



# Translation as the Doctrine of Inter-genre and Trans-genre Communication: A Semioethic Perspective

## La traduction comme doctrine de la communication entre les genres et transgenre. Une perspective sémioéthique

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Article abstract

The proposal of 'translation semioethics' with its focus on inter-genre and trans-genre communication, that is, communication among singularities, arises in the context of global semiotics developed in the direction of semioethics. Translation semioethics contributes to underlining the need for the humanism of alterity by contrast with the humanism of identity.

# Translation as the Doctrine of Inter-genre and Trans-genre Communication: A Semioethic Perspective

**Susan Petrilli**

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:*

*a time to be born, and a time to die;*

*a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;*

*a time to kill, and a time to heal;*

*a time to break down, and a time to build up;*

*a time to weep, and a time to laugh;*

*a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*

*a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;*

*a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;*

*a time to seek, and a time to lose;*

*a time to keep, and a time to cast away;*

*a time to rend, and a time to sew;*

*a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*

*a time to love, and a time to hate;*

*a time for war, and time for peace.*

*What gain has the worker from his toil?*

*Ecclesiastes 3, 1-9*

## **Premise**

As the doctrine of inter-genre and trans-genre communication, 'translation semioethics' is conceived as a field of *semioethics* (see Petrilli and Ponzio 2003, 2005). Semioethics is a specific approach in semiotics understood as *global semiotics*. That is, it is concerned with

‘care for life’ from a global semiotic and biosemiotic perspective which posits that semiosis and life coincide. Indeed, semioethics reflects the idea of semiotics recovering its ancient vocation as ‘semeiotics’ (or *symptomatology*) which is focussed on *symptoms*.

As a general science or theory of signs, semiotics must tend towards *global semiotics* in terms of *extension*<sup>1</sup>. But in addition to indicating the general science of signs, the term ‘semiotics’ also has another meaning. ‘Semiotics’ is also used to indicate a special modality of using signs that is specific to human beings, a special human capacity. We are now referring to the capacity for *metasemiosis* which distinguishes human beings from other living beings. In fact, the latter are only capable of semiosis and not of metasemiosis or semiotics as we are now describing this term. From this point of view the human animal is a *semiotic animal* (see Deely, Petrilli, Ponzio, 2005).

Metasemiosis refers to the capacity to reflect upon signs, therefore the capacity for critique and creativity. As such the capacity for metasemiosis is connected with the capacity for responsibility: the human animal is the only existent semiotic animal, that is, the only animal capable of accounting for signs and sign behaviour, of accounting *for the other*, whether the other *of* self or *from* self, and *to the other*. Therefore, the human being or semiotic animal is subject *to* and subject *of* responsibility. To the extent that the semiotician practices metasemiotics, s/he is at least twice responsible: the semiotician must account for him/herself as well as for others, and as a global semiotician s/he must account for life over the entire globe. Semiotics is a *critical* science in a Kantian sense, that is, in the sense that it investigates its own conditions of possibility, but not only. Semiotics is also a critical science in the sense that it interrogates the human world today on the assumption that it is not the *only* world possible, it is not the *definitive* world, as established by some conservative ideology. Critical semiotics looks at the world as *a possible* world, one among many possible worlds, therefore a world subject to *confutation*.

As global semiotics, metasemiotics, critical semiotics, semiotics connected with responsibility, *general semiotics must*

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<sup>1</sup> From this perspective an exemplary text is *Global Semiotics*, of 2001, by Thomas A. Sebeok. This book was the point of arrival of all his research and the last he published before his death in that same year.

*concern itself with life over the entire planet* and not only in a cognitive sense, but also in the pragmatic, ethic, and therapeutic sense. The implication is that semiotics must *care for life*. From this perspective, semiotics must recover its relation to medical semeiotics. And this is not only a question of recovering historical memory, of recalling the origins, but far more radically it is a question of the *ideologic-programmatic order*.

From this perspective semiotics is *listening*. Semiotics must be intent upon listening. The allusion here is not to the general theory of signs, but rather to medical semeiotics, or symptomatology. Semiotics in a medical sense is listening as practiced by medical semeiotics or symptomatology. With reference to human culture and society, to anthroposemiosis and more specifically anthrosociosemiosis, semiotics must listen to the symptoms of today's globalized world and identify the many expressions of unease and disease now proliferating—in social relations, in international relations, in the life of single individuals, in the environment, in life generally over the entire planet. In a globalized world tending towards its own destruction, semiotics must diagnose symptoms, make a prognosis and indicate possible therapies to improve the future of globalization and the health of semiosis generally. This program, as stated, is part of an orientation in semiotics called *semioethics* proposed by the Bari-Lecce school (see Petrilli 2004b).

### **Translation Theory and Semioethics as the Doctrine of *Inter-genre and Trans-genre Communication***

'*Strictu sensu*' translation is the transposition of a text from one historical language to another. However, from a semiotic perspective such authors as Victoria Welby (1837-1912), Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), and Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) recognized the importance of translation in semiotic and semiotic processes at large. Understood as a process where one sign is considered as equivalent to another which it replaces and somehow develops, translation presupposes: 1) the activity of *translating*, that is, a series of operations whereby one semiotic entity is replaced by another; and 2) the condition of *translatability*, that is, inter-replaceability, interchangeability among semiotic entities. It must be evidenced that 1) and 2) are prerogatives of *semiosis* and of the *sign*. Therefore translation is a phenomenon that pertains to sign reality and as such is the object of study of semiotics.

Translation semioethics is concerned with translation in the triple sense identified by Jakobson: intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic translation. As a field of semiotics oriented in the direction of semioethics, translation semioethics focuses on translation in this triple sense.

The term 'doctrine' is used in this paper as understood by Thomas A. Sebeok (1921-2001) in his *Contributions to the Doctrine of Signs* (1976). Despite its characteristic totalizing orientation, semiotics in this book is neither designated with the ennobling term 'science,' nor 'theory.' Instead, Sebeok chose the expression 'doctrine of signs' which he adapted from John Locke who maintained that a doctrine was nothing more than a body of principles and opinions vaguely forming a field of knowledge. At the same time, however, Sebeok also used this expression *à la* Peirce, that is, charging it with instances of Kantian critique. In other words, from Sebeok's perspective, not only must semiotics observe and describe phenomena, that is, signs (in reality semiosis, that is, sign activity, sign processes), but it must also interrogate the conditions of possibility of signs, characterizing and specifying them for what they are (as revealed by observation, which is necessarily partial and limited), and for what they must be (see Sebeok's Preface to his book of 1976 cited above). This humble and together ambitious character of the 'doctrine of signs' leads it to interrogate its own conditions of possibility, as Kant taught: the doctrine of signs is the science of signs which questions itself and attempts to answer for itself, which researches into its very own foundations.

The term 'genre' is an abstraction that determines another abstraction: the 'individual.' Genre and individual are *concrete abstractions*: abstractions that form the reality we live in. Specifically, politics and logic share the commonality that they consider singularities as individuals, therefore as belonging to a genre, as equals. The relation of alterity between one singularity and another is pre-political and pre-logical. Politics and logic arise because of my exclusive responsibility towards every other, such that I am obliged to keep faith to this responsibility and relate to every other indifferently. This means that I must not only relate to a singularity, but to a singularity according to a genre. I am obliged to relate to the individual of a given system or group, who as such is interchangeable with other individuals, so that whether I am dealing with one individual or another is indifferent. This involves a continuous translation process from singularities to

individuals and genres, from alterities to identities, from difference of signs to signs of difference that identify a genre. Individual identity and community identity are fixed by and in genres.

An example is the concept of nation which may be considered from a semiotic perspective with a focus on the signs of difference and identity. The concept of nation is one of the *concrete abstractions* through which community identity is asserted. This concrete abstraction, as all other concrete abstractions, is at once material and fictitious. And given that they are made of signs, of *semiotic matter*, all social-political constructs, including the economic and political system called *World* are concrete abstractions. The concept of world is a construction, a projection, a geographical and ideological projection, in other words, a product of social planning—and national identity is part of such planning. Being a category of *identity*, the nation is also a category of *difference*. Such duality is reflected in the term ‘nation’ itself, which is ambivalent. In fact, the term ‘nation’ is endowed with 1) an *essentially political meaning*, which found expression during the Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution. According to this meaning the Nation is a State that gives expression to the *sovereignty of the people*. The term ‘nation’ is also endowed with 2) an *ethno-linguistic* meaning which matured during the Romantic Age. According to this meaning one Nation differs from another on the basis of ethnic group and language. These two meanings of nation evidence two different ways of conceiving the origin itself of national identity. In the first case, the origin of identity is *political, juridical and economic*, therefore, national identity is recognized for what it is, that is to say, a *socio-historical construct*. In the second case, the origin of identity is considered to be *natural*. This second guise also involves socio-historical factors such as language and cultural traditions, which are associated with ‘natural’ factors such as blood and territory. In this case, and similarly to the latter, socio-historical factors are conceived to be natural (the common expression ‘natural languages’ is symptomatic), and in any case they are considered as factors that *naturally* determine national differences.

The categories of ‘identity’ and ‘genre’ are intimately interrelated and play a central role in today’s communication society, whether we are dealing with the identity of the individual subject or the collective one—social class, ethnic group, nation, European Union, ‘Western world,’ etc. Individuals belong to genres, sexual genres (genders), classes, professional genres, racial, ethnic or national genres,

etc. Relations among singularities are translated into relations among individuals, which are relations among genres. Translation semioethics as the doctrine of inter-genre and trans-genre communication aims to invert this process, proposing the opposite translation trajectory: translation into the signs of the relation among singularities, what Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) calls '*le face-à-face*', *relation irréductible*, an irreducible relationship.

The human individual may be described as a semiotic process; indeed, thanks to its interpretive-propositional commitment, the individual consists of a potentially infinite number of signifying trajectories. As a developing sign, the individual is a dialogic and relational entity, an *open* individual emerging in the relation with other individuals. Therefore, the boundaries and the signs of the individual are not defined once and for all, but can only be defined through dialogical encounters with other individuals, that is, with other genres.

The self is a community of dialogically interrelated selves, and is subject to the logic of alterity. The subject's identity is multiplex, plurifaceted and plurivocal, it is delineated and modeled in the dialogic relation among its various parts. If we interpret the word 'in-dividual' literally as meaning 'non divided, non divisible,' with Peirce who rejected the 'illusory phenomenon' of a finite self or self-sufficient self, we may claim that 'a person is not absolutely an individual' (*CP* 5.421). The social and communal character of self does not contrast with its singularity, uniqueness or otherness with respect to any signifying process that may interpret it. The self is ineffable (see *CP* 1.357), saying beyond the said; self's utterances convey significance beyond words. On the other hand, ineffability and uniqueness of self do not imply incommunicability.

Victoria Welby analyses the problem of subjectivity in terms of the relationship between what she calls 'I,' or, introducing a neologism, *Ident*, and 'self,' or, with another neologism, *ephemeron*<sup>2</sup>. Self is mortal, ephemeral like the body. By contrast, I tends towards immortality beyond the mortality of body and self. Thus articulated, the

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<sup>2</sup> Victoria Welby's unpublished manuscripts are available in the Welby Collection, York University Archives and Special Collections, Toronto. A file entitled *Subjectivity* includes texts written between 1903 and 1910, see in particular the manuscripts of 1907-1910. For a description of the Welby Collection, see Schmitz 1990 and Petrilli 1998a.

subject is not unitary or compact, but presents a surplus, something more with respect to identity itself, which is constructed in the dialogic relationship between self and I. I or Ident is not the 'individual,' but the 'unique'. Says Welby in her unpublished manuscripts: "It is precisely our di-viduality that forms the wealth of our gifts" ('I and Self,' Box 27, file 13, Welby Collection, York University Archives and Special Collections, Scott Library, North York, Toronto, Canada).

That the subject is an incarnate subject, intercorporeal being, a body interconnected with other bodies, expression of the condition of intercorporeity in both synchronic and diachronic terms; that the subject is incarnated in a body that is related and not isolated from other bodies is essential to our conception of subjectivity. The subject is an incarnate entity from the perspective of biological evolution, of the species, as well as in terms of sociality and cultural history. The body plays a fundamental role in the development of consciousness, which is incarnate consciousness. Indeed the body is a condition for full development of consciousness, for the development of the human being as a 'semiotic animal' (see Petrilli, 1998b; Petrilli and Ponzio, 2003; Deely, Petrilli, Ponzio, 2005). Self develops interconnectedly with other bodies through which it extends its boundaries, which are the boundaries of the world it experiences. The word is an extension of the body. Echoing the Russian philosopher Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975), the word forms a bridge joining one's own body to the body of others (see Bakhtin, 1990).

The dialogic relation between self and other (other *from* self and other *of* self) emerges as one of the most important conditions for continuity in the creative process. A driving force in this creative process is love, the forces of *agape*. In the architecture of Peirce's thought system, the most advanced developments in reason and knowledge are based on the creative power of *reasonableness* and the transformative suasions of *agape*.

Translation semioethics of genres and individuals belonging to genres must not *only keep account of* but also *account for* the 'reason of things.' However, the *reason* of things, the philosophical certainty of being right, *avoir raison*, to echo Levinas, cannot be separated from the capacity for *reasonableness* which is grounded in the logic of otherness. This means to say that the reason of things cannot be separated from the capacity for detotalization as the condition for constituting critical and dialogic globality. The issue at stake may be



stated in the following terms: given the risks inherent for life in today's global communication society which is regulated by the logic of identity and excludes the other, *human beings at their very earliest must change from rational animals into reasonable animals.*

Reasonableness is endowed with the power of transforming horror of the stranger, the alien, fear of the other understood as fear of the other foreign to self, into sympathy for the other become lovely. To read Peirce in the light of Levinas's philosophy of subjectivity: under the hardened crust of identity, through love the subject rediscovers his or her fear *for* the other and not *of* the other, fear for the other's well-being, which renders self incessantly restless and preoccupied for the other. Love, reasonableness, creativity are all grounded in the logic of otherness and dialogism, and together move the evolutionary dynamics of human semiosis globally.

### **From Genres and Individuals to the Face-to-Face Relationship**

Says Levinas in "Judaïsme et temps présent" (1960):

A religious age or an atomic age—these characterizations of the modern world, whether slogans or imprecations, hide a deeper trend. In spite of the violence and madness we see everyday, we live in the age of philosophy. Men are sustained in their activities by the certainty of *being right* (*avoir raison*), of being in tune with the calculable forces that really move things along, of moving in the direction (*sens*) of history. That satisfies their conscience. Beyond the progress of science, which uncovers the predictable play of forces within matter, human freedoms themselves (including those thoughts which conceive of such a play) are regulated by a rational order. Hidden in the depths of Being, this order is gradually unveiled and revealed through the disorder of contemporary history, through the suffering and desire of individuals, their passions and their victories. A global industrial society is announced that will suppress every contradiction tormenting humanity. But it equally suppresses the hidden heart of man. Reason rises like a fantastic sun that makes the opacity of creatures transparent. Men have lost their shadows! Henceforth, nothing can absorb or reflect this light which abolishes even the interiority of beings. (Levinas, 1960, Eng. trans., p. 253)

The properly human, the 'metaphysical' in Levinas's terminology, 'transcendence' of the human is determined by the capacity for absolute otherness (not only beyond the totality but also at its foundations, as it's a priori), for unlimited responsibility, for the

relation of dialogic intercorporeity among unindifferent differences, for nonfunctionality with respect to the functionality of identity and relative roles. Levinas speaks of the 'désir de l'Autre' (see 1961, Eng. trans., pp. 33-35). The properly human is the condition of vulnerability and exposition to the other.

The places that best evidence the properly human are those where time is beaten out in terms of the relation to the absolute and nonfunctional other; the time of aging, disease, and death, the time of friendship and eroticism, the time of mothering and nurturing, the time of aesthetic discourse—literature, figurative arts, music, cinema, the time of inventiveness and scientific research, the time of the play of musement, the time of the ephemeral. This is the time of excess with respect to closed identity, the time of dialogic detotalization and proliferation of differences that cannot be recruited and put at the service of the World.

By 'World' is understood the world governed by the logic of identity, by realism in its most vulgar forms characterizing dominant Western world ideology, identity, being, the order of discourse, the functional subject with a good conscience, the lying rhetoric of political systems and of mass media. All these places respond to today's global and totalizing world, where transparency is the motto, where even the interiority of beings is abolished: a world without a shadow. The global market and the global communication network together exert power and control over bodies which are proposed as self-sufficient and separate individual entities, and which, of course, they are not. The tendency in globalization today is to homogenize and level differences onto dominant values as determined by the global market and global communication. All the same signs of resistance also emerge in the face of the processes of monological homogenization as special *semioses*, languages and cultures continue to flourish.

Constitutively the World as we are describing it is based on identity. It is predisposed or programmed for sacrifice of the other, of otherness, in the name of identity. From this perspective, similarly to rest, free-time, the night functional to the resumption of work, to the violence and 'madness of the day' (see Blanchot, 1969, 1973), peace is no more than an interval, momentary repose, reintegration of forces, respite, a truce which ensues from war, preparation for war.

The questions to ask are the same as those formulated by Levinas throughout the entire course of his research. Is there any other sense than being in the World and for the World? Can the *properly human* supersede the space-time of objects, the space-time of identity? Do there exist relations that cannot be reduced to the category of identity, that are alien to relations between subject and object, to relations of exchange, equivalence, functionality, interest, productivity? Can there be interhuman relations that are altogether *other*, yet at once material and earthly, relations to which one's body may open? Can there be a sense that is other from sense in the world of objects? (see Levinas, 'Notes sur le sens', in Levinas, 1986, Eng. trans., pp. 152-171). All this moves in the direction of the proposal of a new form of humanism, that is to say, humanism not as it is traditionally conceived in the Western World, the humanism of identity, but rather what may be called the *humanism of alterity* (see Levinas, 1972).

The humanism of alterity, as this expression itself tells us, is oriented by the logic of otherness: it tells of a 'movement' without return to the subject, a movement called *œuvre*, risky exposition to alterity, hybridization of identity, rupture of monologism and evasion from the subject-object relation (see Levinas, 1935-1936, pp. 373-392). *Hors-sujet* (Outside the subject) is the title of a book of 1987 by Levinas; 'hors-sujet' also in the sense of being off the subject, not responsive to thematization, representation, to the logic of identity. The logic of otherness is the condition of possibility for a form of humanism where a good or clear conscience, human rights, meaning the rights of self, of identity, are interrogated in the light of the rights of others.

In '*le face-à-face*' relation with the other, the I is interrogated. Through its nudity, exposition, fragility, the face says that otherness will never be eliminated. The otherness of others resists to the very point of calling for recourse to homicide and war, providing evidence and proof of the other's irreducibility. Another one, *autrui*, this other, says Levinas, puts the I into the accusative, summoning it, questioning it, calling it back to the condition of absolute responsibility, outside the sphere of the I's initiative. Absolute responsibility is responsibility for the other, responsibility understood as answering to the other and for the other (see Levinas 'La substitution' (Substitution), in Levinas, 1974, Eng. trans., pp. 99-130).

The relation to the other is asymmetrical, unequal: the other is out of proportion with respect to the I's power and freedom. Moral consciousness interrogates self's freedom. However, interrogation is at once constitutive of self and its freedom insofar as it sanctions the passage from spontaneity to consciousness, from freedom as passive enjoyment (*jouissance*) and self's happy spontaneity, to freedom as a right, and speaking that right (see Levinas, 'Section II, B. *Jouissance et representation*' (Enjoyment and Representation), in Levinas, 1961, Eng. trans., pp. 122-143).

The rights and freedom of self are instituted in the face of the need to answer to others, under the weight of unlimited responsibility for others. The origin of self, an origin without an *arché*, in this sense *anarchical*, arises from an uneasy conscience in the face of others, from a dirty conscience, therefore, from the need to justify one's presence to others, from responsibility without alibis and without evasion from others (see Levinas, 'Humanisme et an-archie' (Humanism and anarchy), in Levinas, 1972, Eng. trans., pp. 127-139). In the continued effort to achieve a good conscience, self in the nominative, self understood as subject, as intentional consciousness, as speech, derives from interrogating self and putting it into the accusative. From such interrogation also derive self's freedoms, self's rights—so-called 'human rights,' elaborated to defend self summoned by the face of the other to account for the rights of others and to defend itself as 'I,' as self.

Opposition of a nude face, opposition of disarmed eyes, deprived of protection, beginning from which self is constituted as responsibility, is not opposition by a force, by a relation of hostility. Rather, this is peace-loving opposition, where peace is not merely understood as suspension of violence, violence withheld only to be used more effectively. On the contrary, the violence perpetuated is the violence of eliminating peace-loving opposition, outwitting it, the violence of ignoring the face, avoiding the gaze. 'No' is written on the face of the other—in the first place, 'Thou shalt not kill'—because of the simple fact of being a face. However, the other having been absolved from the relation with an I has sense in itself, on its own account. As such the other may absent itself from the presence of self and its projects, not go along with it. Violence is perpetuated when *no inscribed* on the face of the other is converted into a relation of hostile force or of submission. Violence consists in prevailing over the other, to the very point of murder and war. Prevarication is perpetuated in

spite of opposition to violence expressed in the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ which is inscribed on the face even before it is explicated in a formula, which precedes rational thought, being as ‘I,’ statements made by the subject, knowledge and objectifying consciousness (see Levinas, ‘Entretiens,’ in Poirié, 1987, p. 104). Humanism implies responsibility for the other, an interpersonal relationship where the subject “reaches the human condition assuming responsibility for the other person in the election that elevates it to this degree” (Levinas, 1990).

The work of interpersonal responsibility is the work of the individual in its singularity, of the person who is absolutely responsible: responsible like a hostage who must account for something he did not do, for a past which was never his, which was never present to him (see Levinas, ‘Entretiens,’ in Poirié, 1987, p. 118).

Responsibility for others is oriented in a dual sense: the other is elevated and taken upon one’s own shoulders, so to say, in a relationship that is asymmetrical. The person I must answer for is also the person I must answer to, says Levinas. I must answer to the person whom I must answer for. Responsibility in the face of the person I am responsible for: responsible for a face that regards me, for its freedom (see Levinas, ‘Liberté et commandement,’ 1953 (Freedom and Command), in Levinas, 1987b, pp. 15-24).

The condition of peace and responsibility in the face of the other, in a relation where individuals give themselves in their singularity, difference, non-interchangeability, non-indifference, precedes politics and logic, says Levinas. We have observed that politics and logic consider individuals as part of a genre, therefore as equals. Instead, the relation of alterity is pre-political and pre-logical. Politics and logic arise because of my responsibility towards the other in its singularity, and also because I am obliged to relate to the other indifferently, that is to say, on the basis of a genre.

Therefore, political and community organization with its logic, laws, distinctions, classifications, finds its justification in responsibility for the other. However, history also shows that justification, responsibility for the other, therefore the sense of politics, the order of logic may be lost. This is particularly manifest today in spite of the situation of so-called global communication.

A paradox connected with globalization in the present-day phase of development consists in the fact that social relationships emerge in terms of relations among individuals who are separate from each other, reciprocally indifferent to each other. The relation to the other is suffered as a necessity for the sake of achieving one's own private interests. Furthermore, exclusive preoccupation with one's own identity, one's own difference indifferent to the difference of others increases fear of the other understood in the transitive as fearing the other. Following such logic, the community is a passive result of the interests of identities, indifferent to each other. Indeed, thus construed the community only presents itself as compact identity for as long as its interests require cohesion and unification.

The egological community, the community of selves forming the identity of each and every one of us presents the same type of sociality. We are referring to sociality founded upon relations of reciprocal indifference among differences and identities. Such a condition ensues from and is at once evidenced by separation between public and private behaviour in the same individual subject, separation and mutual indifference among roles, competencies, tasks, languages, among responsibilities in the same individual, in the same subject, separation viewed as the 'normal' or 'standard' way of conforming to the social system that subject belongs to.

Fear of the other, to fear the other, ensues from the constitution of identity. In today's world, fear of the other understood as fearing the other, fear that the subject experiences of the object, has reached paroxysmal degrees. However, contrary to the Hobbesian principle as formulated in the expression 'homo homini lupus,' fear in the transitive is not at all the starting point, but rather the point of arrival in the constitution of identity (see Levinas, 'Entretiens,' in Poirié, 1987, pp. 117-120).

'Fear *of* the other' means fear that the subject experiences 'of the other' understood as object genitive: the other constitutes the object of fear. Logic distinguishes the *object genitive* from the *subject genitive*—the other subject of fear, in the sense of the other who fears. Subject and object. However, we must abandon this dichotomy as traditionally established in logic if we are to grasp a third sense, which is fear *for* the other. According to this third sense, fear of the other means to experience the other's fear, fear as experienced by the other, therefore fear *for* the other. In this case, we neither distinguish between

subject and object, nor refer to community identity. In other words, the relationship among differences no longer implies community identification, indifference among identities and differences. On the contrary, the relation among differences is based on unindifference among differences, on absolute otherness, transcendence with respect to identity. Following this logic and developing Levinas, the expression 'of the other' may be designated as an *ethical genitive* (see Ponzio, 1995, 1996). This third case of the genitive should be taken into account by logic as the third sense in which we may disambiguate the expression 'fear of the other,' that is, as 'fear for the other.'

### **Humanism, Intercorporeity, and Detotalization of Abstractions Connected with Genre**

Levinas continues the passage cited above from 'Judaïsme et temps présent' as follows:

What matters is to be authentic and not at all to be true (*dans le vrai*), to commit oneself rather than to know. Art, love, action are more important than theory. Talent is worth more than wisdom and self-possession. (Levinas, 1960, Eng. trans., p. 254).

With the spread of 'biopower' and the controlled insertion of bodies into the production apparatus, global communication asserts the idea of the individual as a separate and self-sufficient entity (see Foucault, 1977, 1988; Foucault *et alii*, 1996). The body is experienced as an isolated biological entity, belonging to the individual, as part of the individual's sphere of possession. This has led to the almost total extinction of cultural practices and worldviews based on intercorporeity, interdependency, exposition and opening of the body. We are left with mummified residues studied by folklore analysts, archeological remains preserved in ethnological museums and in the history of national literatures—the expression of a generalized situation of museumification.

Think of the different ways the body is perceived by popular culture as discussed by Bakhtin, of the various forms of 'grotesque realism' which do not conceive the body and corporeal life generally in individualistic terms, separately from the rest of terrestrial life, indeed, from the rest of the world (see Bakhtin, 1963, 1965). Signs of the grotesque body (only weak traces of which have survived in the present age) include ritual masks present in Middle Age popular festivities and in all pre-capitalist cultural systems over the planet (e.g. among the

Amerindians studied by Lévi-Strauss, see his book of 1975<sup>3</sup>). Antecedently to the development of individualism connected with the rise of the bourgeoisie, ‘grotesque realism’ in medieval popular culture presented the body as undefined, not confined to itself, but, on the contrary, as flourishing in relations of symbiosis with other bodies, in relations of transformation and renewal transcending the limits of individual life. Today, global communication (which is global communication-production, see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005 and Petrilli ed., 2006), reinforces the individualistic, private and static conception of body, being a conception that is functional to the ‘technologies of self.’

As Michel Foucault in particular has revealed, division and separatism among the sciences are functional to the socio-ideological necessities of the ‘new cannon of the individualized body’ (Bakhtin).<sup>4</sup> This, in turn, is functional to the controlled insertion of bodies into the social reproductive cycles of today’s communication-production system.

An approach to the study of signs that is global and detotalizing must be founded on the logic of otherness at high degrees of availability for the other, readiness to listen to the other, opening to the other, not only in quantitative terms (the omnicomprehensive character of global semiotics), but also qualitatively (Petrilli, 1990). All semiotic interpretations by the student of signs, especially at a meta-semiotic level, must not prescind from a dialogic relationship with the other. Dialogism is a fundamental condition for an approach that is globally oriented while privileging at once opening to the local, the particular that is not isolated or closed in upon itself. Accordingly, such an approach privileges the tendency towards detotalization by contrast with totalization.

Otherness obliges the totality to reorganize itself ever anew in a process related to ‘infinity,’ as Levinas in particular has demonstrated (see Levinas, 1961, 1982a), or to ‘infinite semiosis,’ in Peirce’s terminology. The relation to infinity is far more than a cognitive issue:

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<sup>3</sup> For an evaluation by Lévi-Strauss of Sebeok’s work, see Lévi-Strauss, ‘Avant-Propos,’ in Bouissac, Herzfeld, Posner, 1986, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Here we must also signal important writings from the 1970s by Italian philosopher Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985), see References.



beyond the established order, the symbolic order, convention and habit, the relation to infinity implies a relation of involvement and responsibility. The relation to infinity is the relation to *absolute otherness*, to that which is most refractory to the totality, to the Same. The relation to infinity implies a relation to the otherness of others, to the otherness of the other person, not understood as another self like one's own self, another *alter ego*, another I belonging to the *same community*, but as the other that is alien, the other in its extraneousness, strangeness, diversity, difference towards which we must not be indifferent in spite of efforts and guarantees to the contrary offered by identity of I, by self.

The global and detotalizing approach to the life of signs we are proposing is not intended to orient semiotics according to some specific ideological plan. Rather, our focus is on human behaviour and the unique responsibility with which the human being is invested as a 'semiotic animal.' As anticipated above, the expression 'semiotic animal' indicates a responsible agent capable of *signs of signs*, of suspending action and deliberating, of creative mediation, reflection and critique.

Global semiotics must be adequately founded in cognitive semiotics, but it must also open to a third dimension beyond the quantitative and the theoretical, the ethical, or, better, what we propose to call 'semioethic.' Semioethics is related to our proposal of a new form of humanism (see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2003). In fact, recalling Levinas, but also the other authors mentioned in this paper, semioethics summons us to authenticity of commitment at a pragmatic level, the level of action, beyond the purely theoretical; semioethics summons us to participation and involvement with the other beyond individual separatisms and interests, to care and love for the other (see also, Levinas, 'Philosophie, Justice et amour' (Philosophy, Justice, and Love), in Levinas, 1991, Eng trans., pp. 103-121). Art, talent is more important than wisdom and self-possession, says Levinas; beyond reason reasonableness, says Peirce. Semioethics aims to transcend separatism among the sciences and among the objects of their research, and to relate the natural sciences to the logico-mathematical and the human sciences.

Semioethics does not propose a program with intended aims and practices, a decalogue, a formula to apply more or less sincerely or more or less hypocritically. Rather semioethics implies a propensity for

critique with a special vocation for evidencing sign networks where it seemed there were none. In other words, semioethics aims to reveal and evaluate interconnections and implications that cannot be evaded where it seemed there were only separations, boundaries and distances with their relative alibis.

The new form of humanism we are proposing can only be the humanism of alterity, as demonstrated by Levinas throughout all his writings, and most explicitly in *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (see also 'Les droits de l'homme et les droits d'autrui' (The Rights of Man and the Rights of the Other), in Levinas 1987b, pp. 116-125). We have hinted at the fact that present-day dominant ideology has centred its claim to human rights on the rights of identity, eliminating from the very concept of 'human rights' the rights of the other. If we are to safeguard life globally over the planet, this orientation must be quickly counteracted by the humanism of alterity where the rights of the other are the first to be safeguarded. Our allusion is not just to the other *beyond self*, but also to the self's very own other, to the other *of self*. In fact, the self characteristically tends to remove, suffocate and segregate otherness mostly sacrificing it to the cause of identity. However, identity thus achieved is fictitious so that all efforts made to maintain or recover identity in such terms are vain.

Semiotics contributes to the humanism of alterity by evidencing the extension and consistency of the sign network connecting one human being to every other, synchronically and diachronically. The progressive spread of communication at a planetary level makes it susceptible to synchronic analysis. But communication is also subject to diachronic investigations that are staggering for diversity to say the least. In fact, the overall destiny of the human species is implied in any action or decision made by the individual, just as the destiny of the individual is implied in that of the human species, from its most remote to its most recent and closest manifestations, from its past to its evolutionary future, in biological terms as well as the socio-historical. This sign network concerns the semiosphere constructed by mankind, a sphere inclusive of culture, its signs, symbols, artifacts, etc. But global semiotics teaches us that this semiosphere is part of a far broader semiosphere, the semiobiosphere forming the habitat of humanity (the matrix whence we sprang and the stage on which we are destined to act).

Semiotics has the merit of demonstrating that whatever is human involves signs. Indeed, more than this: whatever is simply alive involves signs. And this is as far as cognitive semiotics and global semiotics reach. Semioethics pushes this awareness further in the direction of ethics and beyond; from a semioethic perspective the question of responsibility cannot be evaded at the most radical level (that of defining commitments and values). Our ethos, even more, the cosmos itself falls within the scope of human responsibility. The implication is that for an adequate interpretation of human sign behaviour, we must consider the hypothesis that if all the human involves signs, then all signs in turn are human. However, this humanistic commitment does not mean to reassert monologic identity yet again, nor any other form of anthropocentrism. On the contrary, a radical operation of decentralization is implied, indeed nothing less than a Copernican revolution. As Welby would say, 'geocentrism' must be superseded, then 'heliocentrism,' until we approximate a truly cosmic perspective (see Welby. 1983). To reach such a perspective is an integral part of our ultimate end, a point where global semiotics and 'semioethics' intersect. As to the question of human responsibility and, therefore, of humanism as we have described it so far, what is at stake more than anything else is the logic of otherness. But it is time to add that in the light of global semiotics otherness may now be understood differently from previous interpretations: not only as the other of self, or the other from self, our neighbour (whether close or distant, in truth always close), but the other also referred to living beings distant in genetic terms.

### **Signs of Difference and Difference of Signs**

'Signs make difference.' 'Difference makes signs': two statements on the relation between 'signs' and 'difference.' However, contrary to initial impressions, this relation is neither symmetrical nor reciprocal. In the first statement, the term 'difference' merely indicates a *state*, while in the second case it also indicates a *process*. Therefore, the two statements 'signs make difference' and 'difference makes signs' are not at all symmetrical, nor do they reciprocally imply each other, given that in the first case, as stated, 'difference' indicates a state and in the second a process (see Ponzio, 2003 pp. 195-198). This condition is also evidenced by the fact that, in the first case 'difference' may be replaced by 'identity,' while in the second case it cannot.

'Signs make difference' may be considered as synonymous to 'signs make identity.' In fact, difference understood with reference to state means to interpret difference as 'identity.' On the contrary, 'difference makes signs' cannot be interpreted as 'identity makes signs.' Not only would Peirce have rejected such a statement, but so would have Ferdinand de Saussure. Nor could it find a place in any other semiotic conception worthy of that name. In Peirce's description the sign *stat pro aliquo* and is understood in terms of *interpretation*. This approach evidences the fact that the sign is made of difference.

Here 'difference' may be interpreted at least in two different ways: 1) 'Difference' in the sense of *differing from* other signs: for example, on the semantic level a word differs from its synonyms in a given state of language. Think of Saussure's famous examples from the English language, the difference between *mutton* and *sheep*; or with reference to French synonyms, the difference between *redouter*, *craindre*, *avoir peur*. On a phonological level, think of the binary relation between opposed distinctive features such as *d* and *t*, *b* and *p*; 2) 'Difference' in the sense of *deferral*: the sign is also made of difference in the sense that it defers to something else. The sign *refers to* or *defers to another sign* which acts as its interpretant. In this case, therefore, the sign is not merely a static fact of pre-established relationships, but a *process of deferral*, indeed, an infinite process of deferrals, as says Peirce, from one interpretant to another.

Before Jacques Derrida replaces the 'e' with an 'a' in the French word *différance* to indicate the process of deferral, Peirce had already conveyed the dynamic sense of difference, that is, of deferral among signs with his idea of *infinite semiosis*. Deferral among sign and interpretant is understood in the *dialogic terms of question and answer*: the interpretant responds to the sign, is an answer to it, an answer to the sign that presents itself as a question. This sets clear limits to interpretation in the perspective of a dialogic relation that is open and at once tied to or restrained by the irreducible otherness of its terms.

The sign resists identity, is refractory to difference understood as a state, and flourishes instead in deferral, in infinite deferral. Yet, according to the first statement, 'signs make difference,' understood as 'signs make identity,' signs most ironically make difference in terms of state, of identity.

However, it is important to repeat that signs on the contrary are vowed to difference understood in terms of shift, deferral, dialogic opening, otherness. The difference that makes signs is *otherness*; difference thus understood opens the sign to infinite semiosis and distinguishes it from the signal, that is, from the univocality, monologism, and static nature of the signal.

Signs that make difference are signs reduced to the status of signal, signs that have lost their capacity for deferral. Therefore we could speak of a reductive use of signs which are put at the service of difference understood as identity closed in upon itself, which are used to make and to mark difference and identity thus understood.

*Our aim is to critique conceptions that employ signs to make differences, to mark differences internally to the world of signs.* Reference here is to the world of human signs, to cultures, to the sphere of anthroposemiosis. When we ask *where* signs make the difference referring to the world of signs, the entire semio-biosphere (Sebeok), the answer is that this phenomenon only occurs in human cultures, in anthroposemiosis. Only in the sphere of anthroposemiosis are signs used *to make difference* in terms of individual, social, and national identities. This is possible thanks to a specifically human capacity called *metasemiosis*, which makes the human being a unique type of animal, that is to say, a *semiotic animal*. However, as anticipated, such use of signs is limiting, given that it reduces signs to the status of signals. Signs used to make difference, to fix identities in the sphere of anthroposemiosis, means to use signs abusively, aberrantly with respect to semiosis in general. In fact, use of signs to make difference interrupts the processes of deferral and relates the sign to static difference, difference understood as fixed identity, and not difference understood as an open process, dialogic movement, participation, involvement, intercorporeity, otherness.

*Difference as identity* refers to *indifferent difference*, the type of difference that is connected with functions and roles as required by the 'closed universe of discourse' (Marcuse), which foresees *alternatives*, but excludes *difference understood in terms of otherness*.

*Difference as otherness* is *unindifferent difference* (see Levinas, 1961 and 1974), difference understood as dialogic involvement and participation with other differences. Difference understood in terms of otherness is not difference in the sense of *being*

*otherwise*, which is characteristic of alternatives, but rather in the sense of *otherwise than being* (Levinas, 1974): difference as otherness is difference understood as *deferral beyond identity of being, whether individual or collective*.

Signs may be used by cultures in at least two different ways: to establish differences with respect to other cultures, to establish identities, that is, to define a culture's identity and juxtapose it to others; or as a means of responding to signs, whether their own or of others, in dialogic interrelations, in processes of infinite deferral, in which one sign *refers to* or *defers to another sign* as the interpreted sign or the interpretant sign. In this case, cultures invest their signs with the capacity for *interrogative intonation* and *responsive comprehension* (Bakhtin). Insofar as they are signs such signs interrogate other interpretants, in turn signs, in turn a question in a dialogue. This approach offers the *only possibility of escape from relativism as much as from dogmatism*, both being characterized by failure to recognize the other that is overpowered and excluded.

Today's sign universe is characterized by global communication, which tends to homogenize, homologate, level and cancel differences. Such a process inevitably leads to a sense of frustration for identities and differences, which consequently become even more obstinate in the will to assert themselves and prevail over other identities and other differences, in the will to assert their separation with respect to other identities and other differences, to assert their own identity-difference that instead tends to be denied by the social system. And reciprocal indifference among differences is quickly transformed into hostility and conflict towards that which is different, alien, the stranger.

In what signs may we trace differences given that signs have now entered the circuits of global communication and circulate on the world market (which is connected to global communication) and whose vocation it is to cancel differences?

Paradoxically, differences can only be traced in the past: signs of difference are signs received from the past; the present cancels them. That which may unite and differentiate and, therefore, identify is a common past: difference on the basis of religion, language, territorial distribution, origin, genealogy, roots, blood, skin colour, etc. Identity attempts to assert itself in what may constitute difference, whether in

the name of history or some 'natural' characteristic: witnesses to a cultural past, to tradition, habit, monuments, language and dialect, religion, ethnic group. Most significantly churches, museums, ruins, the historical parts of a city are the only characterizing elements, elements of identification in urban space which is otherwise anonymous and indistinct with respect to other urban spaces in today's world of global communication. Today, the signs of identity are fixed between *indifference* and *mummified difference*.

On the basis of identities fixed in this way, it is possible to keep at a distance—to varying degrees of abjection (ranging from hatred to so-called tolerance) —that which on the contrary has become permeable in terms of national territory, urban space, suburbs, neighbourhoods, work-place and everyday life. The link to identity is given by religious, ethnic, linguistic differences, cultural past, and so forth.

But identity based on signs of a common past becomes stronger in terms of the will to defend itself, and spreads more extensively in terms of space the more it is contradicted by ideologies put into circulation by worldwide communication, in spite of and beyond differences and borders. Identity thus described is reinforced when it identifies with the Nation, the State, or confederations of Nations and States such as the European Union, or the United States of America. On the basis of a common cultural past, identity will exclude the migrant from its boundaries, the so-called 'extra-communitarian' obliged to ask developed countries for hospitality because of disasters provoked in the country of origin by development itself.

Nevertheless, signs of the *closed community*, of *community identity*, signs of the 'small experience,' may be counteracted by signs of the 'great experience' (Bakhtin), which flourish in dynamic and dialogic processes of deferral. Thanks to such processes signs are part of the *open community*, and participate with that community in relations of 'interconnection with the other' (Levinas, 1974), relations of involvement and irrevocable responsibility for the other, relations of unindifferent difference (see also Ponzio, 2002).

That which unites each and every one of us to every other is the otherness of each one of us that cannot be reduced to any form of identity, whether of the individual or of the collectivity, that cannot be reduced to difference connected to a community of any sort. This

condition of not belonging, of *reciprocal strangeness* unites us in the relation of indifference towards each other. As much as identity and identity interests may be indifferent to the difference of single individuals, to the difference of all forms of identity to the point of overpowering and excluding them, difference based on closed identity with its identity interests cannot cancel the *essential condition of reciprocal strangeness, of reciprocal otherness*.

Global communication renders signs of difference obsolete, it renders the aberrant use of signs to make difference ever more anachronistic and delusory. *Today's system of social reproduction is the latest social form in which signs are used to make difference*. But this very same system is at once also making it impossible to use signs in this sense, that is, to make and mark difference.

Paradoxically, social reproduction today whilst endangering life over the entire planet in the present-day situation of global communication, is at once and in spite of itself moving towards a social system that can offer the only possible chance of salvation for planetary semiosis, if it is not too late. We are now alluding to a social system where signs are open to otherness and flourish in deferral processes as is the nature of the semiotic universe in its (detotalized) totality, of life. Indeed, we have observed that the signs of anthroposemiosis, differently from the rest of the semiotic universe, are also endowed with a semiotic capacity that is proper to human beings, that is, a capacity for metasemiosis which implies the capacity for creativity, critique and responsibility. The new human community we are prognosticating is characterized by planetary interconnection without the community, a community that is not a community understood as a closed community; on the contrary, a community made of signs that are different, but without signs of difference that make difference, without signs of closed identities, without property, without territories, without ownership, without equality or inequality, without roots and origins, without boundaries and bonds, without belonging; a real community society, the open community, to evoke Charles Morris (1901-1979) (see Morris, 1948). As the doctrine of inter-genre and trans-genre communication, in our specific case, as the doctrine of inter-cultural and trans-ethnic communication, translation semioethics aims to contribute to such transformation.



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**ABSTRACT: Translation as the Doctrine of Inter-genre and Trans-genre Communication: A Semioethic Perspective** — The proposal of ‘translation semioethics’ with its focus on inter-genre and trans-genre communication, that is, communication among singularities, arises in the context of global semiotics developed in the direction of semioethics. Translation semioethics contributes to underlining the need for the humanism of alterity by contrast with the humanism of identity.

**RÉSUMÉ : La traduction comme doctrine de la communication entre les genres et transgenre. Une perspective sémioéthique** — La proposition d’une sémioéthique de la traduction centrée sur la communication entre les genres et transgenre, c’est-à-dire sur la communication entre des singularités, naît du contexte de la sémiotique globale, développée dans la direction de la sémioéthique. La sémioéthique de la traduction contribue à mettre en évidence le besoin d’humanisme de l’altérité en opposition avec l’humanisme de l’identité.

**Keywords:** semioethics, singularity, logic of otherness, dialogism, unindifferent difference.

**Mots-clés:** sémioéthique, singularité, logique de l'altérité, dialogisme, différence inindifférente.

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