

Semioethics and Philosophy of Language as Recovery of Listening

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Abstract: Semioethics is the vocation of semiotics, because responsive understanding is the original vocation of the sign, where responding is not limited to the word, or to any type of identification interpretant. Listening is *encounter*, going towards the other, *hospitality*, responsiveness not as initiative by the person responding, responsibility without alibis. Human semiosis is characterized by *metasemiosis*: the capacity to reflect on signs, to suspend responses and deliberate, beyond immediate semiosis undistinguished from the response to it. Human semiosis is characterized by *metasemiosis*: the capacity to reflect on signs, to suspend responses and deliberate. This capacity involves an inescapable responsibility from the human animal towards life over the whole planet.

Susan Petrilli's book begins with a question, in the title of the first chapter, concerning the relation between "Semiosis and Life": *What lies in their future?* Her response: our present is the *future perfect of semiotics*. The problem is not simply of the theoretical order, given that semiotics is also implicated as semeiotics, as symptomatology. The relation between semiotics and the question of the health of life at the planetary level is not only of the historical order, ensuing from the connection of semiotics today with medical *semeiotics*, symptomatology, beginning with Hippocrates and Galen. The human being as a "semiotic animal" is the only animal responsible for semiosis, for life, even more so the professional scholar of signs.

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taciturnity, translation.

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I. Semioethics as the Vocation of Semiotics

Signs, Language and Listening: the first, *Signs*, are the specific object, or rather the theme, of semiotics; the second, *Language*, if understood as verbal language, is the object or theme of linguistics, and in any case both verbal and nonverbal languages are the object, theme of semiotics, where linguistics is part of semiotics as the general science of signs. And *Listening*?

Listening is not to hear, nor is it limited to the verbal. It does not concern understanding in the sense of recognition, identification, but as *responsive understanding*, where responding is not limited to the word, or to any type of identification interpretant; nor is it a question of interpretants of the pragmatic order.

Listening is *encounter*, going towards the other, *hospitality*, response not as initiative by the person responding, but as *responsibility* that cannot be avoided; not simply *saying* to the other, but *gifting* (Levinas, 2020; Ponzio, 2019a), *owing the other* something, in a relationship that does not ensue from free choice. As to the subtitle of the book we are presenting: *Semioethic perspectives*, they enter via listening.

A second perspective that invests semiotics, concerned with signs and language, is that offered by *philosophy of language* (Petrilli, Ponzio, 2016).

That semiotics, the general science of signs, cannot avoid philosophy of language, is explained by Umberto Eco in his book *Semiotics and Philosophy of Language* (1984, pp. xii - xiii). The different special semiotics can fail to interrogate their philosophical foundations, but not so for general semiotics. The nature of general semiotics is philosophical; philosophical discourse is *constitutive* of semiotics. In particular, the relation of semiotics to philosophy is the relation to *philosophy of language*.

But as recites the subtitle of Susan Petrilli's book, the perspective of semiotics here is *semioethics*. Consequently, via *listening* (associated in the title of the book to *Signs and Language*), the relation of semioethics with philosophy of language (a

theme announced in the title of the first section in the first chapter) is such that the latter invests semioethics, as anticipated in the first section of the second chapter, with the character of *art of listening*.

To orient semiotics in the sense of semioethics implies a great responsibility for the semiotician, the scholar of signs, because it confers upon the sign science a commitment that supercedes the limits of *theoretical reason* (though coherently deriving from it) to concern *practical reason*.

This commitment in fact is of the *ethical* order and concerns the *health of life*, today more than ever put at risk in this “global village” that is our planet, rendered such by the global market, by the need to expand the market into its current form known as *globalization* (Petrilli, 2020a).

The relation between semiotics and the question of the health of life at the planetary level is not only of the historical order, ensuing from the connection of semiotics today with medical *semeiotics*, symptomatology, beginning with Hippocrates and Galen. The relation between semiotics and health also derives from identification of *semiosis* (any sign process) and *life*, considering recent studies in *biosemiotics* as a result of broadening the “semiotic field” with Thomas Sebeok’s *global semiotics* (2001) . But the relation of semiotics to the health of life at a planetary level is due especially to the *objective involvement of human life with all of life over the entire planetary ecosystem*.

Life is a specifically *human* problem insofar as it is an ethical problem; responsibility towards life over the planet is human responsibility. In fact, the human being is the only *semiotic animal*, that not only lives on signs, but reflects on them, accounts for signs and life, even at the cost of one’s own life.

Human semiosis is characterized by *metasemiosis*: the capacity to reflect on signs, to suspend responses and deliberate, beyond immediate semiosis undistinguished from the response to it. Another term for metasemiosis is *semiotics*, distinct and at once connected to *semiotics as the name of the general science of signs*, an expression of *human understanding*.

This special meaning of “semiotics”, as a human species-specific capacity, is closely connected with “semiotica” understood as a *discipline*, which now is also *semioethics*, the highest level of human awareness of the inescapable responsibility without alibis towards life over the planet.

II. Semioethics and Philosophy of Language as the Art of Listening

The fundamental problem of philosophy of language in its close relation to semiotics, also “doctrine of signs” (Sebeok), is the problem of the other, which is the problem of the word, the word as voice, recognized as the demand for listening. *Philosophy of language is here understood as the art of listening.*

Listening is not external to the word, an addition, concession, initiative by the listener, it is not a choice, an act of respect towards the other. Listening is a *constitutive element of the word*. As Mikhail Bakhtin says in “The Problem of the Text” (1986 [1959 – 61], pp. 103 – 131), listening derives from the very nature of the word, which demands listening, responsive understanding, new understanding beyond immediate understanding in an unending process. Insofar as it flourishes on listening, the word is a dialogical relationship, it calls for listening, understanding, for a response and in turn responds.

Listening is the *art of the word*, its peculiar task, attitude, prerogative, way of being. Absence of listening, of interlocutors is the worst that can happen to a word—non *taciturnity*, which is the condition of listening, but *silence*.

Philosophy of language concerned with listening is *philosophy of alterity* which, compared to philosophy of identity—widespread, shared, thus dominant—is no doubt a minority trend, traceable in a few authors, like Mikhail Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas, and in certain presentday orientations and projects concerning signs and language.

Dialogism presupposes corporeality and intercorporeality. Dialogue is not possible without the body and intercorporeal co-implication.

To dialogism of the word, evidenced by Bakhtin at a maximum in Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel, there corresponds dialogism as intercorporeality of the “grotesque body” as revealed in “grotesque realism”, described by Bakhtin (1965) in his analyses of *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, by François Rabelais. After all, the grotesque appears in the “novelistic” genre, the most dialogical literary genre, therefore in Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel. For this reason Bakhtin, in the second 1963 edition of his monograph on Dostoevsky (1st ed., 1929), includes a new chapter (the IVth) on the relation between the “novel” genre and grotesque realism in

carnavalesque folklore, showing how the novel has its roots in grotesque realism.

Dialogism and *intercorporeality* are two faces of the same coin. They belong to the real, material, biosemiotic interconnection among living bodies. “Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue” (Bakhtin, 1963, Eng. trans. 1984 [1961], p. 293) . We can speak of *Bakhtinian dia-logic*, juxtaposed by Bakhtin, implicitly and explicitly, on various occasions (from the original 1929 edition of his monograph on Dostoevskij through to his writings of the 1970s) to Hegelian dialectics and the dialectical materialism of real socialism. The Bakhtinian vision is subtended by a *dialogics of nature*, a *dialogics of life* which today would be expressed in terms of “biosemiotics”.

Dialogue not only exists in *communication semiosis*, where the interpreted is already itself an interpretant response oriented to being interpreted as a sign by another external interpretant. Dialogue also subsists in *semiosis of symptomatization*, where the interpreted is an *interpretant response* (symptom) not oriented to being interpreted. And dialogue also subsists in *semiosis of information*, where an inanimate object acts as sign only because it receives an interpretation from a living being (Petrilli, Ponzio, 2002, 2007). In any case, interpretation, the response to the “interpreter”, is dialogical in nature (Ponzio 2006b). Hence dialogue does not begin with the signaling behaviour of a sender who intends to communicate something to a receiver about some object.

All of semiosis is a dialogical process. The logic of semiosis is *dia-logic*. The interpretant, the sign we use to interpret something else transforming it into a sign, is as such “a disposition to respond”.

III. Linguistics of Silence and Philosophy of Language

In “From Notes Made in 1970 – 71”, Bakhtin (1986 [1970 – 1971], pp. 132 – 158) distinguishes between *listening* and *wanting to hear* and establishes a relationship, respectively, between *listening* and *taciturnity*, on the one hand, and *silence* and *wanting to hear*, on the other.

Silence is the absence of noise and condition for the perception of sound, for understanding-recognition of the verbal sign, the sentence, the repeatable elements of discourse (in the *langue* distinct from *langage*). Taciturnity is only possible in

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the human world. It is constitutive of the “logosphere”, a necessary condition to understand the word’s sense, which is unrepeatable, through which language participates in historical unrepeatability, and in the unfinalized totality of the logosphere. Therefore, each element of discourse is perceived on two levels: that of the repeatable sentence, of the *langue*, which calls for silence as a condition; and of the *unrepeatable utterance*, which instead calls for taciturnity. Silence enables perception of sounds and of the distinctive traits of language (phonemes), therefore *recognition, identification* of the *repeatable elements* of discourse, the elements forming *langue*, at the level of phonology, syntax, semantics. Instead, taciturnity is the condition for understanding the sense of the *single utterance* in its *unrepeatability*. Silence is connected to physical entities, to sound, and to abstract units of the *langue* as a system: phonemes, morphemes, propositions, sentences; taciturnity concerns concrete verbal communication, the utterance in its unrepeatable aspects.

To deal only with the elements of the *langue* and of the sentence means to recognise silence as the only condition of the verbal sign. This tells of the incapacity to enter the space of *taciturnity*, which is the space of the utterance in its unrepeatability, and of the interpretant of responsive understanding: the space of intertextuality and of the dialogic of utterances.

Philosophy of language distinguishes itself from linguistics which takes the *langue* and the sentence as its objects. The objects of linguistics stand out against the background of silence, which enables perception of sounds and identification of verbal signs. Silence is not only the condition for objects to be taken into account by linguistics; it is also their limit, with respect to which all that presents itself as other is not relevant and is excluded.

Both taxonomical and generative-transformational linguistics (Noam Chomsky)—which shifts its attention from the elements of language (*langue*) and of the sentence to the relations that generate sentences—are part of the same orientation, one that neglects the relation of responsive understanding among utterances and their sense (for a critique of Chomskyian linguistics, see Ponzio, 1992, 2012); utterances and sense, unlike sentences and their meaning, do not have silence as their condition of possibility, but require taciturnity instead as the condition of their very production.

Consequently, taxonomical and generative-transformational linguistics is unable to account for the *utterance*, for its dialogical character, its essential destination to responsive understanding. This also means they do not account for the different forms of taciturnity, for indirect, deferred, allusive, parodical, ironical speaking, for ambiguity and polysemy, implicit sense, the capacity for shifting sense; even less so for *literary writing* which is construed on forms of taciturnity: the writer, as Bakhtin says in his essay, “From Notes Made in 1970 – 71”, does not use language directly, but has the gift of indirect speaking, of taciturnity.

Based on the notions of systems of rules and codes, and moving only in the space that goes from sound to sign, identified phonologically, syntactically, semantically, that is, the space of silence, this type of linguistics, linguistics of the code, is *linguistics of silence*.

Mutual exchange in methodological and terminological terms between linguistics of the sentence and mathematical information theory is not incidental. The expression “code linguistics” recalls this exchange. As information theory, this type of linguistics only recognizes “noise” as the obstacle disturbing interpretation of verbal signs, which is interpretation reduced to de-codification, recognition, identification. Once the utterance is reduced to a relation between code and message, proper to signals, “noise” (in the sense of information theory) is the only disturbance possible, deriving from an imperfection in the communication channel, or interference from the external context, or lack of restrictive rules between code and message leading to ambiguity. Fundamentally, “noise” is interruption of silence, which is the condition of perception of the signal.

The problem of sense goes beyond the limits of code linguistics, the linguistics of silence, to concern linguistic reflection that is not limited to language considered as a code, nor to linguistic relations among the elements forming the system of language, or among elements of a single utterance, or among sentences, and their transformational processes (from “deep structures” to “surface structures”).

Instead, linguistics based on listening, linguistics of the utterance, addresses dialogical relations among verbal signs, as utterances and interpretants of responsive understanding. The background of these dialogical relationships is taciturnity. Instead, silence, the absence of noise, constitutes the physical condition of the utterance, the minimal condition that concerns the dimension of signality, the

dimension of recognition and identification; but this minimal condition is not sufficient for the utterance to subsist as a sign and be endowed with sense. Taciturnity is both the situation, the position at the origin of the utterance, and the situation, the position of its reception.

The condition of the word's freedom is taciturnity, a choice made by the speaker; it foresees violation of taciturnity and not simply violation of silence; the word's freedom presupposes *taciturnity as a listening position*.

From taciturnity at the origin of the utterance as free choice, to taciturnity that the utterance demands, to which it turns, to which it entrusts itself and which welcomes the utterance in listening: this is the movement of the utterance. Between these two positions in taciturnity there is no substantial difference: taciturnity at the origin of the utterance takes a listening position; and the utterance is effectively a response, an interpretant of responsive understanding. Vice versa, if listening is effectively to be achieved, taciturnity, a listening position, is in turn the beginning of responsive understanding which, if verbal, takes the form of an utterance.

“Linguistics of silence” corresponds to a *social communication system dominated by silence*. As code linguistics, it is the expression of real centripetal forces in the social. Monologism, the tendency to univocality, lowering of the sign to the level of signality, according to a relation of equal exchange between signifier and signified, belong to the linguistics of silence only in a secondary sense: *in the first place they belong to the social system that has chosen silence as the background of speaking, of which linguistics of silence is only an expression.*

Homologation of the communicative universe reduces listening to wanting to hear, it reduces the spaces of taciturnity, in which *freedom of listening is as necessary as freedom of the word*: consequently, homologation of the communicative universe invests the verbal sign solely with the conventional characteristics of the signal, or with the natural characteristics of sound.

Closed in a universe of silence and of the obligation to speak according to certain laws, conventions, habits, the sign loses its capacity for challenge, provocation, with respect to identity, to the closed totality; it loses the possibility of questioning what would seem to be solid, definitive, as though it were natural. Instead, this is what the sign can do thanks to its taciturnity, by its not collaborating with the *closed universe of discourse*, by withdrawing from monologism, by its excess

with respect to the logic of equal exchange between signifier and signified, between interpreted and interpretant.

Taciturnity is only possible in the *human world*, as Bakhtin says, in the passage cited “From Notes Made in 1970 –71”, referred to above. To limit the sign to the space of silence, separating it from taciturnity and freedom of listening, listening open to polysemy, deprives the sign of its *human* character, thus rendering it mechanical and pseudonatural, making it oscillate between *conventionality of the signal* and *naturalness of sound*, *naturalness of what makes no claim to sense*.

Philosophy of language in *semioethic perspective* keeps account of the connection between *Signs*, *Language* and *Listening*, as in this book by Susan Petrilli. As such, for what concerns the verbal, it recovers those aspects of language and communication that the “linguistics of silence” expels, thus expelling the relation to the *other*, the *alterity* relationship, constitutive of the life of the word. Understood in a semioethic key, philosophy of language considers the forms and practices of verbal language that most showcase dialogism, listening, hospitality, the welcome towards the word of the other.

IV. Listening to the Other: Literary Writing and Translating

As an utterance, the word expresses that which is not already thematized in signs, in other words, neither the object nor the objective of the message, understood as a postal package passing from sender to receiver.

Linguistics of the utterance benefits from the contribution that may come from literary texts, where the utterance is depicted at its best, and from translation, even among different languages (dialects, special languages, etc.) within the same historical-natural language, in addition to translation *across* different historical-natural languages, where the aim is to say “almost the same thing” (Eco, 2003), or, achieve a text recognizable as “the same other” (Petrilli, 2001, 2012a, pp. 231 –285; 2020b).

Under this aspect, the practices of *literary writing* and of *translation* are particularly interesting (see in the book we are here presenting, § 3, “Writing as the Play of Musement”, in chapter II, “Inventing New Worlds”, and chapter VII, “Listening, Otherness and Translation”).

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Taciturnity is the condition of listening—the taciturnity of listening speaks—reached at the highest degree in literary writing. As Bakhtin avers, to valorize listening as the art of the word, we need *verbal art*, literary taciturnity, “secondary” “complex” discourse genres, the genres of the indirect, objectified, depicted word; with respect to “primary and simple genres of everyday discourse, we need the *writer*, the *écrivain* (Roland Barthes distinguishes between *écrivains* and *écrivants*)”.

This is where philosophy of language as the art of listening, linguistics of the utterance and literary writing encounter each other (see Petrilli, 2007).

Functional, productive, necessary and necessarily oriented language “institue pour l'écrivain une condition déchirée” (Barthes, 1953, vol. 1, p. 218). “La Littérature devient l'Utopie du langage” (*ibid.*, p. 224): the closing line in *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*.

Writing evades the arrogance of discourse: arrogance that imposes itself even in claims to the “natural” “obvious”, to “being right” (*ibid.*, p. 202). The only action *other* from the arrogance of assertive discourse is the transition from discourse to writing, the practice of *writing*: the Neutral of writing, desire of writing. Writing is a movement of escape from the *ideosphere*, from dominant ideologic; because it does not assert a conviction, idea, thought, but writing itself, writing as writing. This is what the writer calls “working”, but in an unproductive, “perverse” sense, an intransitive *nonfunctional* sense. With Blanchot this is the time of the “other night” with respect to the time of the “madness of the day”, a function of the ever expanding reproduction of the identical (Levinas, 1975).

All concepts, as Barthes says in *Le Neutre* (2002), arise as *identification of the non-identical*. He defines the concept as *force reducing difference*. To refuse this reduction, we must say no to the concept, not use it. How then to speak? Barthes's response: “*Par métaphores*. Substituer la métaphore au concept: écrire”. Barthes's own work is inseparable from reflection on writing, on the *writer-scrivener* relationship.

Metaphor is not only a rhetorical figure—as already claimed by Giambattista Vico, in *La scienza nuova* (1725)—but the motor that re/generates sense. Vico establishes a connection between metaphor and “logique poétique” (Ponzio, 2006c, 2010, 2016). He avers that tropes are the corollary of poetic logic, of which metaphor is the most luminous, necessary and frequent (Vico, *Principi di scienza*

nuova, Chapter 2).

But a connection can also be made with César Chesneau Dumarsais's conception of language (Petrilli, Ponzio, 2019). In his *Traité des tropes* (1730), Dumarsais asserts that metaphor is the “figure” that prevails in inventive speech and imagination; he observes that “figure” here is already a metaphor in itself. “Bien loin”, as he claims, “que les figures s'éloignent du langage ordinaire des hommes, ce serait au contraire les façons de parler sans figures, qui s'en éloigneraient, s'il est possible de faire un discours où il n'y eût que des expressions sans figures”. The idea is that “poetic logic” (Vico) is present in ordinary language, as also claimed by Bakhtin and members of the Bakhtin Circle (cf. Ponzio, 2014), who describe a relation of similarity between “discourse in life” and “discourse in poetry”, by contrast with the Russian formalists who juxtapose ordinary language and poetic language.

Semiotics according to the tradition delineated by John Locke, Charles Peirce, Victoria Welby (whom Susan Petrilli duly reestablishes in the sphere of sign and language studies), Giovanni Vailati (on the relation between Welby and Vailati, see Ponzio 1990), and more recently Charles Morris, Roman Jakobson, Thomas Sebeok, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, contributes to evidencing the role of metaphor, therefore the iconic dimension of sign in innovative thinking (Petrilli, Ponzio, 2010, 2012). Vico's influence on semiotics in the twentieth century is examined by Sebeok (2000); and for what concerns linguistics by Marcel Danesi (2000).

In Sebeok and Danesi's terminology, *similarity* in metaphor is not “cohesive similarity”, but “connective similarity”, also named *elective similarity*, *similarity by affinity*, *attraction* (Petrilli, Ponzio, 2018). Similarity in this case does not concern what presents itself as belonging to the same category, as identical, but, on the contrary, it concerns that which is different, recalcitrant to cohesive form, that cannot be assimilated, that in the relation remains irreducibly other: this is similarity in *alterity*, something altogether different from similarity through identity.

As regards the relation between concept and metaphor, we distinguish therefore between two logics: on the one hand, cohesive, assemblative logic of the concept, which proceeds through genres and species, paradigms and oppositions, assimilating what cannot be assimilated (singularity); and, on the other hand, connective logic, association by attraction, Vico's *poetic logic*, which flourishes through metaphor.

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With Peirce metaphor is an expression of “iconicity” and “firstness”, it is founded in the “agapastic” relation (Petrilli, 2012a, pp. 190 – 231). In the logic of elective affinity, “agapasm” (Peirce), similarity leaves the terms of the relation in their alterity, in their irreducible singularity.

The relation between language and utterance, *langue* and *parole*, is not a direct relation, a dualistic relation; nor is communication reduced to a dualistic relation between “sender” and “receiver”. Both relations, that between *langue* and *parole*, and between “sender” and “receiver” pass through discourse genres. Every utterance, every verbal text necessarily belongs to a discourse genre. Not only do we always speak in a given language, but also in a given discourse genre.

In “The Problem of Speech Genres”, Bakhtin (1986 [1952 – 53], pp. 60 – 102) analyzes discourse genre and had planned on writing a book on the topic. He distinguishes between primary and secondary genres, the genres of everyday life (official representation, social reality, roles, everyday interpersonal relations, the functional and objective word) and secondary genres, indirect or complex genres, that portray the former: these are the genres of literary depiction (*izobrazenie*), genres of the indirect word. Secondary genres evidence the word in its openness to the other’s word, revealing how one’s own word lives and flourishes thanks to the word of the other, thanks to reception of the other’s word, its interpretation and transmission, to responsive understanding.

This is the reason why philosophy of language and “metalinguistics” (by comparison to “official linguistics”), a linguistics of listening, call for the relation with literary writing, in all its genres, and not only the novelistic genre. Reduction of Bakhtin’s interest solely to the novelistic genre is another big limitation on interpretation of Bakhtinian thought.

The worst thing that can happen to the word, as stated above, is the lack of listening, the word subjected to wanting to hear, to interrogation. Instead, literary writing, an allusive, parodical, ironical form of taciturnity, a form of laughter, is perhaps today the form of writing that best asserts the rights of alterity, against homologation with identity as imposed by dominant communication. Literary writing, with its gaze “from the outside” (from an extralocalized, *exotopic* standpoint with respect to contemporaneity, in the time specific to literature, what Bakhtin calls the “great time”), by virtue of this distancing precisely, valorizes proximity,

unindifference (Petrilli, 2012b). The writer not only participates in life, but loves it from the outside, with the love we all recognize as *true* love, love in its total nonfunctionality.

Literary writing and translation resemble each other because both involve oblivion of self and a great sense of hospitality as required of language, whether one's own or the others, not for self, but for others, the *other-author* in the case of the translator, the *other-hero* in the case of the writer.

The translator, as maintained by Susan Petrilli in *Lo stesso altro* (2001), does not employ indirect discourse to say what the other says, indirect discourse which, as a form of reported discourse, involves dominating over the other's word with one's own word; nor does the translator use direct discourse, which would simply mean to introduce the other's discourse with an "he says": and report the other's discourse word by word, in this case in the same historical natural language.

Instead, the translation speaks *as if* s/he were the other, in the form of indirect speech (because translation is interpretation) "masked", as claimed by Petrilli (2001), "as direct discourse". The relation between the original text and the target text is one of similarity, but that type of similarity that Peirce indicates as *iconic*. The iconic character of translation which Petrilli (2006, 2008, 2010) has contributed to evidencing in her writings on the theory and practice of translation (this is the character of icon which as in sacred images renders visible that which is invisible, precisely because the author has stepped aside) is effectively an essential aspect of the translational process, one that cannot be set aside to understand the rather complex relationship between a translation and the original.

Translation carries out an important role in the face of literary writing, that of making the writer visible, the writer who as a writer has chosen through taciturnity to make him/herself invisible; and, paradoxically, the writer is rendered visible by another who has also chosen *invisibility*, to not speak in his/her own name, the translator.

V. Listening, Tuning in

This is a matter of listening to the other, of tuning in: the recurring message in this book by Susan Petrilli.

Listening thus described concerns *symptoms* in presentday globalisation, that serve to identify different aspects of illness (in social relations, international relations, in the life of single individuals, in the spread and increase of different aggressive and pervasive forms of anthropization of the environment, of life generally over the planet). Petrilli looks towards a future for globalization as openness to the other, not based on the humanism of identity *which excludes the other's rights from human rights* (Petrilli, 2019b, 2019c), but on the *humanism of alterity* (Levinas), in full contrast to globalization devoted to its own destruction.

Susan Petrilli's book begins with a question, in the title of the first chapter, concerning the relation between "Semiosis and Life": *What lies in their future?* Her response: our present is the *future perfect of semiotics* (the title of a book by Caputo, Petrilli, Ponzio, published in 2006). The future of semiotics is decided today, not only the *science*, but also the *human species-specific capacity to use signs to reflect on signs and decide as a consequence*.

The problem is not simply of the theoretical order, given that semiotics is also implicated as semeiotics, as symptomatology. The life of signs and the signs of life, continuity of semiosis over the planet is decided today—never before has responsibility for the future and at once our capacity for destruction been so great. The human being as a "semiotic animal" is the only animal responsible for semiosis, for life, even more so the professional scholar of signs. Paraphrasing Terence: "As a student of signs, nothing in the life of signs is alien to me." (see Petrilli, 2012a, pp. 1 – 16)

As a unique event, as encounter, the utterance with its *dissymmetry* and *anarchy* resists unification, communion, community affiliation to partial, ethnic, national identities; it resists universalization with respect to the maximum, total, omnicomprehensive identity, that as *human race*.

Somebody is always "more human" than others and somebody "less human", "inhuman," as occurs in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where everybody is equal, but some are more equal or less equal than others. *Umano troppo disumano* (Human too inhuman) is the title of a book edited by me with Fabio de Leonardis (2008). *Humanitarian* wars, *humanitarian* military interventions: here, "human" and "humanitarian" derive from *homo*, a kind, class, system.

But another etymology, it too from Giambattista Vico, has "human" derive from

humanitas, not from *homo* which while uniting us all, at once establishes the *human/inhuman* opposition. Instead, like *humilitas*, humility, *humanitas* can be made to derive from *humus*, earth.

This etymology does not defer to kind as in humankind, bringing us all together, eliminating singular differences, singularities, thus achieving a “uniform” “general” “official situation”: not incidentally three military terms. In contrast to humanitarian military intervention and preventive war, *humanitas* appeals to the possibility, to the human commitment to *preventive peace* (Levinas, cf. Ponzio, 2009c).

Deriving from *humus*, *humanitas* evidences involvement, implication, absence of the boundaries that divide each single individual from the “natural” and “social” environment: use of inverted commas indicates a fictitious difference which we continue to establish because of habit, inertia, for reasons of convenience and opportunity.

The *human* sciences, those which most interest us here, including linguistics, should remember this second etymology. And semiotics should remember it, even if as *global semiotics* (Sebeok, 2001) it does not fail to address nonhuman signs beyond the human. *The human being is a semiotic animal*: consequently, semiotics could be indicated *as the most human of sciences*, not to glorify oneself, but to underline the semiotician’s *enormous responsibility* as a student of signs.

(Translation from Italian into English by Susan Petrilli)

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