

# IV. Perspectives

## 1. Translation and Ideology

### *Semiosis as translation*

Victoria Welby describes man's capacity for signification in terms of "translative thinking," an automatic process "in which everything suggests or reminds us of something else" (Welby 1983:34). Translated into semiotic terms we could say that translative thinking is a semiotic process in which something stands for something else, in which different sign systems are related, in which one sign is more fully developed, enriched, criticized, put at a distance, placed between inverted commas, parodied or simply imitated, and, in any case, interpreted in terms of another sign. Translation is a method of investigation and discovery, says Welby, of verification and acquisition of knowledge and development of critical consciousness:

As language involves both unity and distinction (the one actually and the other implicitly), language must itself be recognised as a means of discovering contrasts together with the links which constitute these elements of unity, or at least completely exclude the idea of final disparateness [...] For a thing is significant, both in the lower and in the higher sense, in proportion as it is expressible through bare sign or pictorial symbol or representative action. In the higher sense (that of vital or moral or rational import) it is significant in proportion as it is capable of expressing itself in, or being translated into, more and more phases of thought or branches of science. The more varied and rich our employment of signs [...], the greater our power of inter-relating, inter-translating, various phases of thought, and thus of coming closer and closer to the nature of things in the sense of starting-points for the acquisition of fresh knowledge, new truth. (1983:150)

We could develop such intuitions in the light of more recent results of studies in language theory and the science of signs generally and state that semiosis, that is, the situation in which something functions as a sign, cannot subsist without translation for semiosis *is* a translation-interpretation process. The role of translation is fundamental in the constitution itself of the sign, both verbal and nonverbal, in the determination itself of meaning. As observed by Ponzio (1981) in a paper entitled "Polisemia e traduzione," the intimate connection between signs and translation emerges when we set the category of replaceability as a necessary condition of signness, when the sign is considered not only as something that replaces something else, but that may also in its turn be replaced by something else. Consequently, meaning is defined as a class of verbal and nonverbal sign materials in which these materials may replace each other reciprocally, in which, that is, an interpretant sign may act as a possible alternative to a previous less developed interpreted sign. In other words, as Charles S. Peirce teaches us, a sign subsists thanks to another sign acting as its interpretant, so that its meaning is its translation into some further sign. It subsists only in relations of reciprocal translation and substitution among signs with respect to which the original sign is never given autonomously and antecedently.

In the citation above Welby explicitly states that "while language itself is a symbolic system its method is mainly pictorial" (Welby 1983: 38). Through recourse to Peirce's most basic tripartition of signness into symbolicality or conventionality, indexicality and iconicity (cf. *CP* 2.247-2.249; also letter of Oct. 12, 1904 from Peirce to Welby, in Hardwick 1977: 22-25), we could "translate" or "reword" this sentence as follows: "if verbal language itself is a conventional system its method is mainly iconic." In other words full recognition is given to the role of iconicity in the development and multiplication of signifying processes, to the iconic relation of hypothetical similarity in verbal language

Reference here to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* by Ludwig Wittgenstein in the interpretation of Ponzio (cf. 1991a: 185-201) is instructive. Wittgenstein distinguishes between names and propositions: the relation between names or "simple signs" used in the proposition, Welby's "bare signs", and their objects or meanings, is of the conventional type. In fact, being arbitrary, the rule or code relating the sign to the object to which it refers cannot be discovered simply by guessing: sign arbitrariness is a category proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure in his book of 1916 to characterize certain types of signs—verbal signs, or words taken singly, and nonverbal signals. On the other hand, the relation between whole propositions or "propositional signs," Welby's "pictorial symbol" and "representative action," and what they signify, their interpretant, is a relation of similarity, that is, of the iconic type. Wittgenstein's "proposition," like Welby's "pictorial symbol" and "representative action," are complete signifying units with a high potential for semiotic resonance.

In his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein develops the role of situational context in the completion of the proposition's representative and therefore signifying function. Thus contextualized, the "proposition" is transformed into the "utterance" as understood especially by Mikhail Bakhtin who made a thorough analysis of this particular category with reference to the Russian word *vyskazyvanie* (cf. Bakhtin 1986b; Voloshinov 1973; 1987). The utterance, when dominated by an iconic relation between the interpretant sign and the interpreted sign is, as Bakhtin demonstrated, a dialogic relation of "answering comprehension" with a lesser or higher degree of alterity. Accordingly, it is endowed with a varying capacity for criticism, cognitive innovation, and creativity.

In relation to Wittgenstein, Ponzio (1991a: 198-199) makes the following observation:

Even though propositions are also no doubt conventional-symbolic, they are based fundamentally on the relation of representation, that is, on the iconic relation and, similarly to Peirce's "diagrams," this relation is of the proportional or structural type. Consequently, in Wittgenstein's view, the proposition is a logical picture.

To know a proposition, says Wittgenstein, means to know the situation it represents; furthermore, comprehension of a proposition does not require that its sense be explained, for "a proposition shows its sense" (4.022). Consequently, while "the meanings of simple signs (words) must be explained", "with propositions [...] we make ourselves understood" (4.026). The importance of Wittgenstein's picture theory for a better understanding of the processes of language production and, by extension, of signification generally, is commented by Ponzio (*ibid.*: 199) with words we could easily apply to Welby:

[...] as a logical picture, representation tells of the mechanism that produces propositions and explains how language, through propositional signs, is able to escape the pure and simple convention of names, which would render [language] altogether repetitive. The question invests the mechanism of the production and development of thought given that "a logical picture of the facts is the thought" and that "a thought is a proposition with a sense" [Ponzio is here referring to propositions 3 and 4 of the *Tractatus*].

For both Welby and Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* language analysis must not merely limit itself to the surface description of signifying phenomena, of language and thought, but must account for the production processes of such phenomena. From this point of view an ideal connection can be signaled with Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985) and his notions of "common speech", "linguistic work" and, in a more mature phase of his theoretical elaborations, "social reproduction" (cf. Rossi-Landi 1985, 1992b, 1998).

The work of Welby, Wittgenstein, Bakhtin and above all Peirce helps account for the more complex levels of signification, expression and communication—and not in their reduced form to the mere function of information and message exchange. Each of these scholars calls our attention to the

importance in communication of iconic representation and alterity, of establishing relations among signs beyond systemic restrictions. Such an orientation also helps to highlight the dialectic nature of ongoing interpretive-translative interactive processes between "unity and disparteness", as Welby says in the citation above, between centripetal forces and centrifugal forces operating in language, as Bakhtin would say (1975, Eng. trans., 1981: 272), between centralization and decentralization, monolingualism and plurilingualism, monologism and polylogism, identity and alterity. Thanks to such dialectic, knowledge and truth are never given once and for all, but rather are open to continual investigation and modification in a process of constant renewal and adaptation to ever new communicative requirements, at the level of simple everyday exchange as well.

We shall now consider Roman Jakobson's analysis of translation in the light of Peirce's subdivision of signs into symbols, indexes and icons. Any one given sign (identifiable as such only by abstracting from real semiotic processes for the sake of analysis) is the product of dialectic interaction, among other things, between conventionality, indexicality and iconicity even if one of these aspects prevails in a given sign situation. By considering this Peircean tripartition in conjunction with the analysis of translative-interpretive processes as proposed by Jakobson, we obtain a more adequate specification of the relation between translation and signs and a more precise, and yet broader characterization of the interpretive-translative processes constituting and proliferating in our semiosphere.

In his paper "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", Jakobson (1971), reflecting on verbal signs, identifies three different translative (or interpretive) modalities: 1) intralingual translation or rewording which refers to the interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language; 2) interlingual translation or translation proper which refers to the interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; 3) intersemiotic translation or transmutation which refers to the interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems. Each of these translative-interpretive modalities presents a relative predominance of conventionality, indexicality or iconicity, a relative predominance of the symbol, index or icon in the relation between a sign and its interpretant. Furthermore, these three types of translation are identified by Jakobson as always being interrelated, more or less co-existent with a relative predominance of one or the other. For example, in interlingual translation, for a full understanding of the sense of the object of translation and its adequate rendition in the "target" language, it will also be necessary to continually resort to intralingual translation in each of the two languages in question.

When conventionality predominates the relation between a sign and its object (or referent) is established by a code. This occurs in verbal language and is the kind of relation alluded to by Welby when she says that "[verbal] language [...] is a symbolic system". We know that to decipher the linguistic elements of a text, reference to the code is an inevitable, especially in the initial phase. At this level distancing in translative processes between interpretant signs and interpreted signs is minimal, the mere activity of recognition and identification, of course, being of first importance.

Moreover, relations of a compulsory nature also intervene between signs and their interpretants. As such this relation takes on the aspect of indexicality in Peirce's sense. To mechanical necessity a bilingual dictionary adds the relation of contiguity—proper to the index, says Peirce, jointly with causality—between the sign and its interpretant, when it places the vocable and its equivalent(s) in the target language alongside each other. Therefore, interlingual translative processes present indexicality in addition to mere conventionality. It is in this perspective that we may read Wittgenstein's observation on translation from the *Tractatus*:

When translating one language into another, we do not proceed by translating each proposition of the one into a proposition of the other, but merely by translating the constituents of propositions. (Wittgenstein 1961, 4.025)

Indexicality refers to the compulsory nature of the relation between a sign and its object, a relation regulated by the dynamics of cause and effect, of spatio-temporal necessary contiguity, pre-existent to interpretation. When indexicality predominates translation-interpretation processes simply evidence correspondences where they already exist. The degree of creative work involved is minimal.

Bakhtin, who envisages communication and social intercourse in terms of dialectic and dialogic interaction between identity and alterity, introduces another two important categories in his analysis of verbal language and extensible to other sign systems as well: "theme" (*smysl*) and "meaning" (*znacenie*), or if we prefer, "actual sense" and "abstract sense" (Bakhtin-Volosinov 1973: 106). The second term in these pairs covers all that which is identical, reproducible and immediately recognizable each time the utterance is repeated—it concerns the meaning of linguistic elements, e.g. phonemes and monemes, forming the utterance. "Meaning" thus intended corresponds to signality rather than to signness, to the "interpretant of identification," rather than to the "interpretant of answering comprehension," to "plain meaning," rather than to plurivocal meaning, to translation processes (and phases) where the degree of dialogicality and distance regulating the connection between interpretant sign and interpreted sign is minimal. "Theme," instead, refers to all that which is original and unreproducible in an utterance, to its overall sense, signifying import and evaluative orientation as such aspects emerge in a given instance of communicative interaction. This category accounts for communication and signifying processes in terms of answering comprehension, dialectic-dialogic response, multiaccentuality—it concerns translation-interpretation processes capable of qualitative jumps in knowledge and perception, of amplifying the semantic polyvalency of discourse, of opening new ideological horizons. As says Bakhtin:

Theme is a complex, dynamic system of signs that attempts to be adequate to a given instance of generative process. There is reaction by the consciousness in its generative process to the generative process of existence. Meaning is the technical apparatus for the implementation of theme. (*ibid.*: 100)

In interlingual translation, iconicity, or the iconic relation between a sign and its interpretant, is present as well. Indeed, this relation is fundamental for without it the sense of discourse could not be rendered, to the point that if translation processes remain at the level of conventionality and indexicality, the translator ends in failure. When in relation to translative-interpretive processes Welby states so simply and clearly that the method of language is pictorial, she is evidencing a component of verbal signs irreducible to indexicality or to conventionality. The translator must necessarily deal with this component by moving beyond the conventions and obligations of the dictionary and entering the live dialogue among national languages, among languages internal to a given national language, among verbal signs and nonverbal signs. The presence of iconicity in interaction between interpretant signs and interpreted signs in translative processes involves dialogism and alterity to a smaller or greater degree.

Iconicity implies that the relation between a sign and its object is not wholly established by rules and a code, as in the case of symbols, does not preexist with respect to the code, as in the case of indexes, but rather is invented freely and creatively by the interpretant. The interpreter, in our case, the translator, must inevitably keep account of this given his/her task of rendering the original interpretant with the interpretant of another language. In the case of icons, the relation between a sign and its object is neither conventional, nor necessary and contiguous, but hypothetical—it corresponds to Bakhtin's "theme," or "actual sense."

Where the relation between a sign and its object, between varying different types of signs, is regulated by the iconic relation of similarity, affinity and attraction, as Peirce would say (cf. 1923), ongoing interpretive-translative processes forming the signifying and cognitive universe are founded on dialogism, alterity, polyphony, polylogism and plurilingualism—all essential properties

of language which render such things as critical awareness, experimentation, innovation, and creativity possible.

What has been said à propos interlingual translation is also valid for intralingual and intersemiotic translation. It has also been observed that interlingual translation implies the other two types of translation. Hence the translative process always involves a process of interaction between the three types of sign-interpretant relation as identified by Peirce and the three modalities of translation as identified by Jakobson.

Meanings subsist and flourish in translation processes regulated by the relation between identity and alterity in a polylogic and plurilingualistic context, internal and external to a single language. In this theoretical framework as it is delineated by interpretation semiotics, and especially thanks to contributions from Bakhtinian theory, communication is confirmed as a primary function of human language, but with an important specification: communication as understood not in terms of its potential for message transmission, but of the unspoken, the unsaid, its capacity for vagueness, ambiguity, inscrutability, concealment, reticence, allusion, illusion, implication, simulation, imitation, pretence, semantic pliancy, polysemy, polylogism, plurilingualism, alterity—all of which determine the very possibility of communicative interaction.

Concrete live speech is possible thanks to continual translative processes both on the side of production and of interpretation in the passage from one code (linked to class, linguistic register, idiolect, genre, etc.) to another, from one language to another, from one communicative context to another. And fundamental requisite for the success of communication-translation processes is "answering comprehension". This implies speaker ability to adapt and reformulate one's own language to suit the language of one's interlocutors, to reflect metalinguistically on one's own language in the effort to develop and specify one's meaning through recourse to interpretants from the language of others, as well as the ability to reflect metalinguistically on the language of others in order to specify their meaning in terms of interpretants from one's own language. "Active or answering comprehension" concerns the "theme" or "actual sense" of an utterance. It is achieved thanks to dialogic relations among different languages and codes which permit operations of rewording, transposition, and transmutation in the deferral among interpretants as they substitute each other without ever perfectly coinciding.

Far from being a compact, unitary and monolithic phenomenon, human language may be described as a live signifying process, constantly renewing itself through the generation of different idioms, discourses, logics and viewpoints thanks to a predominant tendency toward decentralization and otherness. Plurilingualism and polylogism, both internal and external to a single language, ensue from the potential in human language for distancing, for the expression of viewpoints that are other, for different and other worldviews: indeed human language develops as a function of this very potential.

Remembering the words of George Steiner (1975), language thus intended is the main instrument through which man can refuse the world as it is. Each single language presents its own interpretation of reality, but man discovers the pleasure of freedom thanks to otherness inherent in language and therefore to the possibility of translating, of moving across different languages and cultures. From this viewpoint, thanks to the propensity inherent in man for "the play of musement", language, as observed by Thomas A. Sebeok (1981), not only concerns the real world, but accounts for the possibility of generating an infinite number of possible worlds.

*Translation and ideology*

The verbal sign is an ideological sign par excellence, says Bakhtin. As an ideological phenomenon it refracts historico-social reality. The verbal sign has an ideological function, an ideological materiality. It refracts ideologically the social reality in which it is produced and used. Insofar as it is ideological, the verbal sign may be characterized as a historico-social event.

Though nonverbal signs contribute toward shaping reality, the modelling influence of verbal signs is far greater. Reality as we experience it is organized verbally—a conviction at the basis of extreme forms of linguistic relativity. Supporters of this theory maintain that the structure of a given language wholly determines a language user's thoughts and worldview as well as his nonverbal behavior, so that, echoing Wittgenstein (1953), we could say that our world is the language we speak. For his part, by contrast with the idealism of linguistic relativity, with opposing neopositivist stances and the conception of language, thought and reality as separate though variously interacting entities, Rossi-Landi stresses the dialectic interaction between thought, language and the economic, social and cultural context in the formation of ideologies and worldviews:

Language is immediately present, but certainly not in the form of a constant linguistic capital, capable of being isolated from everything else, and made to determine nothing less than thought. If we want to study the way in which thought is determined in all its developments up to the point of including spontaneous and sophisticated worldviews, we shall have to turn our attention to the sum total of economic, social and cultural conditions. We shall find that what we describe as linguistic is, if anything, a part of their phenomenology. (Rossi-Landi 1973: 70)

So-called "semantico-ideological pliancy" characterizes the verbal sign and is expressed in its possibility of transferring or transmuting into varying ideological fields whereby acquiring new meanings and functions. The plurivocality, ambivalence, ambiguity and semantico-ideological pliancy of the verbal sign is given in its translatability into other verbal interpretant signs belonging to different semantic classes, that have different meanings.

The debate on the translation of Karl Marx's (1818-1883) *Theses on Feuerbach* is now worth remembering in the light of our discussion of the relation between semiotics, ideology and translation theory. Our reference is to the debate between Adam Schaff and Lucien Sève published in the French journal *L'homme et la Société*, in 1971 and 1972, concerning the official French translations of Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach. This debate involved, directly or indirectly, numerous French intellectuals (apart from Schaff and Sève, Louis Althusser, Auguste Cornu, Roger Garaudy), as well as the international community at large with a concern for Marxist theory. Thanks to Augusto Ponzio (1975b) who has collected contributions in the volume, *Marxismo e umanesimo*, this debate which also extends to Polish and Russian, has also been made available in Italian.

Even though this issue may seem over specialized and therefore of restricted interest, in reality its effect on interpretation of Marxist theory generally has been determining—many scholars believe that the *Theses on Feuerbach* are the key to Marx's thought system even if interpreted differently because of their elliptical and metaphorical nature. For our specific concerns in the present context, this particular issue is helpful in highlighting the close relation between translation and ideology: to translate in one way rather than in another, as in the case of this text by Marx, is full of ideological implications. The solution to this particular controversy is full of consequences at a philological, philosophical and political level as well as being crucial in establishing the validity of Sève's overall interpretation of Marxism and of his criticism of existentialism, structuralism, Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism, etc.

Sève believes that Schaff's translation of Marx's sixth thesis is wrong, the result of his misinterpretation of marxism, of reading Marx in a humanistic-speculative key, with consequences at the political level as well. The whole debate ultimately concerns the relation between Marxism and humanism: interpretation of thesis VI reflects one's general attitude to relations between

Marxism and humanism, ideology and science, scientific socialism and Marxist humanism, Marx's youthful writings and his mature works, all of which are connected with the meaning and value of Marxism taken as a whole (cf. Ponzio 1975b:6). And though this debate centres around the translation and interpretation of just a few expressions in the *Theses*, as Schaff observes, it extends beyond "words" and can only be fully understood by looking "behind the screen," by inquiring into the history of left-wing political movements, and by relating the consequences of this debate to the "controversy on the humanistic contents of socialism, the controversy on the means of overcoming the effects and consequences of Stalinism in the Communist movement, etc." (Schaff in Ponzio 1975b: 114).

The immediate object of discussion concerns the translation of a number of propositions in *Theses on Feuerbach*, all of which contain the German word "*Wesen*" as in the key expression in thesis VI "*das menschliche Wesen*". Schaff contends that recurrent translation of this expression with "the essence of man," generally consolidated by tradition, is wrong. The German word "*Wesen*" is ambiguous: it counts up to eleven distinct groups of meanings, each with numerous semantic nuances. Two of these meanings are relevant in relation to the debate in question and correspond, respectively, to the Latin "*ens*" and "*essentia*", English "being" and "essence", French "*être*" and "*essence*", Italian "*essere*" and "*essenza*", intended as "living being" on one hand, and "essence of things", "that which is essential" as opposed to incidental, on the other. None of these languages have a term—single and ambiguous—corresponding to the German "*Wesen*", though this word does have an equivalent for polysemantism and plurivocality in the Russian "*sochtchestwo*", and in the Polish "*istota*". Consequently by contrast with Russian and Polish which have an equivalent to the German "*Wesen*", when translating into French, English or Italian, for example, the translator must choose from its varying meanings: for appropriate rendition in the target language the meaning and sense of the word "*Wesen*" must be identified each time it occurs in a different context.

Things get even more complicated if we consider that there exist two different and even contrasting official French translations of the *Theses*: the expression we are describing, "*das menschliche Wesen*", is rendered either as "*l'essence humaine*" (*Œuvres complètes de Karl Marx*, A. Costes, ed., 1937) or as "*l'être humain*" (*Œuvres choisies de Marx-Engels*, Editions du Progrès, Moscow, 1946). These different translations bear different philosophical implications given that Marx is accordingly interpreted as discussing either the "essence of man" or the concrete "human being," that is, the real human individual defined in his relations not only with nature but also with society of which, insofar as he is a social being, he is the product.

It should be observed that most official translations of *Theses on Feuerbach* in varying languages are from the original Russian translation. Strangely enough, the Russian translator Plechanov, in 1892, chose to render the German "*Wesen*" by the unambiguous Russian word "*suschtschnost*" (that is, "essence", "*Wesenheit*"), rather than by "*suschtschestwo*" which, similarly to the Polish "*istota*", has multiple meanings and is consequently closer to the German original. Having made this particular lexical choice, the Russian translator—an authority, observes Schaff—was in fact to heavily condition this text's future philosophical and political interpretations.

In French, as in Italian and English, the same word cannot be used indifferently as in the case of "*Wesen*", "*istota*", "*suschtschestwo*" and influenced by the original Russian translation, "*Wesen*" is translated prevalently with the equivalents of "*essentia*", a solution refused by Schaff who favors the equivalents of "*ens*". He reaches this decision by combining the results of grammatical analysis with analysis of the philosophical context, averring that the sense of such an ambiguous term as "*Wesen*" can be established by appealing to the rules of German syntax.

If the expression "*das Wesen*" is followed by a noun in the genitive, it means "essence". Therefore, "*das Wesen des Christentums*", which is also the title of a work by Feuerbach, means "the essence of Christianity", and correspondingly "*das Wesen des Religion*" means "the essence of religion", "*das Wesen des Menschen*", "the essence of man". "*Wesen*" followed by "of something" or "of somebody" functions in the sense of "essence". On the other hand, if "*Wesen*" is preceded by a qualifying adjective, it means "being". Therefore, "*das christliche Wesen*" means "the christian being," "*das religiöse Wesen*" means "the religious being", "*das menschliche Wesen*", "the human being". In all these cases, as syntax tells us, we are dealing with a "being" that is respectively Christian, religious, human.

In the light of the connection not only between "sign" and "ideology", but between "sense" and "ideology", it would seem that the problem of ideology must necessarily be taken into consideration in a semiotic approach to translation. The task of translation can only be properly accomplished if the translator grasps and expresses the "sense" of a text: to remain at the mere level of "meaning" is not sufficient. Given that sense, as intended above, involves problems of evaluation, orientation, standpoint, and social planning, it is connected with ideology. Consequently, what we wish to underline in this paper is not so much the ideological character of translation as the inevitability of taking into account the problem of sense and therefore of ideology in translation theory (which I believe must necessarily be a semiotics of translation).

It is in this perspective that I have referred to the work of such thinkers as Sapir and Whorf (cf. Petrilli 1992a): their theory of linguistic relativity implies a specific theory of translation and a given ideology which obviously influenced, indeed, is at the basis of their rather limited vision of the very possibility of translation. It should also be mentioned that the theory of linguistic relativity is subtended by a hidden ideology of an ethnic-cultural order, an ideological orientation turned to justifying the various forms of separation and segregation imposed on peoples, Amerindians, speaking different languages from our own, referred to by Sapir and Whorf (cf. Solimini 1974: 98-102, 1991: 30-33). The debate on Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* also stresses how the problem of translation is the problem of correctly interpreting the ideology expressed in a text as well as the problem of the ideological stance that the interpreter-translator chooses to take toward that text. Such issues shed light on the close relation between ideology theory and translation theory viewed in semiotic terms. Expressed differently, my focus on the study of the relation between semiotics, ideology and translation theory is motivated by the fact that for an adequate treatment of the problem of translation we must necessarily consider the problem of the relation between "signification" and "significance", or "semantics" and "pragmatics", or, if we prefer, between "meaning" and "ideological sense".

## **2. Conventionality, Indexicality, Iconicity in Signs of Silence**

Hamlet: "He has my dying voice.

So tell him, with th'occurents, more or less,

Which have solicited – the rest is Silence".

(V.ii.1.360)

In this paper we are concerned with silence understood as the absence of words. All aspects of the absence of words connected with physiological causes or with various forms of psychopathological muteness are set aside in the present context as we focus on the *ordinary modes of word suspension*, or on cases which, even if exceptional, are sanctioned by a social norm. Thus intended silence itself is a sign. And given that we all know just how eloquent silence can be, to justify this statement would be redundant.

As the absence of words the sign of silence is obviously a nonverbal sign. Nonetheless, a distinction must be made between the absence of words, on one hand, and the absence of verbal signs ensuing from the use of nonverbal signs, on the other. The absence of words resulting from silence is one thing, the absence of words, for example in the use of gestural language, performance of a dance, language of photography, in the signs relating to proxemics (examined by Edward Hall in a book significantly entitled *Silent language*), is another. As belonging to the sphere of nonverbal signs the absence of words should be considered relatedly to nonverbal signs in general, indeed as one of them. The absence of words, or nonspeaking is eloquent insofar as it is nonspeaking and not gesture, dance, etc.

The signs of silence depend on the verbal, on language. Indeed, they are significant in relation to speech. What Roland Barthes (1964b) says of nonverbal social signs in general may be extended to the signs of silence: that with respect to verbal language they are parasitical. The signs of silence are situated in speech like islands where speech is suspended and the space of nonspeech thus obtained is surrounded by speech and is significant *precisely* because of this.

In a book of 1961, *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune* (1998) Ferruccio Rossi-Landi develops the notion of "common speech" which refers to the set of linguistic practices or operations recurrent in different languages, in spite of the differences, and thanks to which translation from one language to another is possible: reflexion on this notion should also include reference to what we could call a sort of "common nonspeech". In fact, more than involving just this or that language, the relation between speech and nonspeech concerns human language in general. We could say that silence is common nonspeech which leaves aside linguistic differences to concern human language generally rather than languages in their specific differences.

In a text entitled "Per una tipologia del silenzio", Gian Paolo Caprettini proposes a typology of silence based on Roman Jakobson's communication model. With reference to the factors of verbal communication he describes silence relatively to the: 1) sender, 2) receiver, 3) message, 4) channel, 5) code; and therefore he distinguishes between: 1) emotional, 2) connotative, 3) referential, 4) phatic, and 5) metalinguistic silence. On our part we propose a typology based on Charles S. Peirce's triadic subdivision of signs into symbols, indexes and icons.

On adopting this approach our aim is to characterize the signs of silence and distinguish between them more than view silence in relation to the communicative process and its various functions.

As understood above the signs of silence must be distinguished from the nonverbal signs of sign language as used by the American Indians, or by deaf-mutes, the signs of gestural language in general or any other form of nonverbal behavior.

We know that according to Peirce a sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect, which means that it creates in the mind of the interpreter an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign, that is, an interpretant (*CP* 2.228). That the sign stands for

something in some respect means that it does not refer to the object in its entirety (dynamic object), but only to a part of it (immediate object). Furthermore, a sign subsists for Peirce according to the category of thirdness, that is, it presupposes a triadic relation between itself, the object and the interpretant thought which is itself a sign. And given that it mediates between the interpretant sign and the object, the sign always plays the role of third party.

Signs subsist in the dialectic relation between symbolicity, indexicality and iconicity. The symbol is never pure but contains varying degrees of indexicality and iconicity; similarly as much as a sign may be prevalently indexical or iconic it will always maintain the characteristics of symbolicity, that is, to subsist as a sign it requires the mediation of an interpretant sign and recourse to a convention. Symbolicity refers to the sign's conventional character, to the relation of constricting by convention between a sign and its object as established on the basis of a code, a law. To say it with Peirce: "I define a Symbol as a sign which is determined by its dynamic object only in the sense that it will be so interpreted. It thus depends either on a convention, a habit, or a natural disposition of its interpretant, or of the field of its interpretant (that of which the interpretant is a determination)" (Peirce/Welby, October 12, 1904 in Hardwick 1977: 33). Indexicality refers to the compulsory character of the sign, to the relation of cause and effect, of necessary contiguity between a sign and its object: "I define an Index as a sign determined by its dynamic object by virtue of being in a real relation to it" (ibid.:33). Differently from symbols (where the interpretant decides on the object), in the case of indexes the relationship between the sign and the object is preexistent with respect to interpretation, it is an objective relationship and in fact conditions interpretation. The sign and what it stands for are given together independently of the interpretant. Nonetheless, this does not exclude the need to resort to a convention for the relation between sign and object to be recognized as such, that is, as a sign relation. In the case of icons the relationship between sign and object is one of similarity. As Peirce says: "I define an Icon as a sign which is determined by its dynamic object by virtue of its own internal nature" (ibid.:33). The icon is a sign whose signifying capacity is determined by its quality. Icons realize a maximum degree of independence from the object, while the interpretant can occur in a system that may even be distant, identifiable neither through a relation of necessary contiguity (index), nor of conventionality (symbol), but of hypothetical similarity. The iconic relation is characterized by such factors as affinity, attraction, innovation, creativity, and alterity.

We mentioned above that all signs simultaneously share in the character of symbolicity, indexicality, and iconicity. It follows that verbal signs, which are fundamentally conventional signs, contain traces of iconicity also. This has been illustrated, among others, by Jakobson (cf.1968) and Paolo Valesio (cf. 1967). But the point we wish to make in this paper is that the different signs of silence also contain traces of conventionality, indexicality and iconicity together and in different combinations. On this basis a typology can be proposed distinguishing between signs of silence that are predominantly symbolic, indexical, or iconic.

Those which obey a convention, a rule sanctioned and accepted by a group or a community are symbols. The different kinds of signs of silence belonging to this group express silence in different ways while sharing the fact that they do so according to a norm, a convention. Examples include: expressions of respect as observed in religious contexts and foreseen by given rites, for instance, in certain phases of catholic liturgy; monastic silence (monastic signs comprise both nonverbal signs as distinguished from signs of silence as well as signs of silence as such. On monastic signs, see Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok 1987); furthermore, military silence; the silence of mourning; commemorative silence; silence as protest, etc.

The indexical character of signs of silence emerges with the relation of cause and effect and of spatiotemporal contiguity. In such cases, the signs of silence would almost seem to be symptoms—silence as the effect of a fright, surprise, suffocated anger, resentment, etc.

While in symbolic signs silence is achieved on the basis of a convention, indexical signs of silence are provoked by a cause and are a somewhat compulsory response.

Silence of both the conventional and indexical types present a necessity or imposition with the difference that in the first case, this ensues from accepting a convention, in the second it is passively endured as the consequence of an external effect.

Conventional signs of silence are dominated by what Peirce calls the category of thirdness. In this case the relation between sign and object is mediated by a convention and, therefore, depends on an interpretant. Signs of silence of the symbolic type like all other symbolic signs are not comprehensible without being familiar with the interpretant.

On the other hand, indexical signs of silence are dominated by the category of secondness. The sign relates to the object independently of the interpretant given that the two terms are connected by a relation of cause and effect, of contiguity, as in the case of the relation between fire and smoke, spotty skin and a liver disease, a knock at the door and someone behind it wanting to enter.

Signs of silence of the third type are iconic. In this case silence is not related to a system of conventional signs or to natural causes, but rather is the expression of individual intentionality. This means that the absence of verbal signs is not the absence of language—for instance, monastic silence; nor is it the absence of phonation—as in the case of silence caused by fear or surprise. What we have here, on the contrary, is the absence of the word, of discourse, of the utterance with respect to a presence: the speaking subject says nothing. And this nothing is pregnant with meaning, is endowed with the value of an answering interpretant responding to a preceding word, the word of another.

Signs of silence of the iconic type present themselves on their own account, that is, they have their own meaning, their own signifying potential—like the face of the other (cf. Lévinas 1961). The sign is eloquent without the need of resorting to a code, a convention, without the need of an interpretant, of the conferral of sense by self. Iconic signs of silence are dominated, therefore, by what Peirce calls the category of firstness: signs of silence, or if we prefer, of "taciturnity" (cf. below, IV.3) are endowed with value on their own account.

The iconic sign of silence is dialogic, a response, expresses a viewpoint, a standpoint with respect to the word of another. Here silence is not the result of a convention, nor is it the mechanical effect of a cause; on the contrary, it tells of the autonomy, self-signification and alterity of the other, of the other's signifying irreducibility, resistance, materiality.

Silence dominated by iconicity gives itself as an image, the image of alterity. It has a strong axiological value. As Mikhail Bakhtin would say, the sign of silence insofar as it indicates an evaluation, a standpoint, a relation of consensus, perplexity, conflict, or refusal, etc. is always "accentuated".

In the words of Victoria Welby:

[...] for whether positive or negative, excessive or deficient, present or absent even, our words are of moment always. [...] the *word unsaid*, which has often helped or hindered, and in all human ways signified so much. [...] Yet even in

silence there is no escape for us either from danger or duty. Silence is often a most significant declaration, and a most misleading one. (Welby 1985: 40-41)

As says Welby, silence allows no escape neither from danger nor duty. No doubt this is only true of iconic silence where the subject is exposed in its singularity and freedom, and not of symbolic-conventional or indexical silence. Consequently, iconic silence is associated with responsibility. It is also connected with dialogue for it gives itself as a response to another's verbal or nonverbal standpoint, to a provocation, prayer, threat, question, etc. Iconicity, responsibility, and dialogue, therefore, are strongly related in iconic signs of silence.

Bakhtin theorizes the relationship between responsibility, dialogue and alterity in a paper of 1919 entitled "Art and Answerability". The word "answerability"—which covers the two Italian terms "*responsività*" (responsiveness) and "*responsabilità*" (responsibility)—, conveys the dialogic character of responsibility of the iconic type. We are alluding to the condition of absolute answerability, that is, answerability without limitations, without appeal to certainties as established by contract. In this perspective the subject is freed of subservience to the values of coherence, unilinearity, integrity, identity, and authority, and allowed to give full play to its capacity for dialogic pluri-availability, answerability, and otherness, emerging as a subject with the capacity for transgressing the limits of a code, of giving up the reassurances and guarantees offered by a law and, therefore, as a subject endowed with the capacity for unconditioned listening of the other.

### **3. Identity and Taciturnity in Communication Today**

European Union is now reality. Economic union is becoming stronger and cultural union is imposing itself. All this may no doubt have its positive aspects; however, unification of economic interests, of intellectual thought, of scientific inquiry, of fashion, taste and desires even, of the way of speaking, if not of languages, has its negative consequences as is always the case each time a new form of identity is created (whether it be the identity of a person and his role, of a class, group, association, political party, nation, or language).

Symptomatic of reinforced unity in the European Community is the fact that a new word has been coined: "extra-communitarian". This word refers to what remains outside, is alien, does not belong to the dominant identity group. As an adjective it is not simply descriptive but involves a whole series of different forms of behavior: the failure to recognize given rights, prejudice, denials, negations, and rejection of anyone classifiable as an "extra-communitarian". This new term involves a *new stereotype*, and like all stereotypes, its meanings and consequences are not definitively fixed, just as the behavior it promotes is not fixed in a written code. If the term "extracommunitarian" were only used to designate all those people and political areas which do not belong to the European Community, its reference would be so obvious and matter of fact that to explain it would be simply redundant and altogether useless. "Extracommunitarian" refers to immigrants who work or are looking for work in Europe: Algerians, Philippine house maids, black street vendors, and most non-European people who move from one job to another and live precariously, vainly attempting to become an integral part of European society. The argument against these people is that it is unfair for an "extracommunitarian" to deprive a member of the European Union of work, it is unfair for him to benefit from the same rights and prerogatives. The black man in Europe is subject to a *doubly negative* stereotype: the first concerns the color of his skin, and is of a racist type: the second concerns the fact that he comes from the outside as regards a given political and cultural community, and is of a nationalist type.

Europe is now witnessing the formation of a series of reductive, narrow areas of action as well as other distinctions with respect to that between community members and "extra-communitarians": the distinction between developed and underdeveloped countries, between North and South, between those who belong to a certain nation or region or even to a certain city and so-called foreigners, intruders. All this is not the consequence of ideological stances of a nationalist or parochial order, but the wish rather to defend private materials and interests (such as a job for ourselves or for our children) against alien appetites.

Another result of the conquest of unity in Europe is that those same tendencies toward *ethnocentrism* and *logocentrism* which had been put into question, thrown into "crisis", ridiculed and re-dimensioned in terms of philosophical and ideological criticism, thanks also to the encounter with different peoples, with different customs and languages, are now re-emerging.

Revival of the Western logos cannot be explained uniquely in terms of the history of ideas but has a precise economic reality at its foundations: Capitalism. European union is the union of European Capitalism and as such involves such phenomena as the reduction, if not complete elimination, of barriers to exchange, and of the various inconveniences stemming from the different currencies; furthermore, economic union promotes the formation of monopolies, the concentration of capital into multi-national societies, the homologation of needs as induced by publicity. Capitalism is today the winner in Europe. Revolt and the subversion in European Socialist countries must be associated in particular with the attraction exerted on these countries by the victory of European capitalism, and consequent reinforcement of the European Community. The fall of the Berlin Wall can only be explained along the same lines.

Two things must be kept in mind when analyzing the crisis of Marxism in socialist countries. First of all, the term "socialism" was often applied to something—"Real Socialism"—which, in fact, was no less than an alienated form of socialism (conceding that elimination of the free market and concentration within the State of the means of production will suffice to justify evaluation of a social system in terms of Socialism). This alienated form of socialism unjustifiably made claims to the ideas of Marx (on this aspect the best critique is formulated by Adam Schaff in his writings on alienation in socialist countries). In the second place, we must remember the powerful force of attraction exerted by capitalism. In spite of anti-Stalinist stances and the current unpopularity of Stalinism in all political line-ups, the defeat of "Real Socialism" is commonly identified with the defeat of Communist ideology. This is rather peculiar, for it is a Stalinist idea: in fact, similarly to Stalin, the basic assumption is that what has not worked and has now been refused is socialism. The bad reputation of such words as "Marxism" and "Communism" after the crisis of Socialism in European countries (but remember also the terrifying action of repression—Tien An Men—in the People's Republic of China in the name of Communism) has provoked a condition of unease, disorientation, and rejection of Marxism and Communist ideology even among parties of the same name.

The tendency characterizing present times is the disintegration of strong ideologies. If, together with Rossi-Landi, we define ideology as "social planning" and if we believe that confrontation and clashes even between contrasting or different ideologies is vital to ideology, three things should be observed: 1) the social plan dominating in Europe today coincides with a plan for the development of capital. This plan is rooted in things themselves, in reality, to the point that more than the *ideology of capital*, it is its logic; (2) In Europe the European Commission is the organism of social planning in the perspective of such ideology; (3) there is no sign of opposition to the dominant *ideo-logic*, at least not in any conscious, organized form. It would seem (at least at the macroscopic level) that the struggle, dialogue and dialectic between ideologies has now been replaced by the monotony of a single dominating viewpoint. As such, the latter does not need to search for a name

since it sees nothing from which it must differentiate itself. The dominant viewpoint imposes and reproduces itself *automatically* and *silently* through the logic of the development of Capitalist society. If it must necessarily resort to a name, this is a generic, abused, ambiguous name, a kind of "umbrella term", a *passe-partout*: "Democracy".

A more important point to underline is that even politics is losing ground, a fact we must attribute to the "crisis of ideology". Political activity today does no more than respond to purely technical and administrative necessities. Politics represents the set of mechanisms that support and promote presentday capitalist society; nor is it exact to speak of bureaucracy with which politics has identified throughout history. Instead of the bureaucrat we now have technicians, specialists in social questions: the politician today is a technician. Rather than promoting political movements with different and contrasting orientations, the choice of a political leader today generates forms of clientelism: the greatest expert in politics will gain the most clients. Obviously, a movement that opposes one of these dominating orientations officially is not a force in opposition, but simply another force aspiring to the power and primacy of the leading position. All this must be considered in the light of the prevailing tendency toward corporativism.

Dominant behavior is oriented by interests that confirm and reinforce one's own sphere of identity, of "indifferent difference". Beyond the larger spheres of interest there also exist numerous small spheres, including private interest. Nonetheless, if we agree that the public sphere should also consider and recognize the interests of otherness, even the broadest sphere of interest is a private sphere insofar as it is concerned with the assertion of its own identity.

In relation to the problem of Europe's identity, guarded at the price of the rejection of otherness, we must also remember the widespread phenomenon of migration toward Europe. This phenomenon is not a matter of *emigration* (which is less spectacular and more controllable), but of *migration* (a newer, more complex and far more difficult phenomenon to deal with).

Extending our argument to a worldwide level, we must also add that the end of the Cold War, with the ensuing easing of tension between the USSR and the USA, is no doubt of prime importance for world peace. However, this development has its negative side as well: the formation of an almost monolithic block with minimal internal ideological diversity, which implies yet again the advantage of identity over otherness. If such leveling of the differences were at least to guarantee peace, we might have a reason for tolerating it; but, as we have observed, when the logic of identity has the upper hand there will always be an external enemy against which a coalition must be formed. Though maybe not a direct consequence, the fact remains that with the end of the Cold War, world peace has not been achieved; still worse, with periodical crises in the Gulf we are witnessing the danger, not yet completely averted, of a new world war.

Today, the ideo-logic of productivity and efficiency not only exalt the physical-mathematical sciences or scientific research functionally oriented toward the improvement of production, but also the human sciences promoting technological progress and scientific development and ignoring the question of the sense of man.

From the viewpoint of identity, whether it be identity of the individual, of a group, of a nation, of a language, of a cultural system, of a large community such as Europe, or of the entire Western world, the sense of man will not be discovered but only mystified, for in the perspective of identity it is made to coincide with restricted and limited interests as much as they are current and topical; private interests as much as they are shared.

Homologation of the communicative universe reduces listening to wanting to hear, connected with *silence*, and diminishes the spaces of *taciturnity* where the freedom of listening is as necessary as the freedom of speech.

The words "silence" and "taciturnity" as we propose them here correspond to the Russian words "tishina" and "molchanie", as used by Bakhtin (1970-71).

Bakhtin distinguishes between the conditions for perceiving a sound, for recognizing a verbal sign, and for understanding the sense of an utterance. Silence belongs to the first two, that is, to the *conditions for perceiving a sound*, and the conditions for *recognizing a sign*. Taciturnity concerns the conditions for *understanding sense*.

The taciturnity of responsive listening is an interpretant of the verbal sign insofar as it is a sign. Once the taciturnity of responsive listening is set aside, we are left with silence which is obviously of no interest to the utterance. Indeed, the utterance escapes silence.

Homologation of the communicative universe concretely invests the verbal sign with the conventional characteristics of the signal alone, or with the natural characteristics of sound. From the necessity of the natural to the repetition of the conventional, or, as Charles S. Peirce says, from *indexicality* to *symbolicity*, such is the sphere reserved for the sign which thus loses its ambivalence, ductility, possibility of interpretants as characterized by originality, autonomy, absolute otherness—all qualities he attributed to *iconicity*. Enclosed within the universe of silence and the constriction of speech according to laws, conventions and habits, the sign loses its character as a challenge, as a provocation with respect to identity and the closed totality; the sign loses its ability to question what seems stable and definitive as though this were endowed with the characters of naturality. But all this can be accomplished by the sign through taciturnity, by its tacit refusal to collaborate with the closed universe of discourse, by escaping monologism, by exceeding the logic of equal exchange between the signifier and the signified, between the interpreted sign and the interpretant sign. "The disturbance of silence by sound is mechanical and physiological [...]. Taciturnity is possible only in the human world", says Bakhtin (1970-71). The sign's constriction within the space of silence, its separation from taciturnity and from the freedom of listening, from listening open to polysemy, denies the sign its human character and renders it mechanical and natural causing it to oscillate between conventionality of the signal and naturality of sound, of what does not claim a sense.

Silence belongs to the sphere of language as a system, to language as reiteration, as reproduction of the *order of discourse* (Foucault). Taciturnity, instead, belongs to the sphere of the unrepeatable utterance, it shares in the "unfinalized totality of the logosphere" (Bakhtin). Taciturnity enables the utterance to escape the inquiring, coercive silence of the linguistic system whose fascist character, as Roland Barthes (1978) says, does not lie in the fact that it impedes speech but, on the contrary, compels it, imposing the repetition of fixed meanings sanctioned by the order of discourse. Silence imposes speaking but is not listening. Taciturnity is listening and as responsive listening it constitutes a pause in the unrepeatable utterance. Silence in the system of language intended as a "closed discourse universe" (Marcuse) abolishes listening which belongs to historical unrepeatability and to the open, unfinalized totality of the logosphere. Listening is one thing, to want to hear is another: listening allows us to speak and to choose what we want to say, it allows for manifestation and is turned to signs in their constitutive multi-voicedness and contradictoriness; to want to hear compels us to speak, imposes univocality, relevance to questions, coherence, noncontradiction.

In all forms of society the realization, management and reproduction of power is achieved through control over the communication system: however, this has only clearly emerged recently. In the

current phase of the capitalist system, dominion is obviously not achieved through the possession of things but through control over communication relations, over mercantile exchange and production. More simply, we could say that the ruling class is the class that possesses capital, but the expression "capital" must now be specified in terms of *communication control*. If in mercantile exchange in general the "arcanum" of merchandise can be identified by tracing communication relations between humans, now, more than ever, in today's capitalist system, *production is communication*. With the expansion of capitalism, the market has realized its tendency to becoming a world market and communication has also achieved worldwide dissemination. This means that all communication programs are part of a single global project which coincides with the plan for the development of capital. This plan is grounded in the reality itself of capital, so that *the ideology of capital is its own logic*.

The consequence is unitary, compact, monologic communication oriented toward a single, dominant viewpoint; an orientation which obliges us to speak according to a given logic and which imposes silence. As observed elsewhere, it is not so much a question of the end of ideology as of the fact that dominant ideology imposes and reproduces itself in this phase of social reproduction, without encountering opposition, automatically, quietly. Therefore, communication today is characterized by the defence of Identity, by reproduction of the Same, by the Totality, by Reality, by the Being. In a universe where everything communicates with itself, where what is communicated regards Identity and its reproduction, communication is emptied and silence imposed. In the relation between the interpreted and interpretant there is no excess, no margin; this relation is realized on the basis of an identification process in which the sign's escape into the interpretant ends with a return to self, with the negation of what is other and reassertion of identity.

Monologism in communication finds correspondence on the verbal level in the tendency toward *monolingualism*: on an external plane, as |linguistic imperialism, the imposition of one language over others; on an internal plane as the leveling out of language, the loss of effective diversity among internal languages, the loss of expressiveness to the advantage of easy, direct, efficient and speedy communication.

But homologation does not concern verbal language alone. It concerns all behavior insofar as it is sign behavior. To a universal market there corresponds universal communication expressing the same needs, desires, and fancies globally. To "closure of the universe of discourse" there corresponds *closure of the communicative universe in general*, of the *human semiotic universe*. As Italo Calvino writes:

At times it seems to me that a pestilential epidemic has struck humanity in the faculty that characterizes it most, i.e. its use of the word. A plague of language which manifests itself as the loss of cognitive force and immediacy, as automatism tending to level out expression into the most generic and abstract formulations, to dilute meanings, to blunt expressive heights, to put out all flashes produced by words in new circumstances. But inconsistency is perhaps present not only in images or languages, but also in the world. This plague also strikes the life of people, the history of nations, thus rendering all (hi)stories formless, incidental, confused [...]. My uneasiness is for the loss of form which I observe in life [...]. (Calvino 1988:59)

Taciturnity is not only muteness. Taciturnity is not rejection of language. It is also indirect discourse, the distanced word, the ironic word, parody, laughter. In his *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler* (1843), Kierkegaard, the theoretician of the indirect word, observes that the direct, objective word is not concerned with otherness, with the other word with respect to itself, it does not constitute real and proper communication, it communicates silence alone.

Taciturnity as indirect speaking may consist of "that *shifting action*" exercised on language which Barthes in *Leçon* considers as a characteristic of literary writing. "The writer", says Bakhtin, "is he who knows how to work on language while standing outside it, is he who possesses the gift of indirect speaking" (Bakhtin 1959-61; Eng. trans.:110). Moreover, the writer, says Bakhtin, "clothes himself in taciturnity" (Bakhtin 1970-71; Eng. trans.:149, I prefer "taciturnity", to "silence"). But this taciturnity, continues Bakhtin, "can assume various forms of expression, various forms of reduced laughter (irony), allegory, and so forth" (*ibid.*).

In literary writing it is possible to do what Perseus the "light hero" praised by Italo Calvino does in the myth when he defeats Medusa. Perseus defeats the monster which has the power of petrifying with its gaze, neither by looking at it directly, nor by not looking at it and turning his eyes away, but by looking at it indirectly, at its reflexion in his shield. Likewise, writing can escape the petrification of reality by looking at things indirectly. This enables Calvino to write the following:

I do not care to ask myself here whether the origins of this epidemic of language should be searched for in politics, in ideology, in bureaucratic uniformity, in the homogenization of mass media, in the scholastic diffusion of average culture. What I do care for are the possibilities of healing. Literature (and perhaps literature alone) can create antibodies...ready to fight against the spreading of the plague of language [...]. My uneasiness is for the loss of form which I observe in life [...] and which I attempt to resist with the only defense I can think of: an idea of literature. (Calvino 1988:58-59)

The indirect word of literature, this form of allusive, parodic, ironic silence, this form of laughter, is today perhaps what most affirms the rights of otherness against homologation with identity in the communication of silence. (On the practice of literary writing as taciturnity, cf. Ponzio 1993d). Because of the indirectness of his gaze which enables him to avoid the petrifying effect of ideology as it identifies with a realistic view of existence, the writer appears as our new Perseus who subdues Medusa. This is the idea behind the title of my most recent book on literary writing, *La coda dell'occhio*.

The potential of the practice of taciturnity in today's dominant form of communication, silence, is analyzed by Pasolini in a paper of 1974, "Il romanzo delle stragi" (see Pasolini 1990:89-90). Pasolini begins by crying out against the conspiracy of silence with an "I KNOW", and continues:

I know the names of the persons responsible for the coups d'etats and slaughters in Italy and for the series of putschs installed as a system of protection for state power.

Such knowledge comes from the fact of being a writer, a storyteller, a novelist who wants to know about everything that happens, about everything written about what happens, who wants to imagine everything not known to everyone or silenced, who puts together the disorganized and fragmentary pieces of a whole, coherent political scene, who re-establishes logic where arbitrariness, madness and mystery would seem to rule. All this is part of the profession of writing and the instinct of the profession.

#### **4. On the State of Writing in Global Communication**

According to widespread prejudice, writing in today's society is overwhelmed by other kinds of sign systems. Part of this prejudice is based on the conviction that images dominate over writing as though all forms of human sign production were not in themselves already forms of writing.

The fact is that we are victims of a limited view of writing: *writing* is commonly identified with *transcription*, with the written registration of oral language, considered as a sort of outer covering, subjected to and subservient to orality. Described in such terms writing is no more than mnemotechny. This restricted view of writing is not only connected to primacy of the oral word, the *phoné* and therefore to the tendency toward phonocentrism, but also to the tendency toward ethnocentrism. In the latter perspective, the conviction is that writing—reduced to the status of transcription—is the privilege of certain societies and not others representing a fundamental stage in the development of human history. Indeed writing thus understood is signaled as a discriminating factor between prehistory and history, between "cold" societies devoid of history and "warm" societies endowed with history, capable of evolution and historical memory.

In reality, the invention of writing as transcription presupposes *writing* in a far more complex sense and in a greater temporal sphere than the period of man's historico-cultural evolution. It concerns the process of homination, that is, the formation process of the human species. Writing is a human species-specific modeling device through which man, resorting to various means—including his body or external physical devices—, organizes his experience of the world, his surrounding reality, both spatially and temporally. Indeed, man is capable of constructing different worldviews, of inventing an infinite range of new senses with recourse to the same elements. All animal species are capable of constructing their own world and of conferring sense upon it; the distinctive feature of the human species is the capacity to construct a plurality of different possible worlds and, therefore, to confer an infinity of different senses on the same limited number of elements.

Thus intended, writing, "*ante litteram*" writing, writing antecedent to the written sign, to transcription, represents a fundamental stage in the process of homination, it precedes speech which has wrongly been privileged with respect to other—even earlier—means of communication. Writing thus understood is not a means of communication like speaking and its transcription, but rather subtends and precedes all forms of communication.

As transcription writing is connected to "culture" in the narrow sense according to which writing is opposed to "non culture" and is attributed to the "man of culture". In this perspective writing is connected with power and control, with consolidation of the dominion of man over man. On the contrary, the species-specific capacity for writing belongs to "culture" in a broad sense, in an anthropological sense, where writing is opposed to "nature" and attributed to humanity.

The development of speech and relative verbal sign systems, that is, languages, presupposes writing: if he had not been endowed with the capacity for writing man would not have been in a position to articulate sounds and identify a limited number of distinctive features, phonemes, to reproduce phonetically; without the capacity for writing man would not have known how to assemble phonemes in different ways so as to form a multiplicity of different words (monemes), nor could he have assembled words syntactically in different ways to form different utterances with different meanings and senses

Writing as a modeling device is *language* as it subtends human sign systems; and the latter, therefore, may be distinguished in species-specific terms from other forms of nonhuman animal communication. In fact, as much as nonhuman animal communication involves the use of signs typologically homologous to human signs, it is not fixed in the same kind of structure subtending human sign systems and therefore it cannot take on the character of human languages.

And when, as in the case of deaf-mutes, the development of language in the phonic form is impossible, writing—if adequately elicited—finds other possibilities of grafting (gesture, drawings) that—at times—allow for development of the language capacity unaccompanied by speech.

Today we are witnessing a flourishing of languages thanks to developments in technology, and to encounter and exchange between different cultures (blocking frontiers and insistence on community identity will not stop this process which cannot be confined to the limits of market exchange). Writing today, understood in a broad sense, has more possibilities of manifesting itself in different ways. And thanks to language as described above, photography, cinema, television, video-cassettes, computers all offer new possibilities of writing, consequently increasing our capacity for the "play of musement". Furthermore, traditional forms of expression—theatre, music, the figurative arts—are now enhanced by technology and consequently can now invent new forms of writing both within the same sign system as well as through reciprocal contamination favoring the formation of new expressive genres. Design, photography, film, music are forms of writing that should be reconsidered in this light and appreciated as representing high levels in creativity through writing intended as the human capacity for language.

The crisis of writing indeed! No other historical era has ever been so rich in writing as the present era. *Today's civilization is the civilization of writing!* And this should be said emphatically to anyone who, confusing writing with the written sign, writing with transcription, complains—through ignorance or for ideological reasons—about the "loss" or "debasement" of "writing".

We now need to commit ourselves to achieving the conditions for the diffusion and proliferation of presentday writing systems, freeing them from any form of subservience to control over communication. The real problem in today's world of communication is not that of opposing "writing" and "images", but that of the objective contradiction arising from the opposition between the continuing increase and expansion of writing systems, of languages, therefore of the free "play of musement", on one hand, and the increase of control over communication, on the other, which among other things implies concentrating control in the hands of a few.

Literary writing is another important place, and perhaps the most ancient, where writing attains independence from transcription, that is, where the written sign attains independence from its ancillary function with respect to oral language, where writing is no longer reduced to mnemotechny. Film, as Ejzenstejn had already clearly understood ("film begins exactly where all forms of literary art 'end up'"), and other forms of writing in the present era develop and supplement the work of literary writing.

Disengagement of literary writing—that is, its disengagement with respect to the obligations characterizing other writing practices intended as transcription—frees writing from the limits of circumscribed responsibilities, from responsibilities restricted by alibis. And disengagement from partial and relative responsibilities charges literary writing with the kind of responsibility that does not know limits, with absolute responsibility, the kind of responsibility that delivers man from anything that may obstacle the free expression of what characterizes him in his specificity as a human being: language, in other words, the capacity for play, for the construction—and deconstruction— of an infinite number of new possible worlds. "Play" and not "work", insofar as it is independent with respect to need, represents an excess as regards function, productivity, and therefore is alien to the "reign of necessity".

As writing and not transcription, literary writing is refractory to any form of power wishing to obstacle it: the only form of power that literary writings admits to is the power of imagination, to evoke a slogan from 1968. Non functional, unproductive, creative imagination, like that attributed to God: the human lies in man's vocation to divinity, so that man is human insofar as he is endowed with the divine capacity for language, for writing.

## 5. Telling Tales. A Critique of Globalized Communication

The aim of the joint project collective volume *Telling Tales. Toward a Critique of Globalized Communication / Le réseau du récit. Critique de la communication mondialisée* to be edited by Francesco Loriggio, Joseph Paré, Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio, is to analyze the practice of telling stories orally and through writing as well as through various nonverbal sign systems present in all world cultures. Storytelling is a practice that can be traced throughout the whole world and as such provides a link among different peoples altogether different from that proposed by recent forms of global communication.

Given its subservience to the global market and general commodification, global communication leads to homologation and leveling of the differences except for those differences pertaining to competition, conflict and mutual exclusion.

On the contrary, storytelling is a practice that is shared by different peoples and that differentiates them at the same time, it favors encounter and mutual understanding. As emerges from the patrimony of legends, fables, myths, and stories common to humanity, storytelling acts as a sort of connective tissue throughout the centuries allowing for the circulation of common themes, subjects, values and discourse genres.

Narration today manifests itself through different discourse genres, the novel included, and through different media from writing and orality, for example, cinema. The common aspect of storytelling is its being an end in itself and its being founded uniquely in the pleasure of involving and listening to the Other. This also distinguishes storytelling from the kind of narration that serves power: the power of control and punishment (in stories narrated before a judge or a police officer), the power of information (newspaper chronicles), the power of healing (the case history that the physician derives from the patient, the story narrated by a patient during a psychoanalytic session), the power of recording and establishing the sense of history (historical narration), and so on.

Story-telling suspends the order of discourse to which on the contrary globalized communication is functional, offering a space for reflexion, critical re-thinking, dialogue, encounter, hospitality.

So much for now, hoping that our readership enjoyed *this* story about (some outstanding authors of) *Signs of Research on Signs*.