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The Critique of Glottocentricism

European Signatures

Abstract: As general semiotics, semiotics provides a general theory of sign and correlate sign model. As such, semiotics avoids limitations connected with so-called Saussurean *sémiologie* (in reality connected with information theory and the concepts of code and message). One limitation is glottocentrism which is phonocentric, anthropocentric, ethnocentric. When glottocentrism prevails, semiotics cannot adequately account for communication, modeling, and dialogism as generated in human biosemiosis, in the interconnection between verbal and nonverbal. We propose to critique glottocentrism in global semiotic terms, following European scholars (Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva, Rossi-Landi) and beyond (Bakhtin, Sebeok, Morris). Dialogue among these voices is transnational, translanguistic, transdisciplinary. Moreover, as indicated by “semioethics” (introduced by Augusto Ponzio and myself), our approach accounts for the sign’s vocation for the other.

Keywords: biosemiosis; dialogism; global semiotics; modeling; semioethics

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1 Glottocentrism and Its Stereotypes

Glottocentrism presupposes *phonocentrism*. In other words, to privilege language (verbal language) among the various sign systems means to privilege the *phoné* and to assign a subordinate, ancillary value to writing and writing systems, reducing them to the status of transcription. But glottocentrism is also *ethnocentrism*. The reason why is that from a historical perspective glottocentrism has privileged certain languages over others and with them it has privileged certain types of writing systems over others, fundamentally the Western.

Moreover glottocentrism is also *anthropocentrism*. In fact, to privilege verbal language and forms of human communication connected to verbal language and to fail to recognize the sign nature of other systems in the living world

(whether at the macroscopic or the microscopic level of life) means to exalt “man” as the only authentic signifying and communicating animal existing. But who is the man we are referring to here? Obviously this is “man” understood abstractly, the human being; “man” the “rational animal” where “rational” prevails over “animal” even to the point where “animal” is expunged and reason is separated from the body. That is, where reason is disembodied and presupposed as universal. All this means losing sight of the fact that man as a species is only one among the numerous communicating beings in the sphere of zoosemiosis that is extraordinarily broad and diversified. With phytosemiosis and mycosemiosis (limiting our attention to the super kingdoms) zoosemiosis is part of an even greater sphere, the “semiobiosphere”, a term coined by associating Jurij Lotman’s terminology with Thomas Sebeok’s.

Glottocentrism should be rejected for all these reasons; that is, because in addition to being phonocentric, which means to reduce writing to the mere status of transcription, glottocentrism is anthropocentric and ethnocentric. This last aspect has given rise to a prejudice that involves Claude Lévi-Strauss as much as other scholars: and precisely that there exist societies with writing and societies without writing (“warm” and “cold” societies). The former are described as being endowed with history, the latter without history; in school books history is presented as beginning with writing, alias transcription.

According to the definition formulated by Paul Cobley (2010) in his *Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, “glottocentrism” is “a bias” that consists in exalting verbal communication. In Cobley’s words: “Frequently noted by Sebeok, such a bias is particularly evident in structuralism and Poststructuralism, purporting to be derived from Saussure, thinking which often claims to identify and expose other biases such as ‘phonocentrism’, ‘logocentrism’, ‘phallogocentrism’ and ‘ethnocentrism’”. And while these biases “pertain to differences of emphasis within the phenomena of culture and human interaction, “glottocentrism”, instead, does not keep account of the fact that “semiosis takes place also outside the world of humans, that is, in the spheres of animals and plants as well as within organisms (endosemiosis)”.

As regards human communication, glottocentrism tends to ignore the nonverbal component. But with respect to the verbal, the nonverbal is enormously preponderant. And yet, in a glottocentric regime, nonverbal signs are considered secondary with respect to verbal signs. It is not incidental that we have no other term to nominate the nonverbal if not as the negative of the verbal – “nonverbal” precisely.

Glottocentrism refers to the verbal sign and to the linguistic science that takes the verbal sign as its model. But a theory of sign that aspires to the status of a general sign theory must avoid glottocentrism. The priority given to verbal

signs exchanged for signs *tout court* and to the function of verbal language as secondary human modeling (as Sebeok says), explains why semiotics presented itself in terms of *sémiologie* at the beginning of the twentieth century.

2 Contributions to the Critique of Glottocentrism

Sémiologie is focused on the linguistic-verbal aspects of semiosis. Its specific task, in Saussure's (1916) description, is to study the life of signs "*au sein de la vie sociale*". Moreover, following Saussure, signs are entities that carry out an intentionally communicative function in a social context. Consequently, this approach translates into an anthropocentric reduction of semiosis to social signs and, again, of the latter exclusively to intentional signs. It should suffice to think of Sigmund Freud and his research to realize what an enormous amputation on the human world it would be to consider intentional signs alone as signs. And even though Saussure described linguistics as a branch of semiology and rightly so, semiology all the same is strongly influenced by linguistics.

A critique of Saussure had already been formulated by the Russian scholar and member of the Bakhtin Circle, Valentin N. Voloshinov, in an early essay of 1928. In his 1927 monograph, *Freudianism*, anticipating Jacques Lacan he shows how the unconscious is also made of language, verbal language. With this position he denied the idea that the sign must necessarily be intentional. In *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*, his 1929 monograph, Voloshinov continued his critique of Saussurean linguistics and its influence on Russian linguistics.

To qualify his own research Mikhail Bakhtin (1959–1961) actually preferred the expressions "philosophy of language" and "metalinguistics". He believed that these expressions conveyed more clearly his commitment to transcending the limits of linguistics and the sign sciences as officially practiced at the time. Bakhtin thematized the utterance as the basic cell of live discourse, which he described as a dialogic cell. He analyzes the live word as the effect of otherness logic and dialogism, highlighting such aspects as its accentuation and intonation as determined in the relation with the other, its implicit meaning and its capacity for multivoicedness as it develops and unfolds in different communicative contexts and different discourse genres.

At the beginning of the 1960s Roland Barthes in his *Éléments di sémiologie* clarified that in reality the sign systems studied by Saussurean *sémiologie* are translanguistic systems, that is to say, sign systems supported by verbal signs.

The presence of verbal signs can be direct as occurs in the fashion system where a dress is necessarily always presented with a caption; in cinema – even in its “mute” phase, and so forth; or the relation with verbal signs can be indirect, as when they are present implicitly, for example, as an explanation in the case of traffic lights – according to the rules of the road the color red corresponds biunivocally to the word “stop”.

Therefore, once semiology was identified as translinguistics, Barthes rightly proposed an inversion in the relationship between semiology and linguistics: semiology does not contain linguistics, as one of its parts, but rather linguistics contains semiology. Saussure effectively asserted, and rightly so, that it was necessary to construct a general science of signs before constructing a general linguistics and, therefore, it was necessary to explain what a sign in general is before we can explain what a verbal sign is. Nonetheless, in his own interpretation of the relationship between semiology and linguistics (where semiology includes linguistics and not vice versa), his conception of the general sign science clearly privileged the verbal sign and was modeled as a consequence.

However, once semiotics is understood in terms of *global semiotics* (as it presents itself today following Thomas Sebeok), Saussure is right. The general science of signs is the wider circle in which is inscribed the smaller circle represented by linguistics. But in this case the science of signs is not *semiology*, vitiated by glottocentrism, but rather *semiotics* understood as *the study of verbal and nonverbal signs*. Instead, semiology unmasked by Roland Barthes as translinguistics forms an even smaller circle englobed within the circle of linguistics. So that Barthes too was right.

Here reference to another great American semiotician is in place, Charles Morris. In fact, if we understand “linguistics” in Morris’s sense, as formulated in his epochal 1946 monograph, *Signs, Language and Behavior*, we soon realize that his reference is not to the “linguistics” of the linguists. Linguistics according to Morris is far broader and concerns human language in general which, to say it in his own terminology, is not only made of “verbal bricks”. Sebeok (who studied with Morris, one of his most renowned students) takes up this particular meaning of the term “language” and develops it in the sense of “primary modeling” as distinct from “speech”. The animal *homo* is equipped with primary modeling from his early appearance as a hominid.

Another important contribution to the critique of glottocentrism in semiotics is formulated by Julia Kristeva. In her monograph of 1969, *Le langage, cet inconnu*, she focuses on linguistics outlining its contours while at once evidencing its limits. These limits are identified in the history of linguistics and its implication in European culture, in phonocentrism, in the priority accorded

to the alphabetic script, and so forth. In other words, Kristeva establishes a relation between the limits of linguistics and the limits of the European culture from which it derives.

Instead, in her own discussion of these issues Kristeva refers generously to extra-European cultures and languages, including, for example, the different forms of non-alphabetical script. This orientation is also connected to a widespread interest during the 1960s in oriental scripts, cultural systems, and lifestyles, with special reference precisely to China. *En passant* let us remember that Julia Kristeva has also authored a volume dedicated to *Les Chinoises* (1974).

As to the implications of glottocentrism for the concept of writing we must certainly remember Jacques Derrida. Derrida (1967) distinguishes between “writing” and “transcription”. He acknowledges the autonomy of what he understands by writing from the “*phoné*” and connects it to the concepts of “*trace*” and “*différance*”. For Derrida too the critique of glottocentrism and consequently of phonocentrism that comes together with glottocentrism and supports it, is all one with his critique of ethnocentrism. They cannot be separated. On this account I would like to recall a very interesting interview with Jacques Derrida by Julia Kristeva (who was a member of the editorial committee of the International Journal *Semiotica* at the time it was founded, in 1969). The interview is entitled “*Sémiologie et grammatologie*” and is included in an impressive volume of 1971, edited by Sebeok, *Essays in Semiotics* (in the series “*Approaches to Semiotics*”, vol. 4, directed by Thomas Sebeok).

Another important contribution to the critique and surpassing of glottocentrism is that by the Italian philosopher of language Ferruccio Rossi-Landi. In his pioneer monograph of 1968, *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* (*Language as Work and Trade*, Eng. trans. 1983), he introduces the concept of “linguistic work” in his studies on signs and language. Linguistic work is at once individual like the *parole* and social like the *langue*.

Moreover, Rossi-Landi was critical of analytical or linguistic philosophy as formulated by the Oxford school. Like trends identifiable under the banner of “*decodification semiotics*”, the philosophical-linguistic tradition represented by Oxonian philosophy also presupposes a speaker that is outside and preexistent to the communication process. Instead, Rossi-Landi thematizes the role of interpretation as a major factor in the formation of individual speakers and with the notion of interpretation he also thematizes the social character of speakers. Speakers are in becoming in the semiotic processes of social reproduction oriented by ideological programs (Petrilli 2010).

Important references in Rossi-Landi’s research range from Giambattista Vico through to Kant, Hegel, Marx, Peirce and Morris. Rossi-Landi unites American pragmatism from Peirce to Morris with Continental non-idealistic

historicism and dialectic materialism and to this combination adds elements from Oxonian analytical philosophy and Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. He also adds elements from operationism as developed by another Italian philosopher and linguist Silvio Ceccato as well as by the German scholar Hugo Dingler.

European signatures abound in the history of semiotics, an international enterprise, in both its recent and distant phases of development. And as the European signature "Ferruccio Rossi-Landi" illustrates so well, separations and boundaries on the scene of semiotic studies are fictitious, the result of abstracting from the real processes of development in the sign sciences at a worldwide level where studies from Europe, including the orient as represented by Russia, have always encountered studies in the United States of America and vice versa. Authentic scientific research knows no boundaries, but rather can only progress on the basis of dialogue that is and must be transnational, translinguistic, transdisciplinary. And now, with the IASS International Conference taking place for the first time in Nanjing, we can only hope for dialogue to intensify exponentially not only with China, but with the Oriental world at large to the benefit of all the parts involved.

3 Outside Glottocentrism

As anticipated, by expanding the "semiosphere" as conceived by Jurij M. Lotman in terms of the "semiobiosphere", Sebeok's "global semiotics" (2001) with its grounding in the life sciences has offered us the most exhaustive account of signs available so far.

On the one hand, global semiotics presupposes biosemiotics both as its foundation and as a special branch focused on signs insofar as they converge with life; on the other hand, global semiotics is a *metascience* with a focus on all academic disciplines that are sign-related, and as a science global semiotics is dialogically engaged with philosophy.

This does not mean to reduce semiotics to the status of philosophy of science, but to recognize the philosophical standing of science, therefore that of global semiotics together with that of the sciences in general. This is because beginning from Kant at least, the scientific character of a discipline is measured in terms of its capacity to justify itself, its own existence. In other words, its value is measured not only in terms of the facts it analyzes, but also by investigating its conditions of possibility, its sense for man. Sense cannot be confined to the limits of specialism, to the limits of separatism among the

sciences, but on the contrary can only emerge in the search for the meaning of science generally for man, its sense for man: the search for sense characterizes what Husserl (1954, 1965) indicated as “rigorous science” by comparison to a science that is simply “exact”.

Sebeok’s global semiotics can carry out an important role as regards the sciences when they tend to close in on themselves. He questions their claim to converging with the totality instead of recognizing their status as a part (the *pars pro toto* fallacy). Therefore, global semiotics contributes to the development of a detotalizing method and evidences the condition of interrelatedness among the different sciences and the different spheres of semiosis towards which they each turn their gaze. He evidences the important role of dialogue and confrontation as indispensable conditions of scientificity itself.

Sebeok develops a global perspective through continuous and creative shifts that favor the identification of new interdisciplinary relations and new interpretive practices. He evidences sign relations where it was generally thought that there were none, that what we have are mere ‘facts’ and relations among things independently from communication and interpretive processes. Moreover, this continual shift in perspective favors the discovery of new cognitive fields and languages that, in turn, also interact dialogically with each other. This is not a question of inventing, but simply of evidencing dialogical interpreted-interpretant sign relations that already exist and unite different fields, disciplines and languages. As he explores the boundaries and margins of the sciences, Sebeok dubs this open nature of semiotics “doctrine of signs”.

It is doubtful that the fact of my mentioning Thomas Sebeok in this context should sound strange or out of place in light of the second part of my title with its reference to European authors. The fact is that Sebeok’s contribution to European semiotics is no less than central and certainly deserves more than a mere mention. His contribution has been pivotal for the development of semiotics internationally since the second half of the last century. As claimed above, national affiliations are not relevant in a discussion on the developments of a science. But just in case someone is interested, let us remember that Sebeok was educated in Hungary, his country of origin. Moreover, his approach is largely centered around what he calls the “Estonian connection”, the title of one of his essays, with particular reference to the concept of “modeling”, as formulated by the Tartu School, and the concept of “*Umwelt*”, as formulated by the biologist and cryptosemiotician, Jakob von Uexküll. Let me also recall that when Sebeok turned his attention to semiotics in the USA in a monograph by that title (*Semiotics in the USA. A View from the Center*, 1991), a consistent part of the

semioticians he takes into account, including a figure like Georges Mounin, are European.

On the other hand, the expression “European” hardly refers to a well defined geographical area any more, these days less so than ever before. Even the so-called “European Community” as it exists today does not converge with Europe understood in geographical terms. According to how I understand “European” and “Europe”, the reference is cultural. Therefore, to me these terms ring with the same meaning voiced by the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges when he described himself as a European. Likewise, though I was born and raised in Australia I too consider myself a European – and, for that matter, I also consider myself as an Australian (or rather, Australasian considering our connections with Asia), even though geographically I have been a resident most of my life so far in the European community. And this discourse as I am now formulating it goes in the direction of supporting the critique of glotto-ethnocentrism.

4 Two Meanings of the Term “Semiotics”

As Sebeok makes a point of evidencing, historically the origins of semiotics as a field of knowledge can be traced back to reflection on nonverbal signs and, precisely, to medical semeiotics (symptomatology), the study of symptoms. But given that the human being is a “semiotic animal” (Deely, Petrilli, Ponzio 2005), which means to say an animal capable of “metasemiosis”, human life has always been characterized by the capacity for knowledge of a semiotic order. Consequently, if medical semeiotics can be considered as the first branch ever to have developed in semiotics, this is only because unlike Hippocrates and Galen, though hunters, farmers, navigators, fisherman, and women (with their wisdom and sign practices relative to the reproduction of life) have always practiced semiotics (that is, metasemiosis), they never wrote treatises.

At this point, *à propos* “semiotics” it is well to clarify that this term can be used according to two different meanings: 1) as indicating the *specificity of human semiosis, metasemiosis*; and 2) as indicating the general *science of signs*.

According to the first meaning, semiotics designates the specific human capacity for *metasemiosis*. In the lifeworld that converges with semiosis, human semiosis is characterized as metasemiosis. In other words, human signs are characterized in terms of the possibility they have of reflecting on signs. Human signs are not only capable of interpretive processes where signs and responses are all one, but they are also capable of shifting among different levels and

perspectives in interpretation, of reflecting on signs, suspending responses and deliberating.

Aristotle opens his *Metaphysics* (1936 [350BC]) with the claim that man tends by nature to knowledge (“all men by nature desire to know,” Bk I). Today we can go a step further and claim that man tends by nature to semiotics understood as metasemiosis. Human semiosis, anthroposemiosis can be characterized as presenting itself in terms of *semiotics*. “Semiotics” understood as specifically human semiosis or anthroposemiosis can venture across the entire universe in search of meanings and sense. And sense can be considered in terms of signs.

According to its second meaning, “semiotics” refers to the study of signs conceived as a discipline or science (Saussure) or theory (Morris) or doctrine (Sebeok). Semiotic studies and the general sign model can be extended to the whole universe insofar as it is perfused with signs (Peirce), to the world of organisms, to the living world (Sebeok) and hence emerge as “global semiotics”; or, on the contrary, the range may be restricted to verbal and nonverbal human semiosis. But in this case the risk is that semiotics should end up developing an approach that is limited and anthropocentric, which is the limit we are signaling with our critique of glottocentrism.

5 Critique of Glottocentrism and Modeling

In the framework of global semiotics following Sebeok, the critique of glottocentrism is based on the concept of modeling. Modeling and dialogism are pivotal concepts in the study of semiosis. Communication is only one type of semiosis. It presupposes the semiosis of modeling and dialogism. This emerges clearly if, in accordance with Peirce and his reformulation of the classic notion of *substitution* in terms of *interpretation*, we consider the sign firstly as an interpretant, which means to say as a dialogic response foreseen by a specific type of modeling.

Modeling is a process by which something is performed or reproduced on the basis of a model or schema, whether ideal or real. For example: Plato’s world of ideas is used as a model by the demiurge to create the empirical world. Models in semiotics are based on a relationship of similarity or isomorphism; consequently they are associated with the iconic sign as understood by Peirce.

The concept of “modeling” is present in the term “patterning” used by the American scholar Edward Sapir (1916) to designate the original and specific

organization of culture and language: *cultural patterning* and *linguistic patterning*.

But the concept of “modeling” used by Sebeok develops the concept of “modeling system” formulated by the so-called Tartu-Moscow school. Nevertheless, with special reference to Jurij Lotman’s research, this school refers the term “modeling” in the expression “primary modeling system” to verbal language, whereas the expression “secondary modeling system” refers to culture. Instead, for Sebeok the “primary modeling system” is identified with what he calls “language” as distinct from “speech”, therefore “mute language”.

On Sebeok’s account the primary modeling system is an innate capacity (present in all types of animals, from any species whatsoever) for simulative modeling, according to species-specific modalities. Man, from the very first hominid, is endowed with this primary modeling system called “language”, “mute language”, distinct from “speech” (which only appears with *homo sapiens*). Thanks to this special primary modeling system, man is capable of producing numerous possible worlds, as his evolutionary development has demonstrated and in contrast to other animal species. This explains why there exist many languages, that is to say, the enigma of Babel, a problem that Noam Chomsky (1957) with his universal innate grammar does not succeed in explaining, nor in truth did he ever deal with the problem.

The secondary modeling system subtends both “indicational” and “extensional” modeling processes, which human beings share with other animal species. The tertiary modeling system is highly abstract and refers to symbol-based modeling processes, including verbal language. Tertiary modeling necessarily presupposes language in the sense described above, that is, mute language, language as specifically human primary modeling (Petrilli 2012: 150–152).

6 Modeling as Writing

“Writing” is another term that can be used for what Sebeok calls “language”, that is, the human primary modeling device. This is writing *avant la lettre*, writing before transcription, which characterizes human beings as human beings. Indeed, we could claim that man is the animal endowed with writing.

Widespread prejudice has it that writing in present-day society is overwhelmed by other sign systems. Part of this prejudice is the thesis that images now dominate over writing, as though all other human sign production systems were not an expression of writing as we are now describing it.

The fact is that the common view of writing is restricted. Accordingly, writing is identified with the transcription of oral language, which it merely registers. On this account, writing appears as a sort of outer covering, an activity subordinate to orality, ancillary to it. Thus described, writing is no more than mnemotechny. This restricted interpretation of writing is connected not only to the primacy of the oral word, the *phoné*, therefore to prejudice of the phonocentric order, but also to prejudice of the ethnocentric order. With reference to the latter, writing – reduced to the status of transcription – is considered as the prerogative of given social forms and not others, and consequently as representing a fundamental stage in the development of human history. Thus understood writing is used to discriminate between prehistory and history, between “cold” societies without history and “warm” societies with history, capable of evolution and historical memory.

In reality, the invention of writing as transcription presupposes the existence of *writing* in a far more complex sense. It belongs to a far broader temporal sphere than that represented by the historical-cultural evolution of humanity. Writing as we are now considering it concerns the very process of homination, that is, the formation process of the human species in evolutionary terms. Writing is a human species-specific modeling device through which man, with recourse to different means – including his own body as well as external physical means – organizes experience and surrounding reality, both spatially and temporally, conferring sense on them and constructing whole worlds. Man is capable of constructing different worlds and inventing new senses with the same means and elements. All animal species construct their own worlds where things have a sense; the distinctive feature of the human species lies in the capacity for conferring a different sense on the same (even limited number of) elements, and of constructing a plurality of different possible worlds.

Understood in such terms the capacity for writing, “*ante litteram*” writing, that is, writing antecedent to the written sign, to transcription, represents a fundamental stage in the homination process preceding speech, before speech is privileged with respect to other – even antecedent – means of communication. Writing as we are describing it is not a means of communication like speaking and its transcription, but rather precedes and is the foundation of all forms of communication.

Writing as transcription is connected to “culture” in the narrow sense according to which writing is opposed to “non culture” and belongs to the “man of culture”. Writing thus described is connected with power and dominion of man over man, which it consolidates. On the contrary, the capacity for writing understood as a species-specific device belongs to “culture” in a broad sense,

that is, in an anthropological sense where writing is contrasted to “nature” and attributed to the human being as such.

The development of speaking and of relative verbal systems, that is, languages, presupposes writing in the broad anthropological sense: without the capacity for writing understood as a species-specific modeling device man would not be in a position to articulate sounds and identify a limited number of distinctive features, phonemes, to reproduce them phonetically; without the capacity for writing, man would not know how to assemble phonemes in different ways so as to form a multiplicity of different words (monemes), nor would he know how to assemble words syntactically in different ways to form utterances that are always different, that express continuously different meanings and senses.

Writing as a modeling device is *language* that subtends all human sign systems. Consequently human sign systems are distinguished species-specifically from the different forms of nonhuman animal communication. As much as nonhuman animal communication involves signs that are typologically homologous to human signs, it is not fixed in the same type of structure. The different systems of nonhuman animal communication can never become languages as these develop in the human world.

And when, as in the case of deaf-mutes, language in the phonic form is impossible, writing – if adequately solicited – emerges in other forms of expression (such as gesture, drawings), thereby allowing for the (sometimes remarkable) development of the language capacity, unaccompanied by speech.

We are witnesses today to a great flourishing of languages as they develop and proliferate thanks to progress in technology and to encounter and exchange among different cultures (the closing of frontiers and limitations on community identity cannot block this process which obviously is something far greater than exchange at the level of the market). Writing today, understood in a broad sense, as described above, has far greater possibilities of manifesting itself in different ways. And thanks to language in the terms described above, photography, film, television, video cassettes, computers all offer new possibilities for writing, which means to increase the human capacity for the “play of musement” (Sebeok 1981).

Furthermore, traditional forms of expression such as theatre, music, the figurative arts can now resort to progress in technology and invent new forms of writing. Innovation can occur within the sphere of any given expressive genre, just as it can occur through processes of mutual contamination and result in the formation of new expressive genres. Present-day picture writing, design, photographic writing, film writing, musical writing can all be reconsidered in

this light. Such forms of writing are all high-level expressions of the creative need for writing understood as a language capacity.

The crisis of writing indeed! No other historical era has ever been so rich in forms of writing as the present. We now live in the civilization of writing. And this should be repeated emphatically to anyone who complains – through ignorance or for ideological reasons – about the “loss” or “debasement” of “writing”, thereby confounding “writing” and the “written sign”, “writing” and “transcription”.

The contemporary world calls for a commitment to creating the conditions to spread and develop today’s writing systems, safeguarding them from dominion by whoever has control over the communication system. This is the real problem from the point of view of education in writing: not the opposition between “writing” and “image” in communication systems today, which is a false opposition, but the objective contradiction between the ongoing development of writing systems, languages, of the free “play of musement”, on one hand, and increasing control over the communication system generally, which also means to concentrate control ever more in the hands of a few, on the other.

Literary writing is another important place, and perhaps the most ancient, where writing is independent from transcription, that is, where the written sign gets free from its ancillary function with respect to oral language and is no longer reduced to the status of mnemotechny. Film writing, as Eizenstejn had already clearly understood (“cinema begins exactly where all forms of literary art ‘end up’”), together with other contemporary forms of writing develop and supplement the work of literary writing.

Literary writing is disengaged with respect to the limits that characterize other writing genres, where writing figures as mere transcription. Such disengagement frees writing from defined and circumscribed responsibility, that is, responsibility limited by alibis, partial and “relative responsibility”. And such disengagement charges literary writing with the type of responsibility that knows no limits, with so-called “absolute responsibility”. This type of responsibility, absolute, unlimited, is associated with the free manifestation of what characterizes man in his specificity as a human being: language. In other words, absolute responsibility is connected with the capacity for the infinite play of constructing – and deconstructing – new possible worlds. “Play” and not “work” insofar as we are now discussing human behavior independent of need. Behavior and communication characterized in terms of excess in contrast to functionality, productivity are external to, outside the “reign of necessity”.

As writing and not transcription, literary writing is refractory to any form of power that may obstacle it: as an old slogan of 1968 has it, to power writing only

admits the imagination. The allusion here is to non-functional, unproductive, freely creative imagination, like that attributed to God. The human rests in man's vocation for the divine, and his vocation for the divine is determined by his capacity for language, for writing.

7 From Global Semiotics to Semioethics

As stated at the beginning of this paper, the critique of glottocentrism also involves the critique of ethnocentrism and anthropocentrism. Such critique is the necessary premise for a correct focus on the relation with other human beings as much as with all other nonhuman living beings on the planet, with the whole ecosystem. Global semiotics makes an important contribution to this type of worldview, which is a detotalized worldview.

The human being is part of the great semiobiosphere and as such is a semiosic animal like all other animals. Here let me recall what I said à *propos* the two meanings of the term "semiotics": "semiotics" as the name of the "science of signs"; and "semiotics" as distinct from "semiosis". "Semiosis" refers to the immediate use of signs; "semiotics" to the use of signs to reflect on signs, signs about signs, signs that suspend immediate sign use, signs for programming. In addition to being a semiosic animal like all other animals, the human being is also a semiotic animal. In other words, as anticipated above, with respect to all other life forms, the human being is the only one capable not only of *semiosis* but also of *metasemiosis*, of suspending the immediate flow of semiosis and deliberating. Thanks to a primary modeling device endowed with syntactics, also called language, the semiotic animal is endowed with a capacity for critique and creativity.

As a consequence, the human being has a capacity for responsibility. Responsibility is understood here as responsibility for the other as opposed to responsibility connected with the egotistical self-interest of identities in the context of socio-economical globalization. Human beings are endowed with a capacity for responsibility understood as responsivity, accountability, answerability for self and for the other – this other that in social, biological, ontological, and phenomenological terms may be more or less close, more or less distant.

The term "semioethics" indicates an orientation in semiotics for the study of the signs of what clashes of that which clashes with the quality of life and obstacles it, that is, for the study of the symptoms of malaise, of any kind and in any sphere of life. From this perspective, semioethics takes up the ancient

vocation of the science of signs understood as “semeiotics”, or “symptomatology”. The semiotic animal is capable of a global perspective on semiosis, that is, on life (semiosis and life converge as demonstrated by biosemiotics) and as such is responsible for the health of semiosis in its plurality and diversity over the entire planet. For all these reasons semioethics may also be read as an indication to the semiotician of the need to care for semiosis.

Semioethics is an orientation in semiotics which works towards a new form of humanism that cannot be separated from the question of otherness. This emerges from the commitment of semioethics to pragmatics, from its focus on the relation between signs, values and behavior. Another important aspect characterizing semioethics is the commitment to transcend separatism among the sciences by insisting on the interrelation between the human sciences, the historico-social sciences and the natural, logico-mathematical sciences. Semioethics evidences the condition of interconnection between scientific knowledge, the humanism of otherness, and the quality of life.

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