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Augusto Ponzio (2007) *Fuori Luogo. L'esorbitante nella riproduzione dell'identico* Rome: Meltemi, pp.1-335 €24 ISBN 978-88-8353-571 softcover

Augusto Ponzio has been at the forefront of the study of semiotics and the philosophy of language in the Italian academy for many years. Since the late 1960s, when the Russian formalists were first translated into Italian, and in the 1970s, with the first translations of Bakhtin (a crucial author for Ponzio, on whom he is a world-renowned authority) and of members of his intellectual circle such as Medvedev and Volosinov (whose work is believed to be that of Bakhtin himself, but published under their names), Ponzio has dedicated himself to promoting and spreading their works to an Italian audience.

Drawing on the writings of Levinas, Bakhtin, Barthes, Rossi-Landi and Peirce, Ponzio's work as a whole, since its very beginning, has concerned itself with the notion of alterity and difference. Despite the diversity of the theoretical frameworks of these thinkers, Ponzio traces in them a web of interconnections and dialogism that illustrates clearly his own approach to culture, literature, politics and the arts. *Fuori luogo*, the title of his latest work, a dense and rich synthesis of his theoretical approach, situates itself at the crossroads of a diversified disciplinary tapestry in which the paths of philosophers and writers of "alterity" cross.

This is an extremely wide-ranging book, but for the purposes of this review, I will dedicate my attention to the chapters, especially those on Pier Paolo Pasolini and Rossi-Landi, that deal with Italian matters.

Although the title *Fuori Luogo* evokes a displacement, it does not imply an absence of place and time. Rather, there is in the book a strong tension toward reconfiguring space vis-à-vis an idea of identity that does not aim at repositing sameness. As Levinas affirms, a philosopher who recurs often in the book, the movement or journey towards alterity does not aim at repositing Ulysses' adventures where his return to his native island means a reaffirmation of sameness or a value system that was already in place before the journey began. In this context, identity is seen as a process in constant dialogue with otherness. Within this complex process, a call for responsibility towards others is also affirmed (again as has been proposed by Levinas). In *Fuori luogo*, Ponzio elaborates at length on the theoretical and practical meanings of a word such as responsibility, connecting it to (although also keeping it separate from) the discourse on "tolerance." It is here that Ponzio turns to Pasolini's well-known thoughts, in particular those on tolerance, according to which "tolerance," or better, being "tolerated," already expresses a condemnation of freedom and democracy, rather than an affirmation and illustration of these values. Pasolini thinks that "the fact that we tolerate someone is the same as condemning them. Tolerance is, in fact, a more refined mode of condemnation

[...] The repression practiced by a tolerating power is the most atrocious of all repressions” (Pasolini, quoted in Ponzio, 97).

Thinking, in particular, about 9/11, Ponzio’s proposes a reconsideration of how certain words acquire new layers of signification in the light of contemporary events and the weight and significance that is to be attributed to them. This is one of the most cogent of Ponzio’s concerns, especially in the light of another recent event, the massive internet revolution. The attention Ponzio’s volume dedicates to these issues is important for a critical interpretation of any kind of knowledge. It is even more crucial today that so much emphasis is given to the so-called “knowledge society” where competition and the information revolution are key (Ponzio, 211).

It is not by chance that globalization takes center stage in the analysis of the more complex process of communication vis-à-vis the technological revolution. Ponzio reinterprets Pasolini’s reflections and connects them to another important work by the philosopher Rossi-Landi, *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune* (1961). The critique of both the one and the other leads to a better understanding of the notion of “lavoro linguistico” (Rossi-Landi) in the context of the present in which an ever wider process of communication technology and of globalization of information and goods is taking place. It goes without saying that Pasolini’s remarks on the difference between “progress” and “development,” as well as his thoughts on the “omologazione culturale” of the Italy of his day were also, even in his day, aimed at critiquing a process of globalization that saw the West imposing its cultural and economic systems on the Rest. Pasolini saw how the authoritarian concept of a capitalist and bourgeois form of globalization had imposed Western capitalist modes of production and consumption everywhere. Although he focused on Italy, Pasolini never lost sight of the periphery, whether represented by countries of the so-called developing world or by the less developed areas of the Italian peninsula such as southern Italy. Consumerism, the impact of the changes that took place in Italian society, economy and culture during the boom years are at the very center of the analysis of figures such as Pasolini. It was he, in fact, who said that the “consumerist standardization is the first real unification of our nation.” Ponzio takes these ideas further in his chapter on the “transformation of Italian culture” where his critique of the boom years is linked to Pasolini’s experimental and posthumous novel *Petrolio*. Here, in fact, Ponzio raises important questions regarding authorship, the process and the modes of writing and of a literary genre such as the novel. In the light of the current success of crime novels in Italy (but also elsewhere), one can see how the questions that Pasolini posed were far ahead of their time.

One of the major merits of Ponzio’s volume and his method of research in general is the constant attention he gives to dialogism and interdisciplinarity, between philosophy, semiotics, the arts, and a sophisticated approach to Marxism. His work has the effect of undermining what is accepted, acquired, taken for granted and pushes us to look critically at the categories that underlie thought as an act of responsibility. In Ponzio’s reading, dissident voices like those of Pasolini or that of Ferruccio Rossi-Landi are both *fuori luogo*, but always at the very center of history.