

Through Diversity: Artistic Communication

Artistic communication appears as a phenomenon with strong relational implications: artwork is born as necessity to restore a non-superficial link between people facing the uncertainty of existence, thus overcoming crippling loneliness. The path proposed by this article aims to highlight how this particular urgency of sociability takes form in a typical communicative dynamic able to be “translated” in a totally own way, easily crossing linguistic barriers of any particular culture. This wanted connection with the primary human experience (the sense) makes artistic production a very useful and effective tool in an age in which diversity is likely to become the detonator of a potentially devastating incommunicability.

Keywords: *artistic communication, dialogue, cultural mediation, translation, sense.*

Art and Sociality

Beyond the romantic stereotype of the loner and unsociable artist, the creative attitudes, in the texture of the concrete collective life, «are perpetually in search of social frameworks and tend to create “sociality”» (Duvignaud 1967, it. transl. 1969, p. 62) and the artwork can be represented as an expression or «a nostalgia for a lost communion, as forbidden dream incessantly revived by an irrepressible desire for emotional fusion» (ibid). For the same reason the artist can be seen as the man who «seeks and sometimes finds in the painting, in the execution of masks, in the music or in the dance, the means to express his sense of isolation [...] an indication of a virtual participation, not yet realized, of which the individual, despite himself, is the source and the matrix» (ibid, p. 54).

Following this perspective, we could consider the artistic production as a communicative dynamic that strives to build interpersonal bonds of a particular type, capable of depth regardless of the direct and mutual knowledge of the participants. Interpersonal bonds able to feed «that experience of the other that takes place always in the aesthetic practice through those moments of the primary identification such as admiration, shock, emotion, crying, laughter, and that only an aesthetic snobbery can take to vulgar» (Rondini 2002, p. 155).

Only from these considerations is it possible to reestablish also the sense of those creations that are incomprehensible at first sight, justified only by that «violent dissatisfied need of participation» (Duvignaud 1967, it. transl. 1969, p. 54), which can be translated into religious, magical, political and especially artistic practices.

Artistic communication, as well as having its own peculiar dynamic of meaning, seems also to have a very specific ability to facilitate or create links, relationships, sociability.

We want to try, in this short essay, to shed some light on the links between the specific communicative dynamics of the creative language and its particularly effective “socializing” function, often able to “cross” language and cultural barriers in a surprisingly simple way. From a sociological perspective, we must begin our process of investigation highlighting the socio-cultural foundations of this particular mode of symbolic interaction.

Perception and Reception

The perception is that physical-psychic dynamism through which a given sensitive cultural object reaches us, giving rise to the process of construction of sense: we can say that the perception is the subjective manner (for example, the taste) with which each of us evaluates, enhances and holds back communicative proposals of any kind. But perception (mainly studied by psychology) is a complex process that cannot be simply defined within boundaries of subjectivity: both on technical plan (the interpretative practice of symbols) and on the existential one (the type of relationship that comes to settle between the participants) the individual perception implies a “social background” on which it can start. It is incorrect, in fact, to consider an act of perception as an isolated event, since «it is not that the most recent phase of a flow of countless similar acts carried out in the past and surviving in the memory» (Arnheim 1970, it. transl. 1974, p. 96). And the memory is inevitably also “collective” memory.

In other words, my perception is never simply “my” but, to varying degrees, it is also and always “our”: it is customary to indicate this second level of perception with the term “reception”, which includes «all those characteristics of the perception that are common to a particular group in a historical, national or social sense, and which are distinguished from those of other groups» (Lissa 1989, p. 70). The reception, unlike the perception, is the subject of sociology, which aims to identify the «resultant of experiences of many individuals belonging to a particular social group» (ibid). In other words, the research on the reception has the purpose to «find how people give meaning to a particular media product» (Sorice 2007, p. 86) and this construction of meaning is composed inseparably by individual and collective contributions and tools.

Denotation and Connotation

The communicative symbols can function, in general, according to “closed” or “open” dynamics and it is just this different degree of “openness” that characterizes the artistic communication. Let’s try to deepen, very briefly, how a denotatively used symbol requires a semantic process other than a symbol conceived in a connotative way. The “denotation” (ascribable to the pole “closed symbol”) is a kind of “first degree of signification” which has «characteristics of universality (the same meaning for everyone) and objectivity (the referents are real and do not lend themselves to evaluations)»

(McQuail 1987, it. transl. 1996, p. 232): an immediate and univocal, explicit symbol. It is a symbol that has been conceived in such a way that avoids any ambiguity, uncertainty, interpretative variability: a road sign, for example, which means one thing and that one only.

The connotation, however, concerns the second level of meaning, the accessory one, implicit, unspoken in the word: «The circle of other meanings that can be brought into relation with it» (Marothy 1980, it. transl. 1987, p. 120) and finds its breeding ground in the “reaction of the lived experience” of the reader in the impact with the text. In other words, the reconstruction of the connotative meaning of a symbol asks the receiver to risk his/her existential experience. The expression “the lemon is yellow” is essentially denotative: the lemon is yellow for all, regardless of previous experience. The only cultural precondition is the conventional sharing (typical of a social group) of the use of the term “yellow” arbitrarily connected to that particular type of interpersonal visual perception. The expression “I’ll see you at the bar” is, instead, essentially connotative: to understand it, in fact, we need to go fish out the particular experience of “that” bar, an experience shared by sender and receiver. If not, the latter would be forced to walk the denotative way and he would find himself at all the bars of the city in search of the sender.

The connotation, finally, is an evident strategy of synthesis of interaction between the individual level and the collective one: in fact, it consists of an “internal rooting” (his/her own experience, history and memory, tastes and inclinations) but also and simultaneously an “external rooting”, that is the story, the sensitivity, the beliefs of the socio-cultural context in which one is likely to operate and evaluate. This rooting takes the cases of “collective imagination”. It is interesting to note that with the passage of time, even the external rooting tends to become internal, to be perceived therefore as a personal, individual, own feeling of things.

From a communication point of view, it is important to consider that in daily practice it is almost natural to pursue objectives of clearness and that our usual code tends to get the greatest possible denotation: if at the table I want salt, I will try in every way to not trap my interlocutor with tongue twisters or riddles for having it. But, as noted by Iser, in certain cases you may voluntarily «reduce the denotation of a message/text in favor of a greater connotation» (1971, it. transl. 1989, p. 46): you can then decide to ask for a greater effort of interpretation, and thus to run a greater risk of misunderstanding on the part of the interlocutor. These “certain cases” are identified in aesthetic communication, in literary, musical and artistic texts, in which ambiguity and polysemy are not just a limit, but a wealth: they stimulate and require the “productivity” and the “interpretative cooperation” of the receiver.

Verbal and Nonverbal

It is obvious to everyone that human communication dynamics are mostly built on the most powerful symbolic system by the referential point of view, namely verbal language: unlike animals, humans are able to “give each thing

its name”, therefore indicating with pinpoint accuracy every aspect of material or imagined reality. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that non-verbal languages continue to maintain their effectiveness and, often, their central role in human communication dynamics, provoking the question of why men continue to use non-verbal communication, «since they have the ability to use, to communicate, something much more elaborate and complex as language» (Attili and Ricci-Bitti 1983 p. 10).

The most immediate answer to this question comes from everyday experience: «The different forms of non-verbal communication are more effective and reliable in expressing emotions, attitudes and interpersonal relationships» (Gili and Colombo, 2012 p. 291). The need to use non-verbal languages emerges also in situations where the referentiality (that is, the will to indicate something clear and precise, with an intentionality in turn clear and precise) is not the most appropriate strategy: we want to say that there are situations where clear intention collides with the ambiguity or the polysemic richness of the object or with the opacity of our conscience or our will.

Some recent communicative trends related to social networks, finally, paradoxically raise the opposite question: the sudden pervasive advance of the non-verbal codes among the younger generation (see the phenomena related to Instagram and, even more, to Snapchat) would lead to wonder if the adults of tomorrow will still use, and to what extent, verbal language. In this case, the images (which immediately are erased) seem to represent a kind of liberation from the heavy moral responsibility to “say words”: it is as if the image or the video clip, naked and unbridled, may exempt the sender from calling them, from fixing any kind of “explicit value”.

Whatever the motivation for the use of non-verbal languages (which are the main codes of the artistic communication) they present themselves as irreducibly more polysemic than the verbal ones: the only exception is the poetic (or creative) language that attempts precisely to get rid of any residual burden of referentiality.

Irreducible Polysemy

«Art is a communication and signification phenomenon, and as such can be examined» (Calabrese 1986, p. VI), because it is based on the use of “pieces” of reality (objects, concepts, shapes, sounds, movements, etc.) associated with the idea that they can be viewed «as expressing, or representing something else» (Griswold 1994, it. transl. 1997, p. 25). The artistic language, however, has a “special” mode of this reference. There is, in the artistic production, a completely original way of using “symbols”, those signs which give sensitive objectivity to things that are only in personal experience and in relationships. This originality is, firstly, essentially tied to the specifically “sensitive” dimension of each code and, secondly, to the voluntary “noise” of the artistic symbolic dynamics.

On the first side, «the artistic activity is a form of reasoning in which perceiving and thinking are inextricably interconnected things» (Arnheim

1970, it. transl. 1974, p. IX). In other words, you can not separate intellect from sense in understanding artistic objects: «Who paints, writes, composes, dances, thinks through his/her senses» (ibid). The modern difficulty in understanding the artistic languages would lie then in a rift between sensoriality and thought.

On the second side, instead, the discriminatory aspect of the artistic act would be in the particular “symbolic action”, «which is a peculiar way of “speaking”, which distinguishes it both from the common language and from the scientific language» (Calabrese 1986 p. 16). What characterizes such action is the fact that «all contents of art are open systems» (Jiranek 1987, p. 80). In other words, the artistic symbol can be seen as that in which the “reference” ends in a certain vagueness, in a non-obvious, unforced, non-unique connection between signifier and signified: the artistic language reaches a level of “openness” higher than normal, everyday interpersonal communication. In artistic production, therefore, one of the components present in all communication processes (we often forget) is exacerbated: communication is always (at various levels) an “improbable” process. So being the result of different “translations-traditions-treasons” of a lived experience, the artistic communication on one side always requires a translation, but on the other opposes tenaciously to such inevitable reduction: being not comparable to a simple “transport” of “informative” material, it implies a particular and risky “performative” activity of the reader.

Translation, Traditions, Treason

Tradere is one of those verbs of the Latin language so potentially polysemic to range from an action to its opposite: the act of “passing”, of “handing down” implies in fact a series of mutations at each step of the process, so operational to cause the creation of a new object, not always coherent with that of departure: it is no coincidence that the Italian language derives from this verbal root three similar and different processes as *tradition*, *translation*, *treason*. The fact is that, broadly speaking, any act of communication (tradition, i.e. transmission) is the result of translation and undergoes an inevitable treason. Our “inner” speech, in fact, «can not simply be transferred to another, but it is always translated, adapted, re-read into his/her experience, and therefore always in some way modified and *deformed*» (Gili 2005, p. 1).

And this fate, paradoxically, is inherent not only in the final stage, that of the reception, but also in the initial one: the sender, in fact, has the not obvious task of translating into signs what is a merely intellectual, psychological, emotional experience. In practice: he has to translate himself. Similarly, on the other side, «to understand means to decipher. The perception of the intention to mean is a translation. Consequently, the means and the essential problems of the act of the translation ... are all present in the acts of speaking, writing and pictorial coding into any language» (Steiner 1975, it. transl. 2004, p. 12).

1 Same "Direction", Different Codes

2
3 In facing the problem of the possibilities of translation of symbolic codes
4 in different codes and/or through different channels, this latter can be
5 understood in two ways: as a *going in the same direction* (same "sense") or as
6 *a saying the same thing* (same "meaning"). While the first situation is easily
7 viable, as regards the second, the things are more complex. We believe that
8 many "radical" discussions on the very possibility of translation entrench
9 themselves on unreasonable positions because of the lack of understanding of
10 this basic distinction, central to our process of analysis.

11 Surely a "wide" perspective is that of anthropology that, with Lévi-
12 Strauss, argues that the thousands of existing languages are largely mutually
13 unintelligible, but also that, at the same time, «it is possible to translate because
14 they all possess a vocabulary that refers to a universal experience (also if
15 differently cropped by each one)» (1993, it. transl. 1997, p. 80). With this
16 statement we fit in the camp of those who, from the classical thought, were
17 called "universals", so much discussed in the modern thought: there would be a
18 universal experience, "differently cropped", but after all directed toward the
19 same "sense", or directionality. Even some current of the linguistic share this
20 "wide" setting: "Every language projects its own interpretative network on
21 experience, on the world. And yet the extensive production practice shows the
22 possibility of "building" the same sense, using different languages ... the sense
23 lets itself reformulate in another language, even if there is no question of an
24 operation taken for granted» (Rigotti and Cigada 2004 , p. 37).

25 This operation is not taken for granted because of the fact that each
26 linguistic translation is always also a cultural translation (Monceri 2006) and,
27 for this reason, each operation of translation involves an inevitable alteration,
28 which cannot be masked by creating an object similar to the original: «The
29 only form in which in this case the dialogue may be such is that of the aware
30 interruption, that leaves the other in his otherness, refusing to produce a fusion
31 of horizons (in the words of Gadamer) that would be only the reduction of the
32 other on our horizon» (Costa 2006, p. 42). But this interruption does not mean
33 closure, rather it becomes an occasion for a necessary and promising openness:
34 «Altering the meaning that we translate, we leave open the possibility that it
35 alters us, transforms us. As is the case, after all, of genuine dialogue» (ibid).

36 On the other hand, various cultures, «"to not dissolve themselves, need
37 that a certain impermeability exists between them" (Lévi-Strauss 1984). The
38 dialogue between cultures becomes constructive by virtue of its ability to
39 ensure a fair distance: halfway between the lack of communication and an
40 equally pernicious excess of communication [...] The impediments to the
41 dialogue arising from undue forcing of the rhetoric of the tolerance can harm»
42 (Scillitani 2009, p. 86).

43 What task has, then, the translator? It is, as said, a very delicate operation,
44 which requires great sensitivity and, in a certain sense, a solid morality (i.e. a
45 weighted openness). In fact, he stands as "intermediary" and "forwards" the
46 message to the final receivers – who have no direct access to the original one

1 because they ignore its language – by implementing the sense of the linguistic
 2 system that they know» (Rigotti and Cigada 2004: 37). The challenging
 3 reflections of Benjamin introduce us to what is the basis of our own research:
 4 how should the translator of “artworks” behave? And up to what point is this
 5 process possible?

6 After making clear that communication, in a poetic work, is not essential,
 7 the German philosopher warns that a translation that would put aim to convey
 8 and to mediate would condemn itself, as a result, to a communicative process,
 9 a function considered, in the artistic field, inessential. So, what should he do?
 10 Start writing poetry? What has to be unwrapped, surely, is that a good
 11 translation coincide - with similarity - with the original, because “affinity does
 12 not necessarily match similarity”. Instead, what is to be found is the expression
 13 of “the most intimate relationship of languages among them”: in fact, «the
 14 languages are no strangers to each other, but, a priori, and regardless of any
 15 historical relationship, they are similar in what they mean» (Benjamin 1955, it.
 16 transl. 1982, p. 42). In this way, it is possible that the original itself turn
 17 through a “renewal”, able to add a “posthumous maturity also of words that
 18 have been fixed”.

19 And so, «the task of the translator is to understand the work as a task in
 20 itself, clearly distinct from that of the poet. It is to find that attitude towards the
 21 language in which you translate, that can reawaken, in it, the echo of the
 22 original» (ibid, p. 47). The accurate translation does not match the fidelity of
 23 the individual words literally used, because in every language they have their
 24 own history and are closely linked to the cultural history from which arise:
 25 such a mechanism is likely to lead straight to non-intelligibility. And then,
 26 «instead of assimilating the meaning of the original, the translation must
 27 lovingly, and even in the smallest details, recreate in its own language in its
 28 own way of thinking, to look like both – as the shards of the same pot –
 29 fragments of a larger language» (ibid, p. 49), the “pure” language. In this way
 30 the central problem of a moral attitude, that is of openness, recurs: in fact, «the
 31 fundamental error of the translator is to stick to the contingent stadium of their
 32 own language instead of letting it be powerfully shaken and moved from the
 33 foreign language» (ibid, p. 51).

34 35 *The "Translation" of the Non-verbal*

36
37 What happens when these processes are applied to the field of creative
 38 non-verbal communication?

39 It's the music production that attracts more discussions, especially in
 40 relation to the nineteenth century exaltation of the “pure” music, not
 41 translatable into anything different from itself: already in 1854, in his essay
 42 *About musical beauty*, Hanslick recognized sense and logic in the music, but
 43 “musical” sense; “it is a language that we speak and we understand, but that we
 44 are unable to translate”. More recent is the distinction proposed by Eggebrecht
 45 between word and note: «If the sound of a word “means”, the musical sound
 46 “is”; the meaning of the note is itself, his translation is the extinction of its

1 meaning» (1977, it. transl. 1987, p. 37). In other words, the musical sounds
2 would say themselves, according to an order given by the human will.

3 Lévi-Strauss himself, so “possibilist” with regard to the linguistic
4 translatability, seems to change position when one speaks of music, «where the
5 absence of words makes as many languages as composers, and perhaps, even
6 works. These languages are untranslatable one to the other» (1993, it. transl.
7 1997, p. 80).

8 It must be said that very similar positions can be traced in all other sectors
9 of nonverbal artistic production: «Scholars from different disciplines recognize
10 in visual language a specificity impossible to translate in words» and therefore
11 it is possible to consider «a chimera the possibility to fully translate into verbal
12 language an image, that shows a lot more than what can be said with words»
13 (Faccioli 2003, p. 163).

14 On the same wavelength is the now famous response of the dancer Isadora
15 Duncan to those who asked what it meant for her to dance: “If I could say what
16 it means, I would not have to dance it”; (Mahler said the same about his
17 music).

18 If you cannot “translate”, how can you “understand” or at least “share”
19 aesthetic contents coming from social and cultural contexts different from your
20 own?

21 Echoing the views of Lotman and Uspensky, Calabrese says that the
22 culture, functioning as a deposit of the socialized information, is a multilingual
23 tank, and thanks to its multilingualism it is comparable with other cultures.
24 Therefore, «between elements of different sizes such as the culture, the art in
25 general, the particular arts and the artistic text there is a relationship of
26 isomorphism: they are similar not only in the function but also in the structure»
27 (1986, p. 163).

28 If, therefore, the term “translation” is improper and unfit to make
29 understandable and usable an object of art, it is useful to find the strategies most
30 suitable to the purpose: then here check off more refined distinctions between
31 terms-satellites such as “adduction/transduction”, “meta-communication”,
32 “explanation”.

33 The “adduction” is the action that returns the sense “exact” of the object, a
34 process feasible only in scientific context: «In the artistic field the code, the
35 communication, the form and the content are instead intimately related, they
36 can not be separated or translated into another code without the message being
37 altered» (Tessarolo 2005, p. 66). You can then use another strategy to
38 understand the aesthetic object: the “transduction” process, which is borrowed
39 from physics, indicates the transformation of one form of energy into another.
40 There is no question of translation in the strict sense and it is a process that
41 follows, in a specular way, the creative one: «A thought, if transformed into a
42 communicative act, suffers, in fact, qualitative changes as well as in physics
43 when a kind of energy is turned into another» (Bertasio 1997 p. 29).

44 More cautious and more realistic then is the agreement on the possible
45 process of meta-communication applicable to artistic objects: it is, even in the
46 most daily colloquial events, a communication on the communication, a meta-

1 message that signals the manner in which the basic message goes intended, «a
2 kind of “instructions for use”» (Gili 2007, p. 173). It is therefore a mechanism
3 that serves to clarify the meaning of communication, a process that puts more
4 bare the misunderstandings or the clumsy interpretations and can therefore,
5 paradoxically generate further misunderstanding.

6 Traditionally, especially in pedagogy, this “meta-communication” (of the
7 author or of the teacher/translator) coincides with the “explanation”, that
8 process sometimes essential (especially in the face of recent “conceptual”
9 productions), sometimes radically rejected by the artists who consider it a
10 violent abuse against their work. We believe, however, that this type of
11 translatability is a level not waivable if we want avoid falling into non-sense: if
12 so, for Combarieu, you can not exhaust the meaning of the music, but «you can
13 to attempt an explanation, which must not be entrusted reductively to one only
14 science, but which can only come from an interdisciplinary approach (physical-
15 acoustic, physiological, mathematical, psychological, aesthetic, historical,
16 sociological)» (1907, it. transl. 1980, p. 11).

17 To explain, after all, is to translate: in this all the delicate responsibility
18 and the moral urgency of the “wise men” towards the younger generations is
19 summed up.

22 **The Common Ground: The Human**

24 If the term “translation”, therefore, is highly problematic in linguistic
25 situations, it is even more for poetic creations: it becomes, finally, completely
26 unsuitable and unnecessary in front of artworks that use non-verbal codes. But
27 then, how is it possible to escape the drift of the pure subjectivism in which the
28 original communicative intention is resolved by simply dissolving in the
29 emotion of the reader? If you do not find an alternative to this intimistic drift
30 you put at risk the very possibility of an encounter, or a dialogue between
31 people, “through” the artistic work.

32 Our proposal is to use the opportunity of a “large mesh” signification that,
33 leaving much responsibility to the receiver (the famous “gaps” identified by
34 Iser in the artistic texts), at the same time permits appealing to what is common
35 to all, to what we may call *human*, that everyone is able to call up as a dowry
36 received before each subsequent cultural construction.

37 It is in resting our feet (even unconsciously) on this common ground, that
38 each of us can experientially experience in him/herself the capacity to enjoy
39 works from cultures, ages, contexts far removed from our own: «This
40 discussion leads to the conclusion that there is a human nature that transcends
41 the culture. This idea does not enjoy good press among the human sciences»
42 (Boudon 2008, it. transl. 2009, p. 52). Yet, when we recognize that we are able
43 to understand the reasons for attitudes so distant from our cultural setting, and
44 also from what we believe “rational” (as magical practices or the many modern
45 superstitions, for example), we have to admit that «what is common among all
46 people, we have» (ibid, p. 53): art (cultural product) maintains its value

1 inasmuch as it reflects the structural values that underlie and precede every
2 culture.

3 4 *The Imagery* 5

6 The reflections of two French sociologists (of different times) are
7 interesting in front of the typically human phenomenon of imagery. Durkheim,
8 reflecting on this capacity, questions quite naturally: «Only man has the power
9 to conceive the ideal and to add it to the real. Where does this singular
10 privilege come from?» (1912, it. transl. 1973, p. 485). Fifty years later
11 Duvignaud tries to formulate an answer on the origins of this “special
12 privilege” and thinks he can find it in the atypicality of the human condition:
13 «If our substance was actually given us, and we had it at hand, undoubtedly we
14 would not project beyond what limits us. But we are insufficient to ourselves»
15 (1967, it. transl. 1969, p. 134).

16 This “insufficiency” (as well as having many implications and
17 consequences of moral, social, interpersonal, ethical, philosophical character)
18 also poses a specifically “linguistic” problem: how to “say” an insufficiency?
19 In other word, it must cope with the fact that «the character, ultimately,
20 unobjectifiable of the “I” shows a limit in its capability of linguistic definition»
21 (Crespi 2005, p. 141). It is everyone’s experience (rarely an object of
22 reflection) that, ultimately, «the “information” contained in the words brings to
23 the surface only fragments of a certain object and of our relationship with it;
24 just as many if not more human meanings remain in the sensory channels
25 conceptually not generalized, immediately not de-codifiable» (Marothy 1980,
26 it. transl. 1987, p. 120). With an effective and concise phrase, «we live and we
27 feel much more than we can say» (Crespi 2005, p. 23).

28 In this state of “linguistic suffering”, the artistic communication finds its
29 reason for being. It is Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti that describes, with great
30 expressive power, its need: «The language corresponds badly to what you have
31 in mind and you would say: sure, it does not match, if not quite roughly. I will
32 say then that I was looking for the least inaccurate approximation, the
33 reduction, as far as possible, of that gap not eliminable» (Camon 1982, p. 11).
34 From this point of view, what Roland Barthes says about the poetic language
35 can be referred to any other form or code of artistic expressiveness: «Poetry
36 tries to find an infra-signification, a pre-semiotic language: in short, it strives to
37 reconvert the sign into sense: its ideal would be basically to get not to the sense
38 of the words, but the sense itself of things. This is why it upsets the language, it
39 increases as it can the abstraction of the concept and the arbitrariness of the
40 sign and tends to the extreme the binding of the signifier and the signified. This
41 is why our modern poetry is emerging as a killing of the language» (Ragone
42 1996, p. 313).

43 In this, the artistic expression is proposed as the least unsuitable language
44 to express certain experiences that often we connote «as “unspeakable”,
45 “ineffable” or “not given to narration”» (Braga 1985, p. 121). This strange,
46 inevitable *cul de sac* does not exempt us from constantly trying new roads

1 anyway, because «our intelligence is organized so that we attempt to represent
2 the unrepresentable» (Sloterdijk 2003, p. 106).

3 4 *Sense and Meaning*

5
6 Let us now note the useful distinction proposed by Franco Crespi
7 concerning two terms normally considered synonyms: sense and meaning. This
8 distinction, in the artistic field, can clarify many controversies that have
9 marked the history of art, regarding the “communicative” function of the
10 artworks.

11 According to Crespi, the term *sense* must be understood as *directionality*, a
12 sort of primordial thrust congenital to human nature that perceives the
13 inevitable and confused urgency, over that of an end, also of a purpose. When
14 something is given, sense is given. This push is pre-cultural and informs any
15 subsequent action. The meaning, instead, is a cultural translation, and thus a
16 reduction of the complexity of the original sense that is worthwhile in a given
17 environment, historically and geographically defined.

18 Through this distinction, the true meaning of disorienting aporia of Igor
19 Stravinsky contained in *Conversations with Robert Craft* could be, finally,
20 understood: “The music does not mean anything”. It is licit, perhaps, to
21 consider music as a language *incapable of meaning* (because then the
22 referentiality of ordinary communication, that of the road signs, would be
23 enough), but extraordinarily *pregnant of sense*: and man is «an animal that
24 inevitably has sense» (Rigotti and Cigada 2004, p. 25).

25 26 *The Primary Experience*

27
28 One of the risks of contemporary sociology, but also of the classic one, is
29 to realize the analysis systems of social reality able to work perfectly without
30 the need of contemplating human action, except as a mechanism respondent to
31 inviolable laws: the Comtean dream of a “social physics” that, properly
32 “oiled”, removes the error from the system functioning. The outcome, then as
33 now, is that the social is no longer conceived «as the place where the human
34 lives. The human is increasingly seen as character, impulse, solicitation,
35 bother, “noise” external to the system of behaviors, mechanisms and rules that
36 “make” the society» (Donati, 2006, p. 22).

37 But, especially in the field of aesthetic-creative disciplines, «it is a grave
38 mistake to believe that the objectification of value judgments can be achieved
39 by eliminating the subject of the evaluation, starting purely from the object. It
40 is possible only by referring to the dispositions of the “primary experience”»
41 (Zenck 1989: 105). It is useful at this point, to wonder about the properties of
42 this “primary experience”, very shabby today, after an ideological campaign
43 which, in the last century, has put in great crisis the same hypothesis of its
44 existence.

45 But what is it? How and where can we identify this supposed “primary
46 experience”? According to Crespi, this level of experience is crucial to the

distinction between human and animal: in fact, the loss of instinctual automatism caused by reflexivity marked the final separation between the two natures. But, since then, this ability to “reflect”, to considering his/her own experience and not just to live it, compels man to act in totally his own way: «He is from the beginning constitutively the being who asks questions: “Who am I?”, “Where am I going?”, “What have I do?”, “What is the meaning of life?”, “What is there after death?”, and so on» (2005, p. 6).

If this is the level at which man becomes such, then it is possible to revise the concept of culture and art in relation to this perspective: one can therefore consider culture as the set of «answer modes, from sensitive men, towards the central questions that compare human groups that have the consciousness to exist: how one deals with death, the meaning of tragedy, the nature of duty, the character of love - these recurring problems that are, I believe, cultural universals, you must find in all societies in which men have become aware of existence» (Bell 1977 p. 428). And so, if scientific knowledge allows indisputable progress in the path of domain of nature, existential problems remain the same: and if the attempted responses vary from context to context, all cultures «“understand” each other, since they arise in response to common situations» (ibid).

Let’s come now to the last aspect of these general considerations: how to “outsource” this “primary experience”? Can we consider art as the “least unsuitable” language for this particular type of communication? Indeed, poetic language «is what most tries to escape the need to determine, often using words with different meanings from those currents, relying on the evocative strength of sounds and using the allusive power of words in unusual contexts» (Crespi 2005, p. 24).

This is, perhaps, the peculiarity and the great opportunity offered by “artistic communication” compared to any other “ordinary” type of communicating. And this is, after all, what makes it able to easily overcome the limits of linguistic and also cultural skills, through diversity. Because in the end, «all languages are particular, but everyone can, at least to some extent, understand each other. The unity of the sense, which cannot be said an absolute language, transpires through the particular languages» (ibid, p. 27).

Artistic communication, in conclusion, is offered to the fruition of contemporary man as a tool for encounter, among the many available, between people of different cultures and traditions, as an opportunity for dialogue that exceeds linguistic constraints, thanks to its unique and structural communicative dynamic “open to the sense”: it is, if we reflect, an extremely valuable opportunity in an age that “forces” us to deal globally with *diversity*.

It is no coincidence that the most violent actions of those who oppose this possible intercultural dialogue have more and more often as a goal the iconoclastic destruction of symbolic or explicitly artistic values of our civilization.

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