

MEANING, CREATIVITY, AND THE INTERPERSONAL RELATION. A SEMIOETHIC APPROACH

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Abstract. In this essay we refer to a tradition in language and sign studies delineated by Charles S. Peirce, Roman Jakobson, Thomas Sebeok and Ferruccio Rossi-Landi. Sebeok's language origin hypothesis posits that verbal language is grounded in human species-specific "primary modelling," or "language," also tagged "writing", distinct from "secondary modelling," or "speech". In the close dialogue between philosophy and semiotics, sign and language studies throw light on how signifying processes shape the self – a "semiotic animal" – in the interpersonal relation. Other signposts in our research include the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, author of monographs on Dostoevsky and Rabelais, close interpreter of the specificity of the "utterance" by comparison to the "sentence"; and his collaborator Valentin Vološinov, renowned for his book on Marxism and the philosophy of language and on Freud and Freudism. Another important reference is the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas with his studies in French on the interpersonal relation and conceptualization of the intrigue between self and other in terms of "ethics," inevitably involving the question of language. Reading such authors, we develop their investigations between philosophy and semiotics and their various branches in the direction of "semioethics". This term is connected to our research traceable to the early 1980s and is inaugurated as the title of a book in 2003 with our *Semioetica*. The present essay investigates the primacy of "saying" over the "said," of "sense" over "meaning," of "significance" over "signification," of the "implicit" over the "explicit" in interpersonal relations, whether in the form of mutual understanding or of misunderstanding.

Keywords: creativity; iconicity; language origin; metaphor; modelling; semioethics; sense; significance speech; utterance.

1. A GENERALLY NEGLECTED QUESTION: THE ORIGIN OF VERBAL LANGUAGE

The question of the origin of verbal language has been generally neglected and judged unworthy of discussion by the scientific community because of the claims it generated, often considered to be unfounded. In 1866 the Société de Linguistique in Paris went so far as to ban public discussions on language origin considering them useless.

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By contrast to the mainstream attitude (an exception is Giorgio Fano's book, *Origini e natura del linguaggio*, 1973, now also translated into English), Thomas A. Sebeok (renown above all for his "global semiotics" which has broadened semiotic studies, and the axiom that semiosis converges with life, confirmed today and assumed as the basis of biosemiotics) neither neglected the question, nor underestimated its complexity. Validated by Terrence Deacon's research on the origin of language – language being a human species-specific characteristic –, Sebeok has averred that verbal language, *speech* (Fr. *langue*) is species-specific because it is based on a *human primary modelling system* which he also denominates *language*. With his distinction between *language* and *speech*, Sebeok differentiates what the English term "language" does not. Considering expression and communication among hominids and their development in a specific evolutionary niche, this standpoint can contribute to developing the hypothesis that subtends Deacon's book, *The Symbolic Species* (1997): that verbal language and the brain have adapted to each other in co-evolutionary processes of development, based on non-verbal linguistic capacities proper to the human species.¹

On positing that *semiosis* and *life* coincide, an axiom that drives developments in biosemiotics today, Sebeok observes that "a full understanding of the dynamics of semiosis may [...] turn out to be no less than the definition of life".² However this might be, there is no doubt that with his "global semiotics"³ has contributed to broadening the scope of sign and language studies as they have been traditionally conceived across the twentieth century, exploring verbal language as a sign system in a global sign network.⁴ Consequently, though generally neglected in the scientific domain, Sebeok proceeded to investigating the question of language origin in the framework of the general evolution of semiosis,⁵ introducing Deacon's hypothesis in subsequent phases of his own research.⁶ Deacon keeps account of Charles Peirce's epistemology, particularly on the relation between symbolicity, knowledge, and representation. Based on similar grounds, Jesper Hoffmeyer in the collective volume, *Translation Translation*⁷ – which links biosemiotics to semiotics through the notion of translation –, investigates the origin of symbolicity, working particularly with such concepts as "code duality" and "natural translation": "the perpetual transmission down through generations of ontogenetic messages shuffled back

¹ Thomas A. Sebeok, *I Think I Am a Verb*, New York, Plenum Press; *Penso di essere un verbo*, It. trans, intro., ed. by S. Petrilli, Palermo, Sellerio, 1986, pp. 10–16.

² Thomas A. Sebeok, *Contributions to the Doctrine of Signs*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1976, p. 69.

³ Thomas A. Sebeok, *Global Semiotics*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001.

⁴ Paul Cobley, John Deely, Kalevi Kull, Susan Petrilli (eds.), *Semiotics Continues to Astonish: Thomas A. Sebeok and the doctrine of signs*, Berlin, De Gruyter Mouton, 2011. Susan Petrilli, Augusto Ponzio, *Thomas Sebeok and the Signs of Life*, London, Icon Books, 2001; Idem, *I segni e la vita*, Milan, Spirali, 2002.

⁵ Thomas A. Sebeok, *A Sign Is Just a Sign*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991, pp. 49–111.

⁶ See the bibliography in Thomas A. Sebeok, *Signs. An Introduction to Semiotics*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2001; Thomas A. Sebeok, Marcel Danesi, *The Forms of Meaning. Modeling Systems Theory and Semiotic Analysis*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2000.

⁷ Susan Petrilli (ed.), *Translation Translation*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2003.

and forth between digital and analog codes”.⁸ Moreover, interesting developments on semiosis and translation in a Peircean framework are also offered by Floyd Merrell and his take on signs in becoming, in his chapter “Neither Matrix nor Redux, but Reflex: Translation from within Semiosis” in the same volume.⁹

Issues of particular interest addressed in the language origin debate include, from the present authors’s point of view: the semiotic specificity of humans; the semiotic foundations of human communication; the human capacity for development and innovation.¹⁰ Moreover, on signs, language and meaning and how they shape interpersonal relations, communication and knowledge acquisition, we believe that, in addition to the transdisciplinary complex of sciences involving such fields as philosophy of language, epistemology, linguistics, biosemiotics, anthropology, neurobiology, cognitive sciences, life and sign sciences, translation studies, etc., important contributions can come from global semiotics developed in the direction of semioethics.¹¹

With signifying processes brought to the centre of evolutionary development, important to consider is how “sense” over “meaning,” “significance” over “signification,” “implicit” meaning over “explicit” meaning, “saying” over “said” affect communication and the interpersonal relationship. Our immediate object of analysis is the “utterance” which, unlike the “sentence,” occurs in live discourse and as such is always intonated, accentuated. Our instruments of analysis mainly derive from semiotic studies by Charles Peirce through to Sebeok. And as just hinted, we develop “semiotics,” transitioning through “semeiotics,” in the direction of “semioethics”.¹² Semioethics has a special focus on the “semiosic” and “semiotic” foundations of the interpersonal relation: with Peirce we highlight the hypothetical nature of interpretation, therefore of the self as interpretive process in becoming; with Emmanuel Levinas we thematize the self in terms of the inescapable intrigue between self and other. In fact, significant signposts in our

⁸ Jesper Hoffmeyer, “Origin of Species by Natural Translation”, in Susan Petrilli (ed.), *Translation Translation*, p. 334. See also Jesper Hoffmeyer, Claus Emmeche, “Code Duality and the Semiotics of Nature”, in Myrdene Anderson, Floyd Merrell, (eds.), *On Semiotic Modelling*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 1991, pp. 117–166.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 165–188. On the centrality of translation for life, semiosis, language and knowledge acquisition, see Susan Petrilli, *Sign Studies and Semioethics. Communication, Translation and Values*. Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2014, pp. 189–247, 300–321; and with specific reference to learning and education, see Susan Petrilli, “Learning and Education in the Global Sign Network”, *Semiotica*, (234), 2020, pp. 317–420.

¹⁰ Susan Petrilli, *Sign Crossroads in Global Perspective. Semioethics and Responsibility*, New Brunswick: Transaction, 2010, pp. 123–136.

¹¹ Cf. Susan Petrilli, *The Self as a Sign, the World, and the Other. Living Semiotics*, New Brunswick, Transaction, 2013; Idem, *Signs, Language and Listening. Semioethic Perspectives*, Ottawa, Legas, 2019. Augusto Ponzio, *Sujet et alterité dans la philosophie de Emmanuel Lévinas*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1996; Idem, *Emmanuel Levinas, Globalisation, and Preventive Peace*, Ottawa, Legas, 2009; Idem, *Rencontres de paroles*, Paris, Alain Baudry, 2011; Idem, *Con Emmanuel Levinas. Alterità e identità*, Milan, Mimesis, 2019.

¹² Susan Petrilli, Augusto Ponzio, *Semiotica*, Rome, Meltemi, 2003; Idem, “Semioethics”, in Paul Cobley (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, London, Routledge, 2010, pp. 150–162; Susan Petrilli, *Sign Crossroads in Global Perspective. Semioethics and Responsibility*, New Brunswick, Transaction, 2010, pp. 27–33, 206–208; Susan Petrilli, *Expression and Interpretation in Language*, New Brunswick, Transaction, 2012, pp. 185–186; Idem, *Sign Studies and Semioethics. Communication, Translation and Values*, pp. 3–14.

studies also include Levinas as well as Mikhail Bakhtin and his circle. Moreover, studies by Sigmund Freud are also taken into account in this essay. Working on verbal signs, Freud debates the “localist” theory of language and cerebral cortex (“Zur Auffassung der Aphasien,” 1891).¹³

The term “modelling” was employed by the so-called Moscow-Tartu school (A. A. Zaliznjak, V. V. Ivanov, V. N. Toporov e Ju. M. Lotman) for *language*, understood as *langue* (assumed as a *primary modelling system*) and all other human cultural systems (*secondary modelling*). Sebeok, associating the concept of *model* to *Umwelt*, introduced by the biologist Jakob von Uexküll and based on research by the complex of disciplines that constitute “biosemiotics,” he hypothesized that the modelling capacity is observable in all life-forms (Uexküll, 1909, 1940).¹⁴

Every life-form is endowed with an *Umwelt*, a model of the world. Its life and its signs, or, better, its life that consists in its signs (life and semiosis converge) occur in a world that the *modelling device* specific to the species that life-form belongs to produces. All other animals that are not endowed with *language* also communicate nonetheless according to their species-specific. “Zoosemiotics” (an expression introduced by Sebeok in 1963),¹⁵ studies signs in the animal kingdom (*How animals that don't speak communicate*, corresponds to the title of a collection of essays by Sebeok, 1998, on animal communication, in Italian translation). “Anthroposemiotics” is a branch of zoosemiotics which in turn is only a part of the vast sphere covered by “biosemiotics,” from procariots or bacteria to the eucariots forming the great life kingdoms (animals, plants, funghi), to the sign systems internal to organisms, that enable their reproduction and survival (genetic code, neural system, immunitary system).

The first hominids were already endowed with *language as a modelling device*, but not language as a communicative device, verbal language, which came later. Language as modelling explains evolutionary development through to *Homo sapiens*.¹⁶ Noam Chomsky has also argued that language is not essentially communicative, but when he says “language” he understands “verbal language,” that is, what Sebeok understands by “speech” and not his “language,” that is, language as modelling.

Animals different from the human are also endowed with a modelling system through which they produce their world. But the human modelling device is altogether different from other primary modelling systems. Its specific characteristic is what Charles Peirce denominated “the play of musement” (an expression Sebeok used as the title of

¹³ See Augusto Ponzio, *La rivoluzione bachtiniana. Il pensiero di Bachtin e l'ideologia contemporanea*, Bari, Levante Editori, 1997; Idem, *Freud, l'analisi, la scrittura*. Bari, Graphis, 2009; Idem, *Tra semiotica e letteratura*, Milan, Bompiani, 2015.

¹⁴ Kalevi Kull, “Umwelt and modelling”, in P. Cobley (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, pp. 43–56.

¹⁵ Cf. Susan Petrilli, *Expression and Interpretation in Language*, New Brunswick, Transaction, 2012, pp. 71–76.

¹⁶ Thomas A. Sebeok, *Signs. An Introduction to Semiotics*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994 (2001), pp. 117–128; Idem, *A Sign Is Just a Sign*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991.

one of his books), and what Giambattista Vico called “poetic logic”¹⁷: the possibility of creating multiple models, an infinite multiplicity of different worlds, therefore, to borrow from Leibniz, of inventing, simulating, an infinite number of “possible worlds,” unlike all other animal species.

Language understood as primary modelling is at the foundation of human sign systems generally and it distinguishes them, in a species-specific sense, from other forms of nonhuman animal communication. As much as nonhuman animals employ signs that are typologically homologous to human signs (signals, icons, indexes, symbols, names, as above all Sebeok has demonstrated), these signs are not implanted in the same kind of (syntactical) structure and, consequently, though they are used to communicate, they cannot assume the character of languages.

Similarly to language as primary modelling, speech also occurs through adaptation, but with a communicative function from the very beginning, and much later than “language as modelling,” precisely with the appearance of *Homo habilis*. Nonetheless, in the course of human evolution, through *exaptation*,¹⁸ language as a species-specific modelling device also assumes a communicative function, enhancing the communicative function of speech, and speech too assumes a modelling function that enhances the modelling function of language, gradually evolving into a great multiplicity of different (verbal) languages.¹⁹ The situation of many languages, external plurilingualism (as much as “plurilingualism” internal to any single historical-natural language) is an expression of the species-specific human modelling capacity to invent multiple worlds. In spite of thematizing the creative nature of language, Chomsky’s linguistics with its recourse to (Cartesian) innate “Universal Grammar” leaves plurilingualism unexplained.

2. LANGUAGE AS PRIMARY MODELLING AND WRITING *ANTE LITERAM*

On recovering and developing Sebeok’s conception of the origin of verbal language, we propose to interpret the articulatory, syntactical capacity of primary modelling in terms of *writing*, writing *ante litteram*.²⁰ A widespread prejudice in presentday society recites that writing is overwhelmed by other sign systems. Part of the same prejudice is

¹⁷ See Marcel Danesi, *Lingua, metafora, concetto. Vico e la linguistica cognitiva*, Bari, Edizioni dal Sud, 2001.

¹⁸ An expression introduced by Stephen J. Gould, Elisabeth S. Vrba, “Exaptation – A Missing Term in the Science of Form”, *Paleobiology*, 8(1), 1982, pp. 4–15.

¹⁹ Susan Petrilli, *Sign Studies and Semioethics. Communication, Translation and Values*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2014, pp. 47–64; Idem, “Learning and Education in the Global Sign Network”, pp. 317–420.

²⁰ Susan Petrilli, *Signs, Language and Listening. Semioethic Perspectives*, Ottawa, Legas, 2019, pp. 32–36; Susan Petrilli, Augusto Ponzio, *Semiotics Unbounded. Interpretive Routes in the Open Network of Signs*, Toronto, University Press, 2005, pp. 372–395.

the thesis of presentday supremacy of the “image” over writing. As though any form of human sign production were not, as such, inevitably a form of writing.

The fact is that a narrow vision of writing identifies it with the transcription of oral language, thus reducing the concept of writing to the status of registration of orality, a mere covering, ancillary to the *phoné*. Thus described writing is no more than *mnemotechny*. An important critique of this prejudice has been formulated, as we know, by Jacques Derrida in *L'écriture et la différence* (1967).

This conception of writing is traceable in Plato (*Fedro* 274b-275). He reports a dialogue between the Egyptian divinity Theuth who invents writing understood as transcription and king Thamus who observes that writing-transcription impoverishes experiences and relationships. Writing subordinate to the *phoné*, writing as a secondary cover, a form of expression conceived to fix vocality is at the service of memory and of the subject pre-fixed in and pre-scribed by writing thus understood. Much before Hegel's meditations on the dialectics between servant and master, Thamus had already foreseen how this service is fast reversed into a form of dependency, on behalf of memory and respective subject, on writing-mnemotechny, dependency that limits and destabilizes their power.

But writing cannot be reduced to transcription, just as deferral from the present to the absent – deferral that converges with interpretation, inference, signification and is constitutive of the sign – transcends the predefined, quantifiable sphere of memory to involve the unpredictability and incalculable scope of remembrance subtending innovation and inventiveness. Memory is a condition for the use of symbols, conventional signs, and is necessary for *indexicality*. On the basis of indexicality, as observed by Charles Peirce (CP 2.305), a sign refers to its object both through the corresponding individual object as well as through the senses and memory of the person it serves as a sign.

Beyond writing-transcription at the service of memory, writing *avant la lettre*, writing as deferral, *renvoi* is connected with remembrance, creativity and inventiveness. Unlike memory, remembrance is resistant with respect to calculation, quantification. Deferral tells of uncertainty, of unpredictability that the capacity for inventiveness no less than presupposes. Released from subservience to memory and transcription, writing before the letter, *avant la lettre* is a practice characterized by a drifting movement, by a capacity for digression, excess, non-functionality, which translates into resistance with respect to the tendency to reduce signs to function, to instrumentality. Drift characterizes remembrance and is traceable at the highest degrees in literary writing and other artistic expressions.²¹

The narrow vision of writing as transcription is not only connected to a prejudice that asserts the primacy of the oral word, the *phoné* – a prejudice of the phonocentric

²¹ Susan Petrilli, “Representation and Literary Writing. From Identity to Alterity: Re-writing and De-writing”, *Foreign Literature Studies*, (6), 2015, pp. 46–58. Susan Petrilli, Augusto Ponzio, *Fuori campo*, Milan, Mimesis, 1999; Idem, *Raffigurazione letteraria*, Milan, Mimesis, 2006; Idem, “Depicting the vision of the other in the novel and film. Bakhtin, Pasolini, Deleuze”, in M. Cavagna, C. Maeder (eds.), *Philology and Performing Arts*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, UCL Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2014, pp. 289–307. Augusto Ponzio, *La coda dell'occhio*, Rome, Aracne, 2016.

order. It also involves a prejudice of the ethnocentric order. Writing – reduced to transcription – is considered as a prerogative of certain social systems (and not others), as representing a crucial phase in human development, as discriminating between pre-history and history, between “cold” societies without history and “warm” societies in history, as such capable of evolution and endowed with historical memory (Lévi-Strauss, 1952, 1955).

In reality, the invention of “writing-transcription” presupposes the existence of “writing” understood in a far more complex sense, in a far broader temporal sphere than that of human historico-cultural evolution. Writing as we are describing it concerns the process of *homination*, the very formation process of the human species. Writing is modelling procedure species-specific to humankind, what we have also described as language, language as modelling, non-verbal language. Using the most diverse means, including one’s own body or external physical instruments, humans organize their lived experiences and surrounding reality in space and time, conferring sense upon them and constructing a world. But, with the same means and even using the same elements, humans are characteristically capable of conferring new senses and constructing different worlds. Every animal species constructs its own world, in which things assume a given sense. The specific characteristic of the human species is the capacity to invest the same elements, even a very limited number thereof, with different senses and thereby construct many possible worlds.

Appearance of the writing capacity, writing *ante litteram*, antecedent to the written sign, transcription represents a fundamental stage in the *homination* process. It precedes the formation of speech and election of speech, verbal language, over other (even earlier) means of communication. Writing thus understood, a syntactical device, unlike speech and its transcription, does not rise as a means for communication, but rather precedes and subtends all forms of communication. To keep account of this could make an important contribution to investigations on the specificity of the cognitive and constructive capacities of the human species.

Writing as *transcription* is linked with “culture” in a strict sense, opposed to “non-culture,” it pertains to the “cultured man,” with all the connections writing thus understood implies with power and dominion of man over the other man. Instead, the writing capacity, understood as a species-specific capacity, belongs to “culture” in a broad, in the anthropological sense, in this sense it is opposed to “nature,” and is proper to humankind as such.

The very formation of speech and relative verbal systems, that is, the (historical-natural) languages (Fr. *langue*; It. *lingua*), their very multiplicity and evolution presuppose the capacity for *writing*, writing *ante litteram*. Without writing thus described, humans could never have articulated sounds and identify a limited number of distinctive traits, phonemes, to reproduce phonetically; without the writing capacity humans would have never been able to variously compose phonemes to form multiple words (morphemes); nor associate the latter syntactically in different formations, thereby constructing new utterances, meanings, senses.

Writing is inherent to language understood as modelling procedure insofar as its specific characteristic is the capacity to confer different meanings on the same elements according to chronotopic positioning.²² In other words, writing is inherent to language as a signifying procedure, because language is syntactical. The phonetic sign itself is writing. Language is already writing, much before the invention of writing as a system for the transcription of oral semiosis, that is, before language is connected to phonation and the formation of historical-natural languages. When language reappears later as a secondary cover to fix vocalism, the vocal verbal sign receives a spatial configuration which safeguards it through time.²³

Language today has been influenced by the use of phonic material, all the same however it has not lost its characteristics as writing antecedent to transcription. These characteristics are manifest in the articulation of verbal language, in its iconic character (signification via positioning, dimension, word lengthening as in the case of the adjective in the superlative, of verbs in the plural), as demonstrated by Jakobson 1965, and in its propensity for innovation. “Creativity”, which Chomsky (1975, 1985) considers as a distinctive feature of verbal language, in fact derives from language as writing, as modelling procedure.²⁴

Walter Benjamin in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928) would also seem to be insisting on the connection between language and writing thus described when, in his studies on “allegory,” he evidences its “scriptural character,” when he reflects on hieroglyphics, on the ideogram, and on the relationship between thought and “original writing,” on the possibility that verbal language is not reduced to serving mere communication, on the possibility that the letter may withdraw from the conventional combination of scriptural atoms and assume a sense in itself, as “image,” in the sense of assuming an *iconic* character: in the “baroque” that which is written tends to the image, which from a linguistic point of view constitutes the unity of the linguistic baroque and the figurative baroque.²⁵

The fact that human beings have something to say to each other (“einander *etwas zu sagen haben*,” Engels, 1896)²⁶ is not something external to, outside the world produced by language as human modelling procedure. All the same, the origin of (verbal) language cannot be explained *à la* Lamarck as resulting from language as modelling. As Ferruccio Rossi-Landi avers, verbal language does not arise from a general need for communication,²⁷ but from the need for a certain level of social communication relatively to both communicative procedures that have not yet become non-verbal languages, that

²² Thomas A. Sebeok, Marcel Danesi, *The Forms of Meaning. Modeling Systems Theory and Semiotic Analysis*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2000.

²³ Julia Kristeva, *Le langage, cet inconnu*, Paris, Seuil, 1982 (1969), p. 61.

²⁴ Augusto Ponzio, *Production linguistique et idéologie sociale*, Cadiac, Les Éditions Balzac, 1992; Idem, *Linguistica Chomskyana e ideologia social*, Curitiba, Editora Ufpr, 2012.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Il dramma barocco tedesco*, Turin, Einaudi, 1971, pp. 162–229.

²⁶ Friedrich Engels, *Dialektik der Natur* (1896), in *Werke*, Band XX, Berlin, Dietz, 1964–1968, p. 446.

²⁷ Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni*. Milan, Bompiani, 1985, pp. 225–226; Idem, *Between Signs and Non-signs*, ed. & intro. by S. Petrilli. Amsterdam, Benjamins, 1992, pp. 67–68.

are not yet specifically human, and to the world signified and interpreted through the modelling (and not communicative) procedure of language specific to humans. Language, the linguistic capacity cannot be reduced to communication: to do so means not to contextualize language in a coherent phylogenetic framework of nerve structures and relative psychic functions.²⁸

Though language finds in vocalization, and in the (oral and written) verbal generally, its main form of exteriorization and enhancement, this does not mean that exteriorization and enhancement are not possible through other languages as well. After all, “in-fants” (that, as the expression reveals, do not speak) communicate most effectively (a question of vital communication) through non-verbal means. Not only: it is thanks to this type of communication, supported by nurturing-gifting mechanisms in the interpersonal relationship, that the infant eventually acquires verbal language.²⁹ And when, as in the case of deaf-mutes, development of language in the phonic form is impossible, writing – if adequately elicited by responsible carers – can find other possibilities, other forms of expression (gesture, picture-drawing, images) that enable development of the language capacity, in certain cases at noteworthy levels, without help from speech.

The character of writing proper to language endows verbal and non-verbal languages with the capacity to function as signs as an end in themselves, a sort of excess with respect to their cognitive, communicative and manipulative function, traceable, but only in terms of repetition, in animal behavior. The dialogicality of interpretants and therefore the possibility of surpassing the limits of signality in the direction of signness, of signification in significance (what Barthes 1982 [1971] calls “third sense” by comparison to sense in mere communication, message or signification) are connected with the character of writing in language.

3. LANGUAGE, AN A-PRIORI

The a-priori is not speech. The a-priori is language as a modelling device, a writing device. Like verbal language, musical writing also participates in the language capacity thus described, it too participates in the conditions that allow for articulation, scanning, relating, without which a human world would not be possible.³⁰

Language as modelling procedure is rendered more “powerful” by speech, by verbal language implanted in language as modelling which thus introduces intervals into the totality of the social universe, in the social *continuum*. Thanks to language as modelling the social *continuum* is articulated into a series of distinct units and intersubjective relations that are rendered significant in the dynamics of mutual opposition and correlation, and differential gaps. According to Marx and Engels in *Die deutsche Ideologie*

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 233–234.

²⁹ Genevieve Vaughan, *The Gift in the Heart of Language*, Milan, Mimesis, 2015.

³⁰ Susan Petrilli, Augusto Ponzio, *Semiotics Today. From Global Semiotics to Semioethics, a Dialogic Response*, Ottawa, Legas, 2007.

(1962 [1845–1846]), non-human animals do not properly have relationships because they do not have language as modelling, as writing *ante litteram*, *avant la lettre*.

The task of verbal language in the constitution of social relationships is firstly to articulate the social, based on the modelling capacity, on the writing capacity, writing as modelling, inherent in language. The task of making intersubjective communication possible is secondary. It presupposes the capacity for differentiation in positions, levels, roles, different types of social relationships. Such articulation is achieved by modelling the social “material” of a given linguistic community, that which can be said, the “*dictum*” (Fr. “*dit*”) and that which cannot be said, the “inter-dicted” (Fr. “*inter-dit*”) in the language (*lingua/langue*) of that given linguistic community. The circulation of women, goods and messages (Lévi-Strauss) in a given community presupposes articulation of the social based on language as primary modelling. Terms and expressions relating to social roles and positions do not simply constitute a nomenclature, but rather they establish behaviours and pre-scribe a given conduct. The system of appellatives, as described by Claude Lévi-Strauss, is also a system of attitudes. Descriptive-prescriptive meanings are fixed in every language (*langue*), they concern the intersubjective relationship, and in these meanings are sedimented interpretations, classifications and pre-scriptions concerning living together in the social.

Such delimitation of the language capacity by all languages (*langue*) and cultures structures the spheres of the interpretants of identification and of the interpretants of responsive understanding, prefixing roles and conducts. Only on the basis of this type of articulation is it possible for the subjects of communication, the objects to communicate, referents, communicative modalities, genres of communication, and even communicative contexts to develop. Articulation occurs on an intercorporeal *continuum* where, only thanks to the verbal’s capacity for abstraction, is it possible to fix and define identities (sound, syntactical rules, interpretive trajectories, role, conduct, lived experience, culture, community affiliation, etc.); and to avoid that all this – by favouring “signification” over “significance,” precision over vagueness – should produce interferences among differences, to the point of compromising their separation in an entanglement of mutual compromise and indifference.

Writing acts on bodies, on an intercorporeal *continuum*, cutting, etching, engraving, resetting, interspersing, spacing out, separating, opposing. Verbal language fixes caesuras and distinctions in the memory of a given language, circumscribing communication in a world thus construed.

When writing intervenes as transcription to fix the said, the dictum, to sanction the interdicted, to ratify the verdict, to commemorate roles and slogans, language (*langue*) resorts to this mnemotechny to reinforce the power of marking differences and guaranteeing identities. Given the vastness of what with its capacity for abstraction language (*langue*) interdicts and *proscribes*, its *memory* is rather restricted by comparison to *remembrance* by the body of its constitutive intercorporeity. Only re-inscribing (re-writing) can de-inscribe what is pre-scribed. In-scribing (writing) is inevitably always de-scribing (de-writing) and re-scribing (re-writing), because this is the only

way writing can escape sclerosis in transcription, in inscription in the discourse universe that a given language (*langue*) describes and circumscribes.³¹ Writing, inscription is de-description and de-transcription insofar as it is de-writing and re-writing.³²

The idea that the human being is created in God's image and likeness can be made to consist in the non-functionality of linguistic creation, which overcomes *signification* in *significance*, in signifying as an end in itself, "for its own sake" (cf. Levinas 1982). But the expression "for its own sake" is not intended in the aesthetic sense of "art for art's sake," nor is it intended in terms of productivity, that is, of communication for production (or profit), nor in the anthropocentric sense of justifying man's dominion in whatever terms, including so-called anthropization (read destruction) of the planet. Instead, "for its own sake" is understood in a humanistic sense, according to which the human, in one's alterity (and not in one's identity) is an end and not a means, and as an end the greatest wealth of humanity.

Semiosis in nonverbal human languages, including communication and signification, present the same types of signs traceable in the sign behaviour of nonhuman animal (signals, icons, indexes, symbols, names). Nonetheless, the nonverbal semiosis of human languages differs from the nonverbal semiosis of nonhuman animal behavior, insofar as human nonverbal linguistic semiosis is "perfused" with verbal signs. Acting as a transmission shaft, verbal signs contribute to grafting language as species-specific primary modelling onto nonverbal human communication procedures, bringing them to the full status of *languages*. In other words, communication and signification through nonverbal signs in human semiosis occur, thanks to the mediation of verbal language, according to the species-specific model of language. Consequently, nonverbal communication and signification in human semiosis are qualitatively different from communication and signification in nonhuman animal sign behaviour. This difference is signalled with use of the term "language" for all human nonverbal sign systems in addition to the verbal, whilst it does not apply to nonhuman animal semiosis: all *specifically human signs are language, whether verbal or nonverbal*.

Therefore, there is a kernel of truth, so to say, in Roland Barthes's observation in *Éléments de sémiologie* (1964): doubtlessly, in social life, as is particularly evident in the present day and age, no sign systems are as extensive as verbal language. Moreover, images and patterns of behavior can, in effect, signify, and they signify on a large scale, "but never autonomously," given that "every semiological system has its linguistic admixture," that is to say, it somehow has to do with verbal language.³³ More generally, "it appears increasingly more difficult to conceive a system of images and

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² Susan Petrilli, "Representation and Literary Writing. From Identity to Alterity: Re-writing and De-writing", *Foreign Literature Studies*, (6), 2015, pp. 46–58; Idem, *The Global World and Its Manifold Faces*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2016. Augusto Ponzio, *Fuori luogo. L'esorbitante nella riproduzione dell'identico*, Milan, Mimesis, 2013; Idem, *Tra semiotica e letteratura*, Milan, Bompiani, 2015; Idem, *La coda dell'occhio*, Rome, Aracne, 2016.

³³ Roland Barthes, "Éléments de sémiologie", *Communication*, 4, 1964, pp. 9–35; Idem, *Elements of semiology*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1968, pp. 9–10.

objects whose *signifieds* can exist independently of language: to perceive what a substance signifies is inevitably to fall back on the individuation of a language (*langue*): there is no meaning which is not designated, and the world of signifieds is none other than that of language³⁴: in other words, it would generally seem ever more difficult to conceive of a system of images or objects whose meanings exist outside the verbal: in order to perceive what something signifies, we must necessarily resort to the work of articulation carried out by a language (*langue*): sense does not subsist without being named and the world of meanings is no less than the verbal.

But, if this is true, it doesn't depend on a sort of "power of the verbal," as established by a glottocentric vision of the world. Barthes is right to specify that "such language is not quite that of the linguist".³⁵ But, let us add that, if, as Barthes believes, this is a question of verbal language relative to this or that other language (*langue*), not considered at the level of monemes and phonemes, but of "larger fragments of discourse referring to objects or episodes" (*ibid.*), this depends on language as "primary modelling." With respect to this, verbal language (*langue*), oral and written, is "secondary modelling" ("tertiary modelling" corresponds to culture). Verbal language is not the foundation of nonverbal languages, but rather, evoking Barthes, verbal language is only the "mediating element," to use another one of Barthes' expressions, that enables species-specific language as modelling to intervene in nonverbal languages. Via this connection, human nonverbal languages are capable of significations. But, if it is true that human nonverbal signs must inevitably encounter verbal signs on their interpretive trajectories, sooner or later, it must also be clarified that the meaning of these nonverbal signs would not be achieved without deferral to verbal signs. Consequently, the general science of human signs cannot be reduced to "trans-linguistics," as instead Barthes maintains. Nor can we accept the proposal he makes in *Elements of semiology* of inverting the relationship, established by Saussure, between linguistics and the science of signs. Barthes claims that semiology is part of linguistics and not vice versa: "to be precise, it is that part covering the *great signifying units* of discourse".³⁶

To explain the specificity of verbal and nonverbal languages, compared to sign systems in the remaining nonhuman animal world, in light of species-specific modelling procedure of language means to found the study of these languages *semiotically* (and *not* "semiologically"), abandoning prejudices of the phonocentric and glottocentric order in sign studies.³⁷ That language as primary modelling finds its main means of exteriorization and enhancement in vocalization and in the verbal generally (if we keep account of writing-transcription), does not imply that exteriorization and enhancement do not occur through nonverbal languages as well.

A conspicuous example is the language of deaf-mutes which, in the learner, is not at all mediated by the verbal (teacher language is obviously founded on articulation of the

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Susan Petrilli, *The Global World and Its Manifold Faces*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2016, pp. 45–68.

real relatively to the spoken language), but is directly implanted in language as specifically human modelling and representation procedure. Another example is communication among infants, already referred to, who as the word itself (*in-fans*) says, don't speak, and yet they communicate to effect via nonverbal means nonetheless. Not only, as observed above, supported by this type of communication, infants eventually acquire verbal language.

Not to distinguish between "language" and "verbal language",³⁸ in the attempt to explain language origin with Chomskyian concepts, leads to forms of "psychological reductionism." As Rossi-Landi observes: "complex anthropogenic processes are synthesized in the linear development of certain cognitive capacities, moreover described in the language of traditional syntactics".³⁹

According to Rossi-Landi, "language" (*linguaggio/langage*) which he describes in terms of "work," "linguistic work," is that which produces (historical-natural) languages (*lingua/langue*), and which reactivates and revalorizes the "*parole*". The "*parole*" is individual only because processing, each elaboration, is performed by the single individual, but the "processing model is social".⁴⁰ We believe that Rossi-Landi's concept of "language as work" can be associated with Sebeok's concept of "language as primary modelling." In fact, as Rossi-Landi writes:

[...] linguistic work lies on the side of *langage* insofar as, being collective rather than individual, it stands in opposition to *parole* and, being work rather than product, to *langue*. By considering *langage* a mere unit, a combination of *langue* and *parole*, we preclude the study of the collective and communitary techniques of language. The bipartition between language (*lingua/langue*) and speech (*parlare/parole*) must be replaced by a tripartiton: (collective) linguistic work (*lavoro linguistico*) produces language (*lingua/langue*) on and with which the speech (*parlare/parole*) of single individuals is practiced. The products of speech flow back into the same reservoir from which its materials and instruments are drawn.⁴¹

Rossi-Landi characterizes verbal language (*linguaggio verbale*) as semiosis specific to humankind in terms of "linguistic work". This means to describe the specificity of verbal language in terms the mediated use of signs, where what mediates, as in any human production of artefacts, is "work," as Hegel had already observed before Marx. Rossi-Landi contrasts *work* with *activity*. We claim that with respect to the activity of *semiotic interpretation* traceable in all living beings, humans included, specially at the endosemiotic level, linguistic work is *semiotic interpretation*. Linguistic work produces signs by processing signs used as materials, with signs used as instruments, based on models which too result from preceding sign productions.

The expression "linguistic work" evokes a process developed on the basis of conscious awareness in the worker. In truth, there is no necessary connection between

³⁸ See, e.g., P. Liebermann, *On the Origin of Language*, New York, MacMillan, 1975.

³⁹ F. Rossi-Landi, *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni*, p. 229. Translation by S. Petrilli.

⁴⁰ Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato*, Milan, Bompiani, 1992 (1968); *Language as Work and Trade*, Massachusetts, Bergin & Garvey, 1983, p. 68.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 69. Citation translated by S. Petrilli.

“work” and “awareness,” “consciousness” – suffice it to consider Marx’s use of the expression “alienated work” (this too reading Hegel) and Freud’s notion of “oniric work”.⁴² To develop the human capacity for *semiotic interpretation* also means to develop awareness of linguistic and nonlinguistic work through knowledge and control of the social planning involved for their delivery.

Because of commodified and alienated work in our society, “work” in the expression “linguistic work” evokes something opposed “playful activity.” Consequently, the notion of “linguistic work” may seem to contradict that of the “play of musement,” thematized by Peirce and evoked by Sebeok, following Peirce, to describe the specificity of humans. The “play of musement” is an expression that Sebeok uses to characterize the human being (also described as a “semiotic animal”⁴³ and thus evoke the human species-specific primary modelling device or language. In reality, “work” does not contrast with “playful activity” for “playful activities” also call for the preliminary work of preparation and performance. Moreover, work may even be particularly enjoyable, even playful. “There are no clearly cut distinctions,” as Rossi-Landi claims, and if it is possible to identify two extreme zones in which to situate that which is “work” and that which is not, there is also a broad intermediate zone, “where elements forming the two extreme zones overlap or interweave”.⁴⁴ After all, it is no incident that it was Sebeok who promoted publication of the first edition of Rossi-Landi’s *Linguistics and Economics* (as “Part Eight” of Volume XII, *Linguistics and adjacent arts and sciences*, of *Current Trends in Linguistics*, 1974: 1787–2017). The Italian version, also by Rossi-Landi, only appeared in 2016.

A thinker directly connected to Rossi-Landi is the Vietnamese scholar Tran Duc Thao. Rossi-Landi was involved in publication of the original French edition of Thao’s book, *Recherches sur l’origine du langage et de la conscience* (1973). Self-consciousness is generally reduced to a self-referential cognitive process. In addition to Rossi-Landi and other philosophers like Mikhail Bakhtin, Valentin Vološinov, and Emmanuel Levinas, Tran Duc Thao also contributes to interrogating a reductionist vision of consciousness. Moreover, this vision is also oriented ideologically in the sense that it exalts the self, and, consequently, obliterates, expunges the other (Ponzio, 1993). Interrogation occurs by conceiving “consciousness of self” as inherent to the relationship with the body’s alterity (*alterity of self*) and with the alterity of the other, the other’s alterity (*alterity from self*) in historically determined social relationships. Sebeok’s contribution to this problematic is also noteworthy. In his reflections on the *semiotic self* he shifts and broadens the concept of “self” to include two fundamental defence mechanisms of the individual organism, the immunitary system and anxiety. Though a question of sign systems – Sebeok in fact discusses them in terms of the “semiotic self”⁴⁵ –, they escape the sphere of the conscious

⁴² Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni*, Milan, Bompiani, 1985, p. 7.

⁴³ Cf. John Deely, Susan Petrilli, Augusto Ponzio, *The Semiotic Animal*, Toronto, Legas, 2005.

⁴⁴ F. Rossi-Landi, *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni*, p. 11. Translation by S. Petrilli.

⁴⁵ Cf. Thomas A. Sebeok, *A Sign Is Just a Sign*, pp. 36–40, 41–48; Idem, *Signs. An Introduction to Semiotics*, 2001, pp. 120–127, 128–135. Thomas A. Sebeok, Susan Petrilli, Augusto Ponzio, *Semiotica dell’io*, Rome, Meltemi, 2001, pp. 11–72.

and subjectivity, to involve the self of “self-consciousness” as a “zoosemiotic” organism with its particular individual and intercorporeal memory.

4. FREUD: APHASIA AS AN IDIOMATIC AND SYMPTOMATIC PECULIARITY OF THE WORD

In 1891 Freud published a text on the problem of aphasias, “Zur Auffassung der Aphasien,” in which he discusses Paul Broca’s discovery made thirty years earlier – Broca was the first to relate aphasic disorder to a lesion localized in the cerebral cortex – and Carl Wernicke who had generalized “localization theory” thirteen years earlier. Freud excluded this text intentionally from his complete works, perhaps to avoid the impression that psychoanalysis is connected at its beginnings with neurology; a mistaken impression, for this very text testifies to how psychoanalysis begins as linguistics. Freud’s focus on aphasias is connected with his interest in language disorders and their inadequate treatment by linguistic theory. In particular, he questioned localist theory. Freud presented the idea that language functions through association and that aphasias result from the interruption of associative processes.

Freud describes the “word” as a unit of linguistic function, a complex representation involving processes of association, combining acoustic, visual and kinaesthetic images. Representation of the word involves precisely four types of images: the “sound image,” the “letter’s visual image,” the “language motor image,” the “writing motor image.” Each new association of the linguistic order, in the speaker’s original language as much as in an eventual second language, is linked to the preceding, in the form of a surassociation. Each new association is surassociated to the preceding. Language is structured as an interdependent field of associations.

Representation of the word is *typed* to representation of the object, it too, in turn, an associative complex of the most diverse representations: visual, acoustic, tactile, kinaesthetic, etc. Representation of an *object* projects “resemblance” (*Anschein*) of a thing. This thing not only consists of the properties that the sensory impressions obtained by the object “speak” of, but also of an open series of presumed impressions that enter the associative chain as well. So that, on Freud’s account, while representation of a word would seem to be closed, representation of the object seems not to be closed. Representation of the object is *resemblance* of a thing that is tied to representation of the word, consisting of associations between visual, acoustic and kinaesthetic images.

Freud indicates internal disorder in the word complex as *verbal aphasia*, detachment of the representation of the word with its associations from objectual associations as *symbolic aphasia*, and purely functional disorder in linguistic structure as *agnosia aphasia*.

Another important standpoint taken by Freud in “Zur Auffassung der Aphasien” is his rejection of the distinction between aphasias and amnesias. In the terminology used by Freud in this paper on aphasia dominate the words “association,” “function,” “functional” and “repetition.”

Freud uses the description of word disorder, pathology, to explain how language functions. Consequently, the issue for him was not illness, illness that called to be “tailed,” so-to-say, so as to discover where it lives, its location. The symptom no longer gives rise to inquisitorial procedure. Demonization of the symptom gives way to its valorization to the end of describing how language functions. Freudian analysis of the word replaces interrogation, cross-examination, indictment as enacted by medical, psychiatric anamnesis.

Already with Freud, then, the science of language is gradually replaced by the science of the word. Impossible to localize the word; let alone master it. Freud was to claim that “The ego is not master in its own house,” reference being to one’s own language, one’s own “mother tongue.” There is no *place* for the word, no *subject* of the word. Aphasia is aphasia of the word in its logic, original aphasia, idiomatic aphasia. This is aphasia of a word considered in its singularity, in its quality, in its uniqueness as *an-other word*, a *word that is other*, a babelic word, a word related to *an-other word* that understands it.

Freud’s works evidence the nature of the word as symptom, in its unintentional aspect, by contrast to the sign characterized by communicative intention. On the other hand, he revalorizes those aspects of the word that refer to the arbitrariness of language (*langue*), arbitrariness outside conventionality, to the word free from the relation of biunivocal correspondences between signifier (*signifiant*) and signified (*signifié*). Freud demonstrates that to conceptualize language as mere instrument is unsustainable. Signifiers combine arbitrarily, fortuitously, in the sign of inventiveness and contingency. The word speaks. The word is a “Freudian slip.” Psychoanalysis emerges as the science that Aristotle considered impossible, the science of singularity. The word is characterized by equivocality, ambiguity, misunderstanding: *equivocality*, not contradiction.⁴⁶

The word is symptomatic of its equivocality. The symptom does not refer to some disorder, to some illness that confers sense upon it. The word is the house of associations; in the word there are only deferrals from one signifier to another; and encounters, in listening, of an-other word with an-other word, a word that is other, without the least possibility of eliminating equivocation, misunderstanding. So that each interpretation, together with construction, with narration in which interpretation is developed, is different at each occurrence, unique, singular; interpretation is a drifting movement, provoked by other interpretations.⁴⁷

Aphasia is inherent in language, it functions in language, excluding the possibility of “metalanguage”. In the word the symptom testifies to autonomy from interpretation, from conferral of sense, resistance to the unitary, to re-solution, translation, decodification, neutralization, refractoriness to being treated, re-solved, to being situated in some

⁴⁶ Susan Petrilli, *Sign Studies and Semioethics. Communication, Translation and Values*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2014, pp. 139–154; Idem, *The Global World and Its Manifold Faces*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2016, pp. 279–306. Augusto Ponzio, *Freud, l’analisi, la scrittura*, Bari, Graphis, 2009.

⁴⁷ Massimo A. Bonfantini, *La semiosi e l’abduzione*. Milan, Bompiani, 1987; Idem, “La semiotica cognitiva di Peirce”, in Charles S. Peirce, *Opere*, trans., ed. M. A. Bonfantini, Turin, Bompiani, 2003, pp. 13–42; Susan Petrilli, *Significare, Interpretare e intendere. Tra, Lingue, Linguaggi e valori*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2019; Augusto Ponzio, *L’écoute de l’autre*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2009.

specific concatenation, reconducted to some sort of typology.

At every interpretation, conjecture, “unterminable” analysis *takes a step forward*, but at each step (also in the sense of the French negative *pas*), at each move towards the unsayable, it allows for a passage, an opening in saying. Nor does this movement imply linear interpretation, continuous advancement, progressive conquest of the unsayable.

In the semiotic sphere, Roman Jakobson (1971) in particular has addressed problems relating to the making and unmaking of language, working on Vladimir Goldstein’s studies on aphasia and his thesis of the *semantic and systemic structure of the conscious*.

Different interpretations and approaches to Freudism have claimed to apply Freudian analysis of the symptom to pathology, annexing it to medicine and considering it a collaborationist of psychiatry. On this account indicative is that Victoria Welby, in her book *What is Meaning?*,⁴⁸ describing the typical process of Significs, her theory of meaning, as “diagnostic,” at once critiques the bad habit of restricting use of the term “diagnosis” to the sphere of pathology.⁴⁹

5. PEIRCE AND FREUD: EACH SINGLE INDIVIDUAL AND THE WORD

As Peirce claims:

[...] a Percept cannot be dismissed at will, even from memory. Much less can a person prevent himself from perceiving that which, as we say, stares him in the face. Moreover, the evidence is overwhelming that the perceiver is aware of this compulsion upon him (CP 4.541, “Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmaticism” 1906).

In another paragraph in the *Collected Papers*, from “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” 1868 (CP 5.264–5.317), Peirce observes that resistance, uneliminability of the percept, whether “in presence” or in the memory – in this sense its *materiality* –, does not make it a “fact,” a given in itself, fixed once and for all. A percept is a sign, an interpreted, open to the relation with different interpretants (CP 5.314). Indeed, a future interpretant determines the value of the preceding, the implication being that the existence of thought “now depends on what is to be hereafter, so that it only has a potential existence, dependent on the future thought of the community” (CP 5.316).

Moreover, what gives itself in perception and memory does not give itself as interpreted by a subject in itself, outside the process of interpretation. The subject is sign material, in turn interpreted and inserted in a chain of deferrals among interpretants and interpreted.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Victoria Welby, *What is Meaning? Studies in the Development of Significance* (1903), ed. and preface by A. Eschbach, intro. by G. Mannoury, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 1983, pp. 1–11, 51–52.

⁴⁹ S. Petrilli, A. Ponzio, “Semioethics”, in P. Cobley (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, pp. 150–162; Susan Petrilli, *Signifying and Understanding. Reading the Works of Victoria Welby and the Signific Movement*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2009, pp. 902–903.

⁵⁰ Augusto Ponzio, *Man as a Sign. Essays on the Philosophy of Language*, Eng. trans., ed., intro. and appendixes by S. Petrilli, Berlin, Mouton, 1990.

In what then does the reality of a “subject,” “I,” “thought” or “mind” consist? Peirce asked the question in 1868 (CP 5.313). Every mental act is an inferential process (CP 5.266) which constitutes the hi/story of an I, a single individual, of each one as a sort of narration, a story always open, continuously reinterpreted in different signifying trajectories. Each one as an I develops through interpreted-interpretant relationships, doubling into an I and a self, the interpretant I, the conscious, mind, and the interpreted I. Thought is a process consisting of continuous doublings between an interpreted-I and interpretant-I, where each term translates into a new pair.

All percepts, thoughts, feelings, mental states evolve in a flux of inferences. As immediate as they may be, all cognitions or representations presuppose the flow of thought, thus relations among different moments. According to Peirce, “just as we say that a body is in motion, and not that motion is in a body we ought to say that we are in thought and not that thoughts are in us” (CP 5.289, note). In Italian, the expression “*essere in pensiero*,” which translates “to be in thought,” also resounds in the sense of being concerned. In other words, based on Peirce’s conception of the sign, the expression “we are in thought” can also be interpreted as conveying a sense of the ethical-pragmatic dimension of cognition, as apprehension, involvement, unindifference.

All that is present to us as feeling, emotion, concept, representation, is a sign for us, therefore that doubles continuously into an interpreted sign and an interpretant sign, which in turn calls for another interpretant, according to the law of mental association. All preceding thought suggests something else, that is to say, it is a sign, for the following thought, in a continuous processes. Consequently, when a train of thought is interrupted, this is because other interpretive trajectories – either originally offside, disactivated, or newly engendered – continue emerging (CP 5.284).

All perceptions, feelings, emotions are situated as nodes in a thick network of signs. Therefore the conscious (understood in a broad sense, comprehensive of various stratifications, including the “unconscious”) is part of this same sign network. Perceptions, feelings, emotions and thoughts only subsist as nodes in this network, in the sense that they could not exist without the pieces, the interpretive trajectories, joining them.

As sign material, that which is part of the I as an interpreted is endowed with autonomy, resistance, objectivity with respect to the interpretant-I. It maintains an uninterpreted residue which gives rise to other interpretive trajectories, different to those from where it is positioned at any given moment. The thought process depends on the *materiality* of the interpreted, on associative relationships that lead interpretation in a given direction rather than in another; it depends also on overall continuity, essential synechism, in which the I searches for its unity, identity.

In addition to the object, the “percept,” that cannot be treated “at will,” the expression “materiality of the interpreted” also includes the I that specifies the interpreted as a sensation, feeling, emotion, differentiating it from a pure thought. This is what Peirce calls the “*material quality*” of a mental sign: it is determined both by preceding cognitions according to a law of logic, that is, by previous development of the conscious, and by the constitution of our nature, by impressions, by something that is exterior and blind, by an unexplicable and occult power. The mental sign, the sign of

our interpreted I is not only a representation, but also the material quality of representation, an affective coloring. In the same way (the comparison is Peirce's), that which is defined logically, as much as it is the *definitum* of purely logical piece of reasoning, will always resound in the material quality of this or that other language (*langue*), as a given word, consisting of a certain number of letters, of given phonemes and not others, and so forth. It is not possible to establish logically how a mental sign will effectively appear, its material quality. Material quality makes of the "thought-sign" a sign of the body, the body of each one or us (CP 5.293–294).

Thus considered (a thought-sign continuously doubling into interpreted and interpretant, subject to something external and irreducible to rational relations with preceding cognitions), the theme of "cognitive functions" is associated with that of *alterity*, indeed is implanted in alterity.

On considering the sign-interpretant relationship as an alterity relationship, Peirce claims not only that thoughts and feelings that the I calls "mine" have no ontological or metaphysical privilege, but that experience with a self other from me, external to me, is not more complex than experience with my own self, with interpretants recognized as "mine," through which I become conscious of myself (which allow for self-consciousness and install relations of alterity with the signs they interpret):

The recognition by one person of another's personality takes place by means to some extent identical with the means by which he is conscious of his own personality. The idea of the second personality, which is as much as to say that second personality itself, enters within the field of direct consciousness of the first person, and is as immediately perceived as his ego, though less strongly. At the same time, the opposition between the two persons is perceived, so that the externality of the second person is recognized. (CP 6.160)

Such reflections enable us to return to the psychoanalytical work of interpretation. In Freud the theme of the conscious-interpretation connection is developed in terms of alterity: alterity internal to the I, external alterity in the relationship with the analyst.

At this point, interesting to reconsider is Freud's distinction in *Constructions in Analysis*⁵¹ between *interpretation* and *construction*. Described as a relation of alterity, construction concerns both the other "internal to the 'same I'" and the "external other." These two types of construction are connected by a relation of mutual implication: construction of "external alterity" is a condition for construction of "internal alterity," and viceversa.

This leads back to the question of the relationship between self-analysis and analysis. As construction, the analytical work of interpretation does not consist in restitution, reproduction, re-construction of a text that has already been written. Instead, construction involves the creation of a new text through relations of alterity that activate new signifying trajectories from the customary. Considered in these terms, the

⁵¹ Sigmund Freud, *Die endliche und die unendliche Analyse*, 1937. It. trans. *Analisi terminabile e interminabile & Costruzioni nell'analisi*, in *Opere*, Turin, Boringhieri, 1979, vol. 11, pp. 497–535, 539–552.

work of construction helps gleam other pathways from those orienting a subject's story, from those which the I/self obstinately identifies with.

We will conclude this section connecting it to the preceding, particularly our observations on the *word* in relation to Freud.

In the two paragraphs in his *Collected Papers*, in the conclusion to his essay "Some consequences of four incapacities" (CP 5.313–5.317), Peirce observes that "there is no element whatever of man's consciousness which has not something corresponding to it in the word". And he adds that:

[...] the reason is obvious. It is that the word or sign which man uses is the man himself. For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign; so, that every thought is an external sign, proves that man is an *external* sign. That is to say, the man and the external sign are identical, in the same sense in which the words *homo* and *man* are identical. Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought. (CP 5.314)

In the previous paragraph, he had made the following observation:

But since man can think only by means of words or other external symbols, these might turn round and say: "You mean nothing which we have not taught you, and then only so far as you address some word as the interpretant of your thought." In fact, therefore, men and words reciprocally educate each other; each increase of a man's information involves and is involved by, a corresponding increase of a word's information. (CP 5.313)

We find that these observations are particularly interesting in order to read Freud through Peirce and Peirce through Freud.

6. WRITING, "OPERA", ICONICITY

Linguistic creativity as discussed by Chomsky concerns verbal language and is separated from the communicative function. But linguistic creativity is proper to language as a human modelling device. The creativity of verbal language and its capacity for autonomy from the communicative function derives from the fact that verbal language, like writing – which too can get free of its mnemotechnic function, as transcription of orality, and operate as creative writing – is implanted in language as modelling procedure (primary modelling). And a distinctive feature of language as modelling is its unlimited capacity for innovation and inventiveness.

Reflection on language and speech throws light on what it means to be *sapiens*, or rather *sapiens sapiens* – humankind at the highest levels of evolutionary development. While humans share semiosis with all other life-forms, we are the only animals capable of "semiotics", that is, of reflection on semiosis. "Semiotics" is not understood here as the name of the general science of signs, but as designating the universal human capacity to

reflect on signs, the human propensity for musement, for reflection on our cognitive strategies and everyday behaviour.⁵²

As a “semiotic animal”,⁵³ the human being, capable of reflecting on signs, what we have also designated as *metasemiosis*, of using signs to reason about signs, and therefore of deliberating, making decisions – and remembering that semiosis and life over the entire planet converge –, the human being is the only animal in semiosis endowed with a capacity for responsibility, and is responsible for semiosis over the entire planet. Responsibility is not only “technical,” but also “moral responsibility” (as Mikhail Bakhtin would say), and profoundly concerns those who study signs on a scientific plane, the *semiotician*. We have proposed to indicate this special “bend” in semiotics, that reflects on the relation of signs and values, semiotics and axiology, on the ethical dimension of semiosis, on the centrality of dialogical otherness and responsibility for life, as a condition for continuity of life on this planet, *semioethics*.

We have proposed the term “semioethics” from the very title of a book published in 2003, *Semioetica*, to indicate a special orientation in semiotics, and not a new branch of semiotics, once it becomes aware of its responsibility towards life over the planet. Semioethics recovers the original medical vocation of semiotics as *semeiotics* (Sebeok evokes Hippocrates and Galen), evidencing the condition of intercorporeal interconnectivity, thus of inevitable interdependency among all living beings, therefore all signs, and the implications for life, as research today in biosemiotics also evidences.

The *ethical relation*, in Levinas’s understanding of this expression, as the I-other intrigue, concerns body and word. The body and its *ethical intrigue*, *entanglement*, in the first place says of a contact, an involvement. The body allows the *saying* to be significant independently from the *said*, it allows for *assymetrical* communication – beyond bilateral communication for the exchange of messages –, where sense, from the I to the other, is not mutual, indifferent, or reversible, and where distance of one term from the other does not necessarily converge with the distance separating the latter from the former.

In this sense, the ethical relation not only concerns inevitable dialogical implication of the word, evidenced by Bakhtin (1929) in Dostoevsky’s artwork, and its corporeal aspect – voice, the grain of the voice, listening, contact, writing, especially in literary writing, but it also implies the *intercorporeal entanglement* among all living beings described by Bakhtin (1965) in his book on Rabelais through the figure of the “grotesque body”.

Writing as a practice that is independent from semiosis functional to the satisfaction of a given need, including those relative to different communicative functions, supercedes the sphere of objectivating thought, and presents an excess with respect to the subject-object, means-end relationship. Writing thus understood is traceable, even outside the verbal sign, in a movement towards alterity that Levinas (1972) calls *œuvre*,⁵⁴ each time it occurs, a one-way movement, without return, in the sense of “without profit” as

⁵² Thomas A. Sebeok, *A Sign Is Just a Sign*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991.

⁵³ J. Deely, S. Petrilli, A. Ponzio, *The Semiotic Animal*.

⁵⁴ Augusto Ponzio, *Con Emmanuel Levinas. Alterità e identità*, Milan, Mimesis, 2019.

well. In this movement the sign manifests the scope of its *significance* beyond *signification*, of the *significance of signification itself* (Levinas). In other words, this movement, Levinas's *œuvre*, evidences the possibility of signification to signify in *saying* itself and not exhaust itself in the *said*. Writing, in the sense specified from the very beginning of this essay differentiating it from "transcription," is autonomy from the "said," *surplus* that is not functional to message exchange, irreducibility to the status of object, excess with respect to the economy of narration and memory.

In Peirce's terminology, with respect to meaning and the interpretant, in *writing as a practice oriented according to the movement of an artwork*, the sign manifests itself in all its autonomy as iconicity prevails over the mechanical necessity of *indexicality* and the arbitrariness of *symbolic conventionality*.

Writing as we are describing it, is oriented by what Peirce denominates *Firstness* or *Orience* or *Originality*, which "is being such as that being is, regardless of aught else" (CP 2.89). It is precisely this possibility of being such as being is, regardless of anything else that constitutes alterity: the possibility of being *kath'auto* (Levinas), that is, of being independently of reference to anything else, whether a viewpoint, a function, an end, a relation of distinction or opposition, of belonging to a story.

That Firstness, Orience, or Originality is "something *which is what it is without reference to anything else* within it or without it, regardless of all force and of all reason" (CP 2.85), is the reason why this something cannot be englobed in a totality; indeed elicits reopening of the totality, its renewal and reorganization, that is never concluded or finalized.

This movement we are designating as *œuvre* with Levinas, writing as opposed to transcription, is proper to the artwork, but not only: it can also be traced outside the artistic sphere.⁵⁵ However, in the artistic sphere it manifests itself as a fundamental condition and a method. The significance of saying as proximity, as contact, intercorporeity, involvement, is endowed with the characteristics of the *artwork*.

Knowledge, the totality, binarity and mediation, knowledge that presents itself as accommodation to the object, as cognitive adequacy, all presuppose *orience* (Peirce), alterity, inadequacy *par excellence*, which is the capacity to surpass objectivating thought, the boundaries of memory, and of the subject that memory guarantees. On the basis of memory and writing as mnemotechny (transcription), only limited knowledge is possible. This is the case, for example, of deductive inference, of knowledge that is only amplified in quantitative, repetitive, unilinear terms, without discontinuities, returns, retroactions, qualitative leaps, as in the case of inductive inference. Instead, the cognitive inventiveness of abduction⁵⁶ is based on the opening afforded by writing, it calls for the *distraction of remembrance* which disanchors itself from memory, from the economy of narration, from the official order, and develops in drifting, whose characteristics are nonfunctionality, lack of utility, a capacity for digression. All this involves exposition to alterity that cannot be absorbed, or reconducted to the narrative economy of the subject,

⁵⁵ E. Levinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme*.

⁵⁶ M. A. Bonfantini, *La semiosi e l'abduzione*.

to the small time (the “temps du sujet seul,” to evoke Levinas, the time of the self in its alleged self-sufficiency), to the being that is already determined, the totality.

As we have discussed in other essays,⁵⁷ machines, computers are capable of memory and mnemotechny, more and better than human, hence they are capable of deductive and inductive inferences. On the contrary, the type of movement involved in remembering and writing, as opening to alterity, is an exclusively human prerogative. This is the movement involved in abductive inference which is exclusive to the human and makes for the renewal and innovation of knowledge. In fact, as Peirce demonstrates, abduction is the only type of argumentation that gives origin to a new idea. Abduction

is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis.

Deduction proves that something *must* be; Induction shows that something *actually* is operative; Abduction merely suggests that something *may* be. (CP 5.171)

In audacious and creative abduction, the surprising and innovative capacity is not so much in the exhibition of an image that approaches what seems to withdraw from all grips and relations, as in the orientation towards the autonomously other. Abductive inference risks going beyond the given, with respect to which it offers an interpretant that – owing to the predominance of iconicity – *is itself endowed with alterity and autonomy*, for it is not wholly motivated, justified, compensated by the object of interpretation.

The creative imagination of scientific discovery in abductive inference, “all the more innovative all the more the juxtaposition between the result and the antecedent is unusual”⁵⁸ is no different from Giacomo Leopardi’s “double feeling,” in the digressions of remembrance at the basis of poetant thinking in which, he believes,

lies all the beauty and pleasure of things. Sad is that life (and such it is generally) that does not see, hear, feel if not but simple objects, only those for which eyes, ears and other feelings receive the sensation.⁵⁹

In the deferral between sign and interpretant which constitutes the thought, and which constitutes the subject insofar as it “is in thought” (in the double sense described above), in abduction though signs relate to each other, they do not follow on from each other mechanically, nor do they match perfectly: an excess occurs, a residue that ampli-

⁵⁷ S. Petrilli, *Sign Studies and Semioethics*. S. Petrilli, A. Ponzio, *Semiotics Unbounded*. A. Ponzio, *La rivoluzione bachtiniana*; Idem, *La coda dell'occhio*.

⁵⁸ M. A. Bonfantini, in Charles S. Peirce, *Le leggi dell'ipotesi*, trans., ed. by M. A. Bonfantini, R. Grazia and G. Proni, intro. by M. A. Bonfantini, Milan, Bompiani, 1984, p. 22.

⁵⁹ Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone* [1817–1832], p. 4418 of the manuscript, in Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, vol. 2, ed. R. Damiani, Milan, Mondadori, 2011, pp. 977–978G. Translation by S. Petrilli. In original: “sta tutto il bello e il piacevole delle cose. Trista quella vita (ed è pur tale la vita comunemente) che non vede, non ode, non sente se non che oggetti semplici, quelli soli di cui gli occhi, gli orecchi e gli altri sentimenti ricevono la sensazione”.

fies, or modifies and reviews the totality that the thought – the subject – identifies with at a certain point. The iconicity of abduction consists in establishing a relationship between that which is not originally or naturally related: imaginative representation attempts nearing that which gives itself as other.

7. METAPHOR AND INVENTIVENESS

Verbal language helps understand how the human mind works, a task pursued by cognitive linguistics with its focus on thought processes and concept-formation. Under this aspect, a special type of icon, the *metaphor* (in Peirce's classification) deserves special attention. In his writings on metaphor, language and concept, particularly his books *Vico, Metaphor, and the Origin of Language* (1993) and *Lingua, metafora, concetto. Vico e la linguistica cognitiva* (2001), Marcel Danesi evidences the empirical role of *metaphorical interconnectivity* in verbal communication and symbolical expression generally. But metaphorical-associative procedure in concept-formation calls for a *theoretical explanation* as well. An important contribution in this sense comes from semiotics in the tradition outlined by Locke and Peirce and, in more recent times, by Charles Morris, Roman Jakobson and Thomas Sebeok.

In spite of the decisive role carried out by metaphor in thought, language and communication, we know that it has long been considered mistakenly as a mere rhetorical or decorative device. As driving argumentation, metaphor does not only *represent* objects (indicational modelling), but *pictures* them (which involves modelling proper to language and modelling systems based on language, i.e., the “secondary,” modelling systems of historical-natural languages, and the “tertiary” modelling of cultural systems exclusive to humans). As such, metaphor, this associative capacity, is capable of highly abstract symbolically structured processes. Moreover, interdisciplinary research has revealed that metaphorical-associative procedure emerges in the cerebral hemisphere which controls creative acts and synthetical-global meanings.

Among the most theoretically advanced voices of linguistics with claims to the status of “philosophy of language,” not even the Chomskyan generative-transformational approach affords an adequate theoretical explanation, given its deafness to the question of the metaphor, considered an aberration. This explains Danesi (1993) who recalls Vico (1948, 1963) and his “new science” where, instead, metaphor is already recognized as a major mechanism in concept-formation. Vico's role in twentieth century semiotics, the science, theory or discipline that deals with signs, is evidenced by Sebeok in “Some Reflections on Vico in Semiotics”.⁶⁰ Danesi circumscribes the question of Vico's relation with sign studies to *linguistics*, focusing on recent orientations in *cognitive linguistics*.

⁶⁰ Thomas A. Sebeok, “Some Reflections on Vico in Semiotics”, in *Functional Approaches to Language, Culture and Cognition*, ed. by D. G. Lockwood, P.H. Fries, J. E. Copeland, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2000, pp. 555–568; Idem, *Global Semiotics*, pp. 135–144.

A strong contact point between Giambattista Vico and cognitive linguistics as it has developed over the past thirty years is, in fact, the common interest in metaphor and its pivotal function in thought and language. This is not merely to evidence a similarity or to acknowledge a precedence. In Danesi's view, Vico's reflections help contextualize current linguistic research in a theoretical framework that explains metaphorical-associative procedure in terms of species-specific human modelling. Our allusion here is to Vico's notion of "poetic logic," according to which the human mind has a propensity to intuit and express things synthetically and holistically: on the one hand, Vichian "poetic logic" presents an alternative to the Chomskyan model, and, on the other, it is in line with research today in cognitive linguistics, neuropsychology, and developments in semiotics and modelling theory.

The human mind moves between meanings and concepts in a modality described by Danesi as imaginative mental navigation, in a network of interpretative trajectories and associative connections that form the complex system or "macro-web" denominated "culture". In this light, the notions of "linguistic competence" (Chomsky) and "communication competence" (Searle) (whether opposed to or as a completion of Chomskyan theory) are clearly inadequate or insufficient to explain how thinking and speaking function, the human capacity for reasoning and verbal expression: on Danesi's account, both competencies enter an *organic conceptual competence* that consists in the ability to convert thought schemes from different conceptual dominions into linguistic and communicative structures.

"Conceptual competence" allows for the creation of messages that are conceptually appropriate and culturally relevant. It consists in three sub-competencies: a) *metaphorical competence*, that is, the ability to metaphorize a concept appropriately; b) *reflexive competence*, the ability to select linguistic structures and categories that reflect conceptual dominions inherent to the message appropriately; and c) *cultural competence*, the ability to navigate the different discourse fields and conceptual dominions presented in the message.

True "linguistic creativity" consists in forming new metaphorical associations, in proposing new cognitive combinations, in inventing new figurations. This is not a prerogative of poets, scientists, and writers, but rather, to evoke Vico, a capacity involving *fantasy*, *ingenuity* and *memory*, which we all possess insofar as we are human, thus a question of primary modelling, Sebeok's "language," the preliminary basis of human symbolic behaviour. In other words, the associative capacity, linguistic creativity understood in the broad nonverbal sense of "linguistics," is structural to human primary, secondary and tertiary modelling systems.

Unlike the Cartesian model of the thinking subject, the associative nature of thought and verbal language, as observed by Danesi (1993), allows for the claim that human beings are ingenious "guessers" more than rational thinkers. "Guessing", to evoke Peirce, characterizes argumentation the more capable of creativity, inventiveness and innovation, the more it risks associations among terms distant from each other, among fields seemingly unrelated to each other in the macro-web of culture.

8. A VICHIAN LINGUISTICS?

At this point, a question worth at least mentioning is whether or not we may speak of a “Vichian linguistics” in contrast to “Cartesian linguistics” (to which is associated Chomsky’s generative-transformational grammar given his innatistic assumptions). In addition to founding the historical sciences, Vico has the merit of pioneering investigation into the metaphorical nature of thought and speech. Nonetheless, we believe that this does not justify making of him a “tutelary deity” of new orientations in linguistics. Apart from anything else, Vico, at least in Italy, is already an important reference point for Benedetto Croce’s historicism (nor do we believe it advisable to risk inappropriate associations between cognitive linguistics and Croce’s oversimplifying aesthetic and linguistic ideas as expressed in his renown book, *Estetica come scienza dell’espressione e linguistica generale*, 1902). In any case, when a question of scientific research, it is best not to commit to “tutelary deities”. There now exists a consistent bibliography on the relation between Vico and semiotics.⁶¹ No doubt many ideas in semiotics and philosophy of language and other sign sciences have somehow been influenced by Vico, whether directly or indirectly, or at least they present analogies with his way of thinking. We also have studies that compare Vico and Peirce, for example, on the notion of “common sense,” on the critique of Descartes, on the relation between Peirce’s pragmatism and Vico’s formula that “*verum factum convertuntur*”. Here we can only limit ourselves to declaring our doubts.

Vico’s critique of Descartes presents motivations, argumentations and above all a context obviously altogether different from Peirce’s. Delimitation of the cognitive sphere to human works contrasts with Peircean semiotics and its current developments which range well beyond the boundaries of anthroposemiosis and the “semiosphere” as understood by Lotman, limited, that is, to human culture: as a development on Peirce when he claims that all the universe is perfused with signs, Sebeok and all those operating in the sphere of biosemiotics have broadened the margins of semiosphere having it coincide with the biosphere.

Alongside ideas important to develop and not only in the cognitive sphere, in his search for solid, inviolable boundaries (traceable in religious tradition and common sense), Vico’s *New Science* presents apologetic and rhetorical expedients designed to reject or contain the new vision of the world and of the human deriving from progress in the physical and mathematical sciences. For Vico “common sense is judgement without reflection, commonly felt by a whole order, peoples, nation, human race, and is taught to nations by divine providence” (*Scienza nuova*, I, Dignità XII and XIII). Therefore, to critique Vico contrasts a fideistic attachment to common sense, a system of judgements deriving from the divine and not the human, convalidated by the rhetorical expedient of quantity which boasts the validity of the highest numbers, if not universal consensus.⁶² Even Vichian anticartesianism is the expression of “resistance and defence against the philosophical development and implementation of new mathe-

⁶¹ Cf. T. A. Sebeok, “Some Reflections on Vico in Semiotics”.

⁶² Giuseppe Semerari, *Esperienze del pensiero moderno*. Urbino, Argalia, 1969, pp. 271, 239–240.

matical experimental science... a cultural strategy devised, more or less consciously, for the *quietness of not moving*, of leaving things as they are, limiting the field of action of the new methodology as much as possible, dangerous for the natural course of ideas and common sense”.⁶³

If all this is true, if it be true that Vico’s position and current cognitive research are distant from each other not only in historico-contextual terms, but in terms of overall sense, orientation, motivation, such that cognitive linguistics cannot be classified as “Vichian linguistics”, nonetheless Danesi’s explorations, as he translates the New science into the language of contemporary linguistic and neurological research, reveals a great capacity to identify profound homologies, beyond easily identifiable, but superficial analogies.

9. METAPHOR IN WELBY AND VAILATI

As a way of completing our reflections on the icon, in particular the metaphor, a brief reference is in place to the important but generally neglected works on imagery and the figures of discourse, published towards the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, by Victoria Welby (1837–1912) and Giovanni Vailati (1863–1909).

Victoria Welby, who has an important epistolary with Charles Peirce (some of his most innovative writings are in their correspondence), worked on a theory of meaning she denominated “Significs” with a neologism, intending to signal her interest in meaning in a valuational sense (emotional, ethical, aesthetical, pragmatical), and not only the semantic. This double sense at least of meaning is conveyed with the question from ordinary language, “what does it signify?,” “what does it mean?” – and is subsequently the object of investigation in studies by Charles Morris, e.g., in his book of 1964, *Signification and Significance*. In *What is Meaning* (1983), *Significs and Language* (1911), and her essays “Meaning and Metaphor” (1893) and “Sense, Meaning and Interpretation” (1896),⁶⁴ Welby describes metaphor as a vital aspect of thought and verbal language, which are characterized by “plasticity” (see also Welby 2010, 2021). Instead of considering the “figurative” as meaning to be rendered “literal,” and images and analogies as faded and indistinct abstractions or mere rhetorical expedients, Welby maintains that the notion of simple meaning and the possibility of referring directly to “hard dry fact” is delusory. She signals the need to investigate the *necessary* use of metaphor in thought and discourse, hence its instrumental value in reasoning, knowledge and communication.⁶⁵

Giovanni Vailati was also aware of the need to reflect on the workings of the metaphor. Welby’s research as well as Peirce’s (Vailati was among the first in Italy to understand the latter’s importance) guided his own studies on questions of logic and meaning

⁶³ *Ibidem*, pp. 239–240.

⁶⁴ Now both in Susan Petrilli (ed.), *Signifying and Understanding. Reading the Works of Victoria Welby and the Signific Movement*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2009, pp. 421–430, 430–449.

⁶⁵ S. Petrilli, *Signifying and Understanding*; Idem, *The Self as a Sign, the World and the Other. Living Semiotics*; Idem, *Significs e filosofia del linguaggio. Il significato del significare in Victoria Welby*.

in both ordinary and scientific discourse. (With Mario Calderoni, his friend and collaborator, Vailati visited Welby at her home in England). In his article, of 1905, “I tropi della logica”,⁶⁶ occasioned by Welby’s book *What Is Meaning?*, Vailati examines metaphors used to speak about the reasoning process itself. Even when discussing discourse and thought, linguistic and logical operations, metaphors condition how we understand them. Vailati distinguishes between three types of images: 1) *support* (as in discussions about conclusions that are “founded”, “based”, that “depend on”, “connect to”); 2) *contain* or *include* (conclusions “contained” in the premises); 3) *ascend* or *descend* (conclusions that “derive from,” that “go back to” given principles). He questions their use in argumentation, pointing out the connection to a hierarchical view of things (to be based on, to stand upon, to be grounded in), or to the mere distribution of certainties implied in the premises, that merely call to be explicated. In terms not dissimilar from Danesi on the relation between metaphor and concept, Vailati observes that “it is preferable to speak of attraction and mutual support. The spread of certainty is bidirectional, not unidirectional”.⁶⁷

A certain type of imagery leads to conceiving of premises as simple elements, as though there exist “primordial, undecomposable, atomic truths,” yet the simplicity or complexity of any given assertion is always “extremely relative” (*ibid.*: 89); other images lead one to believe that inference means to pass from the general to the particular, which is not even true of deduction as revealed by the deductive science *par excellence* reveals, mathematics, where demonstrative processes to the exact contrary are frequent, and conclusions contain a premise as its special case.⁶⁸

Vailati does not use the Peircean term “abduction,” but thematizes a “special type of deduction” (autonomously from Peirce), which has enabled current developments in modern science. In this “special type of deduction” initial propositions call to be proven more than the propositions reached, so that the latter “must communicate certainties reached through experimental verification to the initial hypotheses”. Abduction is a particular form of deduction, based on suppositions, conjectures, hypotheses, “deduction that anticipates experience” and that, unlike real deduction “moves towards unsuspected conclusions,” as foreseen by the hypothetical-deductive method precisely, or, as Peirce would say, the “abductive method”.⁶⁹

In this new type of deduction, that is, abduction, Vailati observes that relations of similarity are established among things, that are not immediately given. These relations identify analogies among elements that to immediate experience would not seem to be related at all. This allows for “progress in cognition” beyond the power of induction, such that as an effect of deduction of the hypothetical order – or abduction – “we discover intimate analogies between facts that would seem to be different and that immediate observation is incapable of revealing”.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Giovanni Vailati, *Il metodo della filosofia. Saggi di critica del linguaggio*, ed. by F. Rossi-Landi. Bari, Graphis, 2000, pp. 81–91.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

⁶⁹ Giovanni Vailati, *Scritti filosofici*, ed. by G. Lanaro, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1980, p. 65.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

These special “intimate analogies” that allow for cognitive development and “scientific revolutions” are what in biology are called “homologies,” similarities of the dynamical-structural order, as opposed to analogies, surface and often deviating similarities. The distinction between “analogy” and “homology” was clear to Welby who even used this precise terminology to mark it. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, who continues and develops Vailati’s reflections, bases his own language-related research on the same “homological method”.

10. LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY AND LITERARY WRITING

Literary writing is another important place, and perhaps the most ancient, for autonomization of writing from transcription, achieved as autonomization of the written sign from its ancillary function with respect to oral language and from its reduction to the status of mnemotechny. Together with other forms of writing of our times, film writing develops and enhances the artwork of literary writing, something Ejzenstejn had already understood clearly – “film-making begins exactly where all forms of literary art ‘end up’”.⁷¹

The *disengagement* of literary writing, that is, from the commitments of other writing-transcription genres, frees it from defined, partial and relative responsibilities, limited by *alibis*. Disengagement from limited responsibility charges literary writing with *responsibility without limits*, absolute responsibility which is connected with liberation from all those obstacles the manifestation of what characterizes the human being most – that is, *language*, the human capacity for *the infinite play of construction* – and *deconstruction* – *of new possible worlds*. “Play” in this case, and not “work,” for play is autonomized from need, external to the “reign of necessity,” in excess of functionality and productivity.⁷²

Literature is allusive, parodic, ironical, a form of “silence,” or rather “quietude” (Bakhtin),⁷³ a form of laughter, and today perhaps a form of writing that best safeguards the rights of alterity over the assertion of identity and homologation by dominant communication. Instead, “Newspeak,” maximum expression of total communication in the economico-political system hypothesized by Orwell in his novel, *1984*, contrasts with the language of literature.⁷⁴ Newspeak represents a world where the non-functional, where excess is eliminated, nor is it incidental that this project is presented in the novel as yet to be completed. Any differently, the main characters in the novel, Julia and Winston, could

⁷¹ Sergej M. Ejzenštejn, *La natura non indifferente*, ed. by P. Montani, Venice, Marsilio, 1981, p. 266.

⁷² Susan Petrilli, *The Global World and Its Manifold Faces*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2016, pp. 233–278. Susan Petrilli, Augusto Ponzio, “Depicting the vision of the other in the novel and film. Bakhtin, Pasolini, Deleuze”, in M. Cavagna, C. Maeder (eds.), *Philology and Performing Arts*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, UCL Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2014, pp. 289–307.

⁷³ On the difference between “silence” and “quietude,” cf. Augusto Ponzio, *Tra semiotica e letteratura*, Milan, Bompiani, 2015; Susan Petrilli, *Sign Studies and Semioethics. Communication, Translation and Values*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2014, pp. 111–122.

⁷⁴ Massimo A. Bonfantini, Augusto Ponzio, *Dialogo sui dialoghi*, Ravenna, Longo, 1986, pp. 75–99.

not be what they are: in fact, Newspeak foresees total submission of the body to official language, cancellation of all residues, of alterity with respect to the order of discourse. Considering the political system hypothesized in *1984*, the characteristics of Newspeak are easy to imagine: univocality, monologism, the verbal sign's submission to pre-established meaning, elimination of heterodoxy, and in any case secondary meaning, reduction of vocabulary to the essential, stiffening of morphological syntactical rules, absence of irregularities and exceptions. All ambiguities and meaning nuances are rigorously eliminated, such that to consult the vocabulary for literary purposes would be impossible. On "translating" works from the past into Newspeak, literary writing resists, it creates problems: Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Byron, Dickens... Adoption of Newspeak is deferred to a later date (even for us today), to the year 2050 – the novel was written in 1948 and set in 1984 –, giving respite to the work of translation.

As writing, and not transcription, literary writing is refractory to any power that might obstacle it. The only power it admits is that of the imagination, *power to the imagination* as recites an old 1968 slogan, a nonfunctional, unproductive, free and creative imagination. The human is in this vocation, a properly human vocation insofar as it is capable of language, of writing.

Centred on the concept of *responsibility*, of opening to *alterity*, for human life, indeed all life over the planet, and insofar as it looks to a new form of humanism, the human of alterity which no longer excludes the rights of the other from human rights,⁷⁵ semioethics views literary writing as a practice able to safeguard the properly human. As Italo Calvino says in his *Lezioni americane*,⁷⁶ literature contributes to defending humanity from that "pestilential epidemic" manifest in language as automatism, as the levelling out of expression, the loss of cognitive force and of the capacity for innovation and critique.

11. GLOBAL SEMIOTICS AND SEMIOETHICS

The trajectory developed in this text and the authors cited as signposts are relevant to current research in the cognitive sciences. In fact, the cognitive sciences today look towards semiotics and philosophy on such themes as *human evolution*, the *genesis of language*, development of the *cognitive capacity unique to humans*, as well as contributing to terminological clarification. Trends in semiotics as delineated Peirce, Welby, Vailati, Sebeok, Rossi-Landi, Bakhtin and others, have made a noteworthy contribution to understanding the species-specific nature of human beings, that which allows for evolution through to *Homo sapiens sapiens* via "adaptation" and "exaptation" (Gould & Vrba; Sebeok). What is mistakenly described as a *sign typology* – the distinction between

⁷⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1972; It. trans. A. Moscato, *Umanesimo dell'altro uomo*, Milan, Il melangolo, 1985. Susan Petrilli, "Learning and Education in the Global Sign Network" pp. 317–420.

⁷⁶ Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1988, p. 59.

symbols, indexes and icons – in fact essentially characterizes the so-called “symbolic species” (to evoke the title of Deacon’s book once again), in the sense that the human sign is never purely symbolical, but rather is always “degenerate” (the expression is Peirce’s), to the extent that it is also *indexical* and *iconic*. This helps to explain how abstraction, similarity and referentiality coexist in language, in other words, how to maximum abstraction there can correspond exact similarity and precise referentiality. From this point of view, most illuminating is Jakobson’s essay “À la recherche de l’essence du langage” (1965), in which, using Peirce’s terminology, he evidences how though the symbolical-conventional dimension may prevail in the verbal sign, the iconic and indexical dimensions are always present to varying degrees, exemplifying with references to different historico-natural languages.

Moreover, with respect to the problem of the origin and nature of language, particularly important is the inextricable entanglement between the self and the other, what Levinas calls “ethics,” involvement, compromission with the other, with the other’s alterity, which is irreducible to relative alterity. This is a problematic that theoretical reflection in semiotics and philosophy of language, and today the cognitive sciences, should not neglect if gnoseologism, pure theoreticism, is to be avoided (Levinas 1961, 1974, 1991). As contact, the word is not reduced to informative, cognitive or pragmatic functions; but, on the contrary, the word forms their very basis, their foundation. Absolute alterity of the other (*autrui*) as such is the pre-condition, the presupposition of the constitution of a *world in common*, a *shared world*. There can be no “givens” without the relation to others. In fact, “given” is associated to the verb “to give”. And the person who gives is the other. Without the *other’s signifying expression* there are no “givens”. The *given* is the result of *giving*. For a phenomenon, a thing, an object, a theme, a given to exist, there must exist a relation with a being irreducible to a phenomenon, thing, object, theme, given, that *associates me* to the constitution of a *shared world*. The first word, the original word, is not a *said*. It is saying, saying as such, saying that says nothing other than saying itself, inevitable “being there” of the other. Original saying presupposes the request of a response, the request of responsibility, involvement, unindifference, that cannot be delegated. To keep account of responsibility as a presupposition, responsibility without alibis, unlimited responsibility/responsiveness as the origin and, at oncem, as the overriding sense of language, means already in itself to recognize the need for interdisciplinary dialogue between semiotics, philosophy and semioethics.

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