a public space, the area of the Angelo Majorana square. I chose this location because not only the garden at the center of the square but also the buildings surrounding it are practiced by people from various horizons. [We find old families of Catanese, mostly from a popular background, a gentrified population of Sicilian, Italian and foreigners coming here to work/e-work, as well as short term tourists, but also precarious workers from the global south and recently arrived homeless migrants and refugees from Africa. This area is also multi-purposed: some people live there, others come regularly, to eat or drink at the bar or the three restaurants, shop at the butcher's shop and mini-market, park their car, walk their dog, feed the stray cats, illegally leave trash, etc. It is also a place of work in shops and restaurants as well as in the adjacent police barracks, but also for the ones coming everyday to collect the garbage, distribute post mails, other packages or even parking fines. Apart from the label "public space" there is no dominant scheme characterising this area. It is not recognised by some institution as a tourist or heritage, or protected, or religious or symbolic space. This situation allows for flexibility and makes it an interesting place to study from the anthropotopy approach. I am looking at the anthropotopy layers present there, observing, discussing and conducting interviews with people. Long term fieldwork will allow me to distinguish the different ways people may call, think, represent, value, practice this space, the feelings and affects they developed with this space, the way they narrate this space, associate to their own bio-history with it.

⁵ A paper is currently being written for a collective issue on the topic of *Lieux et espaces des morts en Asie*, following the May 2022 CCJ Workshop (<https://ccj.hypotheses.org/30800>) and a communication at the ANR Cortem Seminar (<https://ccj.hypotheses.org/30310>).

⁶ This study follows a post-doctoral research project entitled *Les modes d'appropriation de l'espace dans des villes reconstruites après destruction* funded in 2014-2015 by the Germaine Tillon post-doc scholarship/HeSam.

⁷ Since 1st November 2021 Katiana Le Mentec is part of the visiting scholar program of the Università degli Studi di Catania : <http://www.dsp.unict.it/it/dipartimento/visiting-scholar>.

Inevitably, such a study will brought to light past events considered by some people as having affected, transformed this space either temporarily (leaving sometimes tangible or intangible traces recognised by some people), either definitively (discourses pointing at “this place is not like it used to be”). While for others, for instance the newcomers, this place is stable so far, they haven’t noticed a change. The study of practices and discourses in this context allow to examine the ways groups of people consider a space, on the long term, throughout various hazards. Fieldwork have already brought to the surface few past affecting events considered by people involved in this public square. Some very recents like the storm of octobre 2021 which had deeply flooded the whole area, and some very old, like the very well-known seven destruction and rebuilding of the city experienced in the last two thousand years, through volcano eruptions and earthquakes (the last one happened three hundred years ago).

To study an event viewed as affecting a space

To the difference of a daily routine in a particular space, we can also examine with the anthropotopia approach a space when it is considered by some people as in the process of being affected, changed, transformed.

Data I collected during fifteen years in the Three Gorges Reservoir and the Wenchuan earthquake area give plenty of study cases to explore such contexts. These events included a myriad of local and micro local situations of physically transformed urban and rural space and landscape. For instance, I look at the Three Gorges Landscape in relation to the effect of the rise of water upstream of the Dam, the layers of anthropotopy in presence and how various group reacted in very different ways to this change, some even challenging the occurrence of a change⁸. I am doing the same kind of work regarding the Zhang Fei temple who was relocated to about submersion by the Water reservoir and which was part of my previous research in the last sixteen years⁹. National heritage site, local museum, work space, landscape feature, popular religious place but international religious and tourist place, considering the layers and groups of people involved this temple is quite adapted to be studied through the anthropotopia approach. The Beichuan old city, preserved in the state of destruction and open for tourism is also an interesting study case to explore an affecting event through layers of anthropotopia, including people familiar with the site before destruction and people felt concerned afterwards¹⁰.

Such study cases allow us to examine closer if specific configurations of anthropotopy are related to specific ways to react to a spatial change and to events considered as affecting a space. In such contexts, at least part of the people maintaining an anthropotopy of a space may engage in discussion, debate even action aimed at reparation, reconstitution, rebuilding. These processes may be explored through the perspective of layers, friction and resonance of anthropotopy. Looking at how these people thought, imagined, evaluated, felt and practiced this space before; on what ground they consider their space affected; how these changes affected their anthropotopia afterwards. In particular, the anthropotopy approach can make visible groups of people that are affected by this change but who are not usually acknowledged for various reasons such as they have no legal legitimacy on this space, or they belong to a minority group which do not bother or fear getting involved. But when we are engaged in a fundamental research and wish to understand the situation through a panoptic perspective, all factors, all effects should be taking into consideration. This is the basic philosophy of the anthropology approach.

Galaxy of anthropotopy

Beyond study cases this approach aims at bringing to light relationship, processes, ideal-typical modalities to better seize human-space relationship and contexts of affected space. One path towards that is to look at

⁸ This study-case was presented at the department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Catania in December 2019, in a communication entitled *Disruption of Anthropotopia. Proposal for a renewed anthropological approach on territorial events and upheavals* (<https://cecmc.hypotheses.org/55987>)

⁹ My first article on the topic was published in 2006 and is on open access <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/626>.

¹⁰ An article was published on the topic in 2015 and is on open access <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03334596>

spaces, in their daily routine or during a transformative event. Another path is to focus on people and their galaxy of anthropotopy.

It is also a work I am engaged in by developing life stories focused one person's space relationship. Catania is a very cosmopolitan city, I can collect space related life narratives with people from various paths of life, not only different gender, age, social class but also cultural background and geography mobility, using their mother-tongue: French, English, Chinese, Italian and Spanish.

Such a method offers precious qualitative data on the different ways humans enter in relationship with the space they think, practice, inhabit throughout their life. Such whole encompassing gaze could allow to identify what is important for a person, to identify patterns, links, configuration, evolution of a set of space-human relationship - their galaxy of anthropotopia. Academic work in anthropology of space have already extensively studied how people think, talk about and practice a home, a worship site, a site marked by death in certain socio-historico-cultural and geographic contexts or as anthropological processes. Yet, to examine galaxies of anthropotopy of people aim at examining invested spaces in a transversal manner, balancing characteristics not in regard to one category of space but in regard to one life path, one individual way to connect with their space, to deal with their space change, to engage in small and big conflicts regarding their space. While cultural background and time period would need to be taken into consideration, the idea here is to go further general anthropotopy schemes in circulation at this time period, and collective sanctioned way to engage in some particular space. The anthropotopia approach is about qualitatively explore how humans may forge, maintain and abandoned the spaces they attached themselves to.