

REVIEW ARTICLE

Semiotics undoubtedly unbounded

The volume written by co-authors Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio is to be considered as one of the most important enterprises of our days in the field of semiotic researches. It can rightly be seen as a synthesis which intends to reformulate – in the more adequate possible way – some classic problems of the philosophical-semiotic tradition (which's abundant literature is well illustrated by the excellent Bibliography at pp.565-612). As the co-authors underline, 'this book is the expression of a unitary research project and can be read as such' (p.xxii), taking in consideration that the volume in question 'has been entirely reworked from texts in Italian assembled by the authors, revised and expanded with new sections as part of a unitary research project' (p.xxiv). The volume was presented by the authors the first time in an academic event, intitled Language, literature and semiotics. Round table and symposium in memoriam Ferruccio Rossi-Landi 20 years after his death, which took place on the 13th and 14th of December 2005, at the Italian Institute of Culture and at the University ELTE of Budapest (Hungary).

Is there any specific reason to publish such a monumental volume on semiotics right these days? One motivation by the part of the co-authors is obviously their intention to summarize the results of their high-level researches in semiotics developed during decades. But taking a look to the chapters of the volume we can see a disclosure of a relatively radical social-critique of some basic institutions of our civilization, like for example of the mass-media, political agreements or war itself (showing also the inter-relations between these institutions), and we can see as well the critical analysis of some common-place kind terms, like 'open community', etc. 'The most powerful expression of the destructive character of capitalism in the present phase of development in the global communication system is war. The world of global communication is the world of infinite war. We are now living in a world where international relations among nations are regulated by „just and necessary wars”, by wars described as „humanitarian” or „preventive”' (p.492). According to the point of view of the authors, political agreements in their 'classical' form, arranged by political institutions founded in the cold war-era (and which institutions in most of the cases are no able to react in the adequate way to the crisis and to the conflicts of our days) have also lost their validity. One of the examples given by the authors is the Helsinki Final Act, which 'has gradually lost its paradigmatic value, especially in the 1990s'; analyzing this text at the semantic and at the semiotic level we can understand the internal causes of this process of deterioration, 'which we believe can be tracked back to the argumentative loci and logical formulations of fundamental concepts and categories developed in that document. Specifically, argumentation concerning the logic of war is weak, and this could well be one of the main reasons for its i.e. the Helsinki Final Act's failure" (p.494).

In connection to the critical analysis of the concept of 'open community', one relevant reflection – in existentialist-like terms – is the following: 'in contrast with the open community, which is characterized by communication among individuals, understood as unindifferent differences that relate to one another according to the logic of otherness, the closed community (which is formed of undifferentiated individuals) reproduces being, generic indifferent differences, by asserting difference of the individual and indifference to the other' (p.528). As an example of the totalitarian-closed community, the authors give also an account on the process of substitution, in Nazi Germany, of Gesellschaft (society) with Gemeinschaft (community): such a closed community 'implies undisputed belonging on the part of its members, absolute identification (without the excesses of alterity), full solidarity, perfect alignment, total convergence' (p.530).

The authors seem to give such a detailed account on the concepts of 'open community' and 'closed community' because they want to point out that in many cases a political society can hardly be characterized – in these terms – in the appropriate way. Anyway, the following passage can make clear

some of the goals of the authors by publishing their volume in the actual context: 'semiotics contributes to the humanism of alterity by mapping out the sign network that links all human beings to one another. And interconnection is a fact of synchrony as much as of diachrony. The dissemination of communication worldwide actually means that the communication sign system is operating at a planetary level involving living organisms worldwide; this is a global phenomenon susceptible to synchronic analysis. It follows that human beings – and more generally all living organisms – are part of a life system in which all terms are interconnected synchronically' (p.546). The authors clarify that their intention – by publishing this volume – is also a contribution for the future formulation of semioethics, which 'contrasts with stereotypes as much as with norms and ideology; if anything, it can be described as proposing a critique of stereotypes, norms, and ideology, and thus a critique of different types of value Semioethics is the capacity for critique' (p.548).

- - -

Let's take a look to the structure of the book. The volume consists of three major units. The first – historical-theoretical – part, intitled 'Semiotics and semioticians' basically gives an overview on the problems related to the intellectual legacy of Charles S. Peirce, analyzing the works of authors like Peirce himself, Victoria Welby, Mikhail Bakhtin, Charles Morris, Thomas A. Sebeok, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi and Umberto Eco. In Part Two, by the title 'Modelling, writing and otherness', and in Part Three ('Predicative judgement, argumentation and communication') the authors intend to apply on different fields the theoretical material presented in Part One.

The introductory chapter ('An excursion into semiotics') is opened with an elementary definition of semiotics: starting from the basic presupposition that 'semiosis is the process, or relation, or situation, whereby something serves as a sign' (p.4), "'semiotics" refers to both the *specificity of human semiosis* and the general *science of signs*' (p.3). According to the first meaning, 'semiotics relates to the specific human capacity for metasemiosis', and developing the Aristotelian definition (given in his Metaphysics), according to which the human being has a natural inclination for knowledge, it can be claimed that 'human semiosis, anthroposemiosis, presents itself as semiotics'. According to the second meaning 'semiotics is the study of signs', which – as a scientific discipline – 'can embrace the world of organisms, or the living world (Sebeok), or the entire universe insofar as it is permeated with signs (Peirce)', and in these cases 'it emerges as „global semiotics”' (p.3). In harmony with the conception of symbol formulated by Ernst Cassirer (expressed in his Philosophy of symbolic forms), for Charles S. Peirce and for Ferdinand de Saussure as well the symbol is basically 'a special type of sign', meanwhile for Mikhail M. Bakhtin the symbol is given 'as the sign that most requires answering comprehension, given the dialectic correlation between identity and alterity' (p.5). It is a merit of Thomas A. Sebeok that 'a new trend in semiotics has been evolving since the 1960s'; the effect of such a paradigmatic turn rightly can be called global semiotics or semiotics of life, by which Sebeok 'expands the boundaries of traditional semiotics – or ... semiology – which restricts itself to the verbal paradigm and as a result is corrupted by the pars pro toto error. Sebeok tags this conception of semiotics the „minor tradition" and promotes instead what he calls the „major tradition" as represented by John Locke and Ch.S. Peirce' (p.5). So the global semiotics formulated by Sebeok (and analyzed in details by 175 authors in the work of three volumes intitled Semiotik/semiotics: handbook on the sign-theoretic foundations of nature and culture, published between 1997 and 2004, and edited by the same Sebeok with Roland Posner and Klaus Robering) extends the field of semiology as a scientific discipline to medicine, physics, biology, psychology, economics, philosophy, etc. In the following sub-chapters of the 'Introduction' the authors give introductory explanations about some basic semiotic concepts like sign, interpretant, pragmatism and pragmaticism, signification and significance, denotatum, etc.

Part One – as it was already mentioned – starts with a schematic reconstruction of Charles S. Peirce's semiotic theory. For Peirce 'all things that exist ..., impose themselves ... as they are signs', and in his

theoretical perspective it's necessary a distinction of two levels, the semiotic and the hermeneutic level of the phenomenological manifestation of signs: 'the semiotic level focuses on the internal semiotic structure of the signifying process and considers signs in terms of their intrinsic signifying capacity; while the hermeneutic level considers semiosis in terms of the interpretive response it elicits and in which it is generated' (p.36). In this context is crucial to clarify the relationship between the interpretant sign and the interpreted sign. As the authors emphasize, in Peirce's theory 'the interpretant sign develops in response to the interpreted sign', and 'to a certain degree the interpretant sign also comprehends that interpreted sign', but 'the interpreted sign also is endowed with otherness and will never be completely comprehended or grasped by any single interpretant sign in any given piece of semiosis or interpretive route' (p.38), so 'the relation between sign (interpreted) and interpretant ... is a dialogic relation' (p.349). It is important to see that Peirce's semiotics has also the features of a 'global semiotics', at least in the sense that its definitions 'are not circumscribed to representative signs; ... his aim is to describe all types of signs' (p.43). Giving finally a general characterization of Peirce's sign-model, the authors underline that in this theory 'signs are ... always present in nature, albeit at a remove from the actions of external agents; thus, the universe is permeated with signs, which stand apart from the action of interpretive will. Genuine mediation (irreducible thirdness) is an inherent part of reality, one that manifests itself as sign reality in interpretive processes, be they scientific, artistic-esthetic, or part of everyday life. The signifying universe is manifested through such processes; it is also generated and amplified through them' (p.46).

In the sub-chapter on 'Consciousness, body, world', one of the central thoughts is that 'consciousness, which is the totality of the mind's manifestations, is modelled in signs to the extent that a relation of identity can be established between mind and semiosis' (p.55). The main contribution of Peirce from this aspect is that he 'described subjectivity in terms of „outreaching identity”', a term that emphasizes the continuity between private-mental phenomena and public life. Analogously to Welby and Bakhtin 'Peirce perceived the internal world as deriving from the external world – as consisting of signs interiorized from the outside world' (p.55). And one of the major achievements of Peirce's sign-theory is that it was 'capable of transcending the dualism of competence and performance, deep structures and surface structures' (p.77); a further relevant aspect of Peirce's thought (showing some similarities with Willard Van Orman Quine's conception on radical translation) is the way he put in relationship signs and language with his translation theory: 'according to Peirce's sign model, the situation in which something subsists as a sign necessarily involves translation processes: semiosis is a translative-interpretive process' (p.78).

The Second Chapter of Part One is dedicated to the critical reconstruction of the semiotic theory of Victoria Lady Welby, who – similarly to Peirce – preferred to formulate her concepts in triads. The final form of her theory was outlined in her volume intitled What is meaning? Studies in the development of significance of 1903, where she replaced her previous 'sense-meaning-interpretation' triad with the 'sense-meaning-significance' triad, 'to reflect that the term „interpretation” designates a process invested in all three levels'; in the authors's view in Welby's theory the concept of 'significance' can be considered the most original, because 'it suggests that meaning can be delineated in all its signifying valencies and that the character of signs in general and of the verbal sign in particular can be specified' (p.84). It is particularly interesting the theory of translation described by Welby: for her translation is a 'method of interpretation and understanding. As such, it is a means for exploring the sphere of reflection on signs and meaning', taking in consideration also that Welby 'sees a close relationship between theory of translation and figurative language, and emphasizes the importance of metaphor, analogy and homology in the very constitution of thought and communication processes. Like Peirce (albeit independently of him) Welby asserts that mental activities are automatic translative processes. All signs and expressions are already translations in themselves before being subject to subsequent translative and interpretive processes' (p.87, emphasis added).

One of the most radical innovations of Delby is formulated (still in What is meaning?) in her critique in relationship with the 'plain meaning'-fallacy: 'Welby was intent on showing that it is simply wrong to believe that a text can evolve in a single, absolute, definitive reading valid for all times' (p.90). In her first important work, Links and clues (of 1881), there are important observations on the questions related to the interpretation of the Holy Scripture; as the authors point out, Welby 'attributed many of the problems in exegetic interpretation, characterized by the tendency to equivocation, dogma and orthodoxy, to the failure to do just this – that is, to take into account that truth can only be reached by dealing with the ambiguity of signs, the great multiplicity of perspectives, logics, and voices that form language, experience, and the value of expression. Like Bakhtin, she declares that truth is essentially dialogic' (p.92).

Chapter Three is dedicated to the analytic reconstruction of the work of Mikhail M. Bakhtin. As a starting point, the authors underline that according to Bakhtin 'philosophy of literature cannot be separated from philosophy of language', and these two 'share the same roots – moral philosophy': in fact originally he was interested in moral philosophy, and specifically in the problem of responsibility (p.139), moreover he considered his own studies on language as studies in 'metalinguistics'. In one of his famous works (published in 1963), The problems of Dostoevsky's poetics, 'Bakhtin emphasized the dialogic character of the relation between language and sign', and this means that 'semiotics and philosophy of language are dialogically linked: semiotics has a philosophical component, and philosophy of language has a scientific one' (p.140). The question on the relationship between semiotics and philosophy of language is strictly related to the problem of the relationship between science and philosophy; Bakhtin's main position is that philosophy of language has to be distinguished from semiotics.

In the formulation of his own concept of sign, Bakhtin took in consideration first of all the distinction between signifiant and signifié, developed by Saussure. The semiologies of Saussurean matrix „not only conceive the sign in terms of equal exchange between signifiant and signifié”, but 'they theorize only two poles in linguistic life, between which all linguistic and (taking linguistics as the model) all semiological phenomena take place. These two poles are the unitary system (langue) and individual use of this system by the single speaker (parole)' (p.142). For Bakhtin a further basic aspect of sign is its material quality (semiotic materiality): 'for a sign to subsist, there must be a body, that is, a physical object that does not refer to itself but rather to something else for which it stands, be it a body or an idea'; the sign is material because its physical nature, and also because 'it has a place ... in a historical tradition ..., on which basis it objectively assumes a given meaning' (p.157). One of the most original ideas of Bakhtin was that he 'identified the specificity of the verbal sign in the fact that it does not carry out an extra-sign, instrumental function In this sense, the verbal sign is the sign par excellence. Its expressive capacity is greater than that of non-verbal signs, which to a degree verbal signs are able to describe and contain' (p.158).

Bakhtin's work is a basic referential point for post-modern theories of literature: Bakhtin was one of the first authors who have attempted to develop a literary analysis taking in consideration intertextuality: 'Bakhtin worked from the perspective of literature – he stood inside literature. From this position, he conducted what can be called an antisystemic and detotalizing critique, through which he revealed the internal threads linking literature to the extraliterary – that is, he revealed the structural intertextuality through which literary texts are related to extraliterary texts' (p.155).

In connection with the work of Charles W. Morris (in Chapter Four) the authors underline his interest in behaviouristics and biology, which is clear also in base of his terminology: 'Morris rejected terms that were uncertain and ambiguous ... in favour of terms from the science of biology, which studies the behaviour of human and non-human animal life objectively' (p.169), and in this attitude we can see Morris's intention to return to Peirce, and at same time go beyond him. Morris – as it can be seen first of all in his Signs, language, and behaviour – was deeply inspired by Peirce's work, but at the same

time Morris also expressed his critical views toward Peirce: 'Morris rejected Peirce's definition of sign – of all signs – as giving rise to other signs. That signs generate new signs cannot be used as a defining criterion, for this would involve a form of circularity' (p.170). Anyway Morris appreciated Peirce's emphasis 'on the importance of behaviour. Peirce maintained that to determine the meaning of a sign, we must identify the habits of behaviour it produces. This was the aspect of Peirce that Morris wished to develop in his own theory of sign' (p.171), in fact for Morris 'the science of signs and behaviouristics mutually implied each other' (p.174). It has to be added to all this, that in his probably most important work, the Foundations of the theory of signs, Morris 'reflects on the eventual contribution from semiotics to a program for unifying the sciences' (p.185).

In Morris there is an emphasized distinction between signals and symbols; the main difference between these two is that 'symbols, being produced by the organism, the interpreter, are less reliable than signals, which are more closely connected with external environmental relations and therefore tend to be more reliable' – so this is a difference of degree (p.196). In Signs, language, and behaviour 'Morris set out to define language by applying criteria that exclude the relationship between language and communication', moreover claimed that 'language is not reduced to speech, and speech is a specific form of language' (p.197). The authors summarize the five criteria for the definition of 'language' given by Morris; according to the 5th criterion 'signs constituting a language must form a system of interconnected signs combinable in given ways and not in others so as to produce a variety of complex sign-processes' (p.198). In the theory of Morris 'language' is taken as a synonym of 'communication': as a result 'there is no doubt that non-human animals also possess language' (p.200).

In connection with Thomas A. Sebeok's work (in Chapter Five) Petrilli and Ponzio emphasize the relevance of the three aspects of the unifying function of semiotics, formulated by Sebeok. These aspects are the following: the descriptive-explanatory aspect, the methodological aspect, and the ethical aspect (cfr.: pp.211-212). It is an innovation of Sebeok that he added a new meaning to the concept of 'semiotics': this is not only the 'general science of signs', but it is also the specificity of human semiosis (cfr.: p.213). According to the authors's formulation a fundamental aspect of Sebeok's theory of signs is that 'living is sign activity. The activities of maintaining life, reproducing it, and interpreting it at a scientific level necessarily involve the use of signs. Sebeok theorized a direct connection between the biological and semiotic universes, and thus between biology and semiotics. His research extended Peirce's conviction that man is a sign by adding that this sign is a verb: to interpret' (p.220).

With regard to the origin of language and speech the views of Sebeok are particularly important: 'Sebeok described language in agreement, as the same authors point it out, with Chomsky's theory of generative grammars as a primary modelling device. ... Human language is completely different from the modelling devices of other life forms. Its distinctive feature is ... syntax Thanks to syntax, human language – ... as a modelling device – is similar to Lego building blocks. It can reassemble a limited number of construction pieces in an infinite number of ways" (p.216). The authors recall our attention to the importance – from a semiotic point of view and specifically in connection with the iconic aspect of language – of Wittgenstein's Tractatus. And finally, a further important observation of the authors is that the iconic relation „can also be explained and analysed by distinguishing among analogy, isomorphism, and homology, as discussed by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi Also, the distinction between analogy and homology fits well with the general orientation of Sebeok's own research, given its association with biology" (p.217).

The author treated in Chapter Six, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, is particularly important for both co-authors, and some parts of their analysis in the Chapter in question were presented at the already mentioned conference intitled Language, literature and semiotics; in that event the subject of the paper of Augusto Ponzio (written in French) was 'Valeur linguistique et valeur marchande: Saussure, Chomsky, Schaff, Rossi-Landi', meanwhile Susan Petrilli's paper had the title 'The relation between Morris's and Rossi-Landi's approach to signs'.

According to the authors' explanation, one of the most important works of Rossi-Landi, Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune, 'is a groundbreaking attempt to merge two distinct traditions: the Italian tradition, with its German and continental influences, encounters British analytical philosophy and American pragmatism. More precisely, this book amounts to the first attempt ever made to graft the line of thought that passes from Charles S. Peirce to Charles Morris, combined with elements from Oxonian analytical philosophy, Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, and Hugo Dingler's operationism, onto the trunk of continental, non-idealistic historicism' (p.235). Rossi-Landi admired Saussure's theory and partly has also accepted his views, but in his entry 'Semiotics' (in the Dizionario teorico-ideologico) Rossi-Landi 'proposed the Augustinian terms signans and signatum in order to avoid the mentalistic ambiguity of Saussure's signifié' (p.237). An important innovation of Rossi-Landi is that he 'introduced the notion of common speech in opposition to the notion of „ordinary language” as conceived by the Oxonians'; his notion of common speech 'does not contradict the reality of plurilingualism ..., on the contrary, it helps explain plurilingualism precisely because it alludes to similarities in function as fulfilled by different languages in satisfying expressive and communicative needs' (p.237). A further innovation of Rossi-Landi is that he developed Ryle's distinction between use and usage of language (which corresponds to the phenotypic distinction between linguaggio and lingua) Rossi-Landi went a step further in an attempt to identify the general conditions of language viewed against both a linguistic background and a non-linguistic one', and these conditions could be characterized as the existential dimension of common speech (p.239).

Rossi-Landi, in his theory on common speech, 'takes an ante litteram critical stand against Chomsky's „Cartesian linguistics” Chomsky's conception of language does not free itself of the classic alternatives: consciousness or experience, rationalism or empiricism. In this sense, his approach is alien to both Kantian critique and its surpassing by abstract rationalism and abstract empiricism' (pp.241-242). Rossi-Landi's anticartesianism is evident also in his analysis of Giambattista Vico's work; Rossi-Landi here emphasized the importance of Vico's critique of Cartesian epistemology: insofar as Descartes's theory of knowledge 'is based on evidence and deduction, it could not be applied to the historical or „human” sciences' (p.243). According to the authors, one of the main innovations, on the anthropological level, of Rossi-Landi's semiotic theory is the connection between linguistics and economics (cfr.: pp.247-248).

The authors dedicate an entire sub-chapter to a concept, broadly used in contemporary theories of language and literature, which resulted to be a central concept in Rossi-Landi's writings as well: linguistic alienation. In his Language as work and trade Rossi-Landi 'addresses the problem of ideology in strict relation to the semiotic approach to society. Here, he acknowledges that his own perspective is ideological and attempts to explain it' (p.255, emphasis added). As an important example of the explicitly ideological approach of Rossi-Landi to linguistic-theoretical questions, it has to be mentioned that 'in Language as work and trade, Rossi-Landi overtly criticizes the Wittgensteinian notion of linguistic use and does so in Marxian terms; this leads him to maintain that the limitation of Wittgenstein's theory of linguistic use is the absence of the notion of labour-value' (p.260). Meanwhile by criticizing Morris's Signs, language and behaviour Rossi-Landi was focusing on 'the concept of goal-oriented behaviour with the observation that Morris was presupposing a distinction between behaviour and goal-oriented behaviour' (p.260). We can find further analysis of the concept of linguistic alienation and the role of semiotics in the criticism of the same phenomenon in sub-chapter 6.3.4; according to the main conclusion 'if human being are signs, and if signs belong to a situation that is more or less alienated ..., a critical theory of signs, language, and ideology is necessary if we are to overcome social and linguistic alienation and the processes of dehumanization' (p.282).

Chapter Seven is dedicated to the analysis of the work of Umberto Eco. As the authors indicate, the title of the 1984 book of Eco (Semiotics and philosophy of language) in itself makes clear that 'Eco strongly associates general semiotics with philosophy'; in a similar way, in a 1997 article Eco states

that '„a general semiotics is a branch of philosophy, or better still, it is the way in which philosophy reflects on the problem of semiosis"', independently from the fact that grammars or semiotics are not concerned with their own philosophical foundations (p.300). In the evolution of Eco's theory was an important step to substitute the concept of 'code' with the concept of 'encyclopedia'. In Eco's career Peirce (and especially Peirce's theory of infinite semiosis) remained constantly a fundamental source of inspiration. The Italian semiologist 'revisits the question of openness (Opera aperta, 1962) in the Limits of interpretation (1990) and in Interpretation and overinterpretation (1992) – in terms ... of „unlimited semiosis". In Kant e l'ornitorinco (1997 ...), he turns his attention to the Peircean notions of „Dynamical object" and „Ground", thereby presupposing a theory of knowledge that semiotics, understood as philosophy of language, cannot avoid' (p.303). Eco, as a follower of Peirce (and distinguishing his own theory from Derrida's deconstructivism), elaborating the conception of the 'limits of interpretation', 'differentiates between „interpretation" and „hermetic drift" The distinction between „unlimited semiosis" and deconstruction is central to Eco's Limits of interpretation', because this distinction, with reference to the problem of text-interpretation, partly 'corresponds to the one between pragmaticism and pragmatism. ... Faced with the text's potential for pluriinterpretability, Eco applies the concept of unlimited semiosis in theorizing a limit to interpretive possibilities on the basis of consensual judgement ... formulated by the community of interpreters' (p.309). At this point the authors should had note the implicit similarity between Wittgenstein's views (described in his Philosophical investigations) on the necessarily public character of the institution of language, and the conception of Eco on 'consensual judgement'.

A further important point in Ponzio's and Petrilli's analytical reconstruction is related to Eco's semantic theory: in connection to the problem of the relationship between meaning and referent, 'Eco himself signals a change in the evolution of his thought from La struttura assente 1968 and Le forme del contenuto 1971 to the Theory of semiotics Trattato di semiotica generale, published in Italian in 1975. This evolution is reflected in the transition from „antireferential" semiotics to „non-referential" semiotics, and from there to „not immediately referential" semiotics' (p.315). In Theory of semiotics the concept of 'referent', formulated by Eco, is based on two presuppositions: '(1.) The referent is generally either a single concrete entity or an abstract entity'; '(2.) if the referent is an abstract entity, a cultural entity, then it is a meaning. Furthermore, we must free the term „denotation" from any referential hypothesis; what the term denotes is meaning' (p.317). In the following the co-authors criticize in a radical (and in my view in a non completely adequate) way Eco's theory on the concept of 'referent'. For Ponzio and Petrilli Eco's presuppositions are unacceptable, because – as they write – these lead 'to a confusion of two different functions, both of which are present ... in the process of semiosis: that of being expressed (meaning) by a signifier, and that of being denoted by a sign (referent)', which – in simple terms – means that 'two functions of the sign are reductively identified: expressing and denoting' (p.318). Even this way the authors recognize that Eco is right, in the sense that 'the process of „infinite semiosis" ... indicates that signs do not exist in a specific sense, since the object can become the sign of another object or act as the interpretant of the same meaning or signifier with respect to which it acted as referent. But this does not negate the fact that every time a sign functions as sign, it refers to that which with respect to that sign does not function as a sign but as a referent' (p.319). It can be added, that at this point of their analysis the authors could have mentioned (at least at the bibliographical level) the results related to the semiotic researches – especially in connection with the concept of 'referent' – of semiologist Luigi Tassoni (1995, 1996), mainly because Tassoni, by developing a critique toward Eco's theory, intended to give an alternative instead of that. Probably the best and more synthetic account of the evolution of Eco's theory is given by János Kelemen (1998: 135-173); the volume's hermeneutic-historical explanation is outlined in a recension written by József Nagy (2000).

Part Two deals with the problems of 'Modelling and otherness' (Chapter 8) and that one of 'Writing

and dialogue' (Chapter 9). In Chapter Eight the authors reveal the importance of Jakob Von Uexküll's work, specifically his theory on functional cycle, which can serve as a paradigmatic model for semiotic processes. 'In the „functional cycle”, the interpretandum produced by the „objective connecting structure” becomes an interpretatum ... and is translated by the interpretant into a behavioural disposition that triggers a behaviour in the „connecting structure”, and, no matter the fact that Von Uexküll doesn't use a dialogic model, in his theory on functional cycle 'a dialogic relation is established between an interpreted (interpretandum) and an interpretant' (pp.350-351). In the sub-chapter on 'Literary writing and the creativity of language' one of the main thesis is that literary writing is disengaged 'with respect to the obligations that characterize other writing practices Literary writing is freed from the impositions of circumscribed or restricted responsibility All of this invests literary writing with ... absolute responsibility' (p.375).

In Chapter Nine the authors – in my view – seem to agree with Derrida's conception on the primordially of written texts (written language) in comparison with oral language (emphasizing this way that orality and written tradition are on the same level): according to the authors, the fact that 'oraliture echoes écriture reminds us that orality in the various forms of non-written literature is already writing ... avant la lettre. As such, oraliture presents ways of modeling the world – the expression of a sort of play of musement, the pleasure of inventiveness, encounter, involvement, and listening – no less than written literature' (p.417).

Finally, Part Three includes (in three chapters) different analysis on 'Predicative judgement, argumentation and communication'. In Chapter Ten ('Semiogenealogy of predicative judgement') the authors intend to show that semiotic and phenomenological inquiries are compatible with each other: 'semiotics can present itself in terms of transcendental logic as understood by Husserl, given that the phenomenology of semiosis can explain the problems involved in forming possible worlds' (p.433). The phenomenological approach is important first of all from the point of view of the genesis of the Object; such an analysis requires the distinction of four aspects, described synthetically by the authors (cfr.: pp.434-436). In a sub-chapter on 'Critical common-sensism and pragmatism' Petrilli and Ponzio – as I see – show some analogies between Peirce's and Wittgenstein's thought (even without mentioning Wittgenstein's name), with the latent co-presence of some Cartesian elements: 'according to Peirce's critical common-sensism ..., as a human being, I am not endowed with an infallible introspective power into the secrets of my own heart, to know precisely my own beliefs and doubts. However, there exist beliefs that are more or less constant and beyond doubt. Such beliefs are in the nature of instincts understood in a broad sense. ... An important proposition should be considered as indubitable only after we have systematically endeavoured to attain to a doubt of it An indubitable proposition can be false, but insofar we do not doubt a proposition, we must regard it as perfectly true, perfectly certain' (p.472). The title itself of Chapter Eleven ('Closed community and open community in global communication') formulates synthetically the subject included in it. I consider as particularly important the sub-chapters on 'Language, modelling, alterity and open community' (pp.515-517) and (in Chapter Twelve, intitled 'Global communication, biosemiotics, and semioethics') on 'Responsibility and semioethics' (pp.538-540).

Susan Petrilli's and Augusto Ponzio's work is undoubtedly a basic source, especially – but not exclusively – for university students, who are interested in knowing (in a historical as well as in a theoretical perspective) the basic notions of semiotics. - - -

Bibliography

- Kelemen, János (1998). *Italian hermeneutic philosophy from Croce to Eco Az olasz hermeneutika Crocétól Ecóig*. Budapest: Kávé.
- Nagy, József (2000). „Teorie ermeneutiche da Croce ad Eco”, in: *Il Cannociale*, 3/2000, pp.223-231.
- Tassoni, Luigi (1995). *Semiotica dell'arte e della letteratura*. Pécs: Edizioni Dante Alighieri.
- Tassoni, Luigi (1996). *Sull'interpretazione*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

BIONOTE

József Nagy is a research fellow at the Institute of Philosophy of the University ELTE of Budapest (Hungary). His main field of research is 17th-18th centuries' philosophy (political philosophy, philosophy of language). He published a volume (his first dissertation) in Hungarian on the interpretations – from a hermeneutic approach – of the work of Giambattista Vico (*Vico – history of ideas as unlimited semiosis*, Áron, Budapest 2003). He developed relevant researches and published studies also on Dante, on Petrarca, on Machiavelli, on Hobbes and on Croce. In his second dissertation (*A comparison of the political philosophy and of the philosophy of language of Vico and Hobbes*) he compares Hobbes's and Vico's theories mainly from a philosophical-linguistic and a semiotic approach. He participated (as an interlocutor) in several conferences in Hungary, in Italy and in other countries. Besides his papers he also published (in some Hungarian and Italian reviews) many recensions and translations. He is a member of the Hungarian Philosophical Society, of the Hungarian Wittgenstein Society and of the Hungarian Dante Society.