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A semiotic lifeworld. Semiotics and phenomenology: Peirce, Husserl, Heidegger, Deleuze, and Merleau-Ponty

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Abstract: If we think of cognition and experience from the enactivist idea of a structural coupling between organism and environment, we see that this environment is first and foremost a semiotic environment, crowded with objects, norms, habits, institutions, and artefacts that shape our minds and represent the background of our perception of the world. This semiotic environment, which goes far beyond the opposition between nature and culture, (See Paolucci 2021. *Cognitive semiotics: Integrating signs, minds, meaning, and cognition*. Berlin: Springer: ch. 1.) is a semiotic lifeworld that is important to compare with the classic idea of lifeworld coming from phenomenology. In this paper, (i) we will first start with a comparison of the semiotic *Lebenswelt* and the phenomenological *Lebenswelt*; (ii) we will follow the construction of the semiotic lifeworld coming from Peirce's Anti-Cartesian essays; (iii) we will make a deep comparison between the phenomenology coming from Peirce (phaneroscopy) and the phenomenology coming from Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty; (iv) we will show how these very same principles also ground structuralism; (v) we will show how this new semiotic lifeworld grounded on phaneroscopy is neither pre-logical nor pre-categorial. Rather, it is founded on the primacy of "telling" over "showing," and on the primacy of discourse over perception.

Keywords: phenomenology; interpretant; Peirce; lifeworld; intuition

1 Disclaimer

In this article, an attempt is made to construct a semiotic *Lebenswelt* and to compare it with the concept of lifeworld originally formulated in phenomenology. A warning is therefore necessary: not only are "semiotics" and "phenomenology" complex and heterogeneous fields with differentiated positions within them, but the authors

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discussed here have often, in different phases of their work, held different positions on these and other points. For this reason, even when terms such as “semiotics,” “phenomenology,” or even “Husserl,” “Peirce,” “Heidegger” or “Merleau-Ponty” are used, it is not intended to imply that behind each of these words lies a single position. Nevertheless, given the numerous attempts to bring semiotics and phenomenology together, or even to think of Peircean phenomenology as “a possible variant” of Husserlian phenomenology (Sonesson 2017: 101), I believe it is important to try to extract some features that highlight their relative specificities and, ultimately, their different objectives. After all, Spiegelberg (1956) and, especially, Ransdell (1989) already pinpointed several differences between the two phenomenologies, while underlining “their different attitudes to Descartes and to science.” For this reason, when we talk about phenomenology or the lifeworld, it seems interesting to see in what way we can construct a heuristic concept of it today, through semiotics.

2 Semiotic lifeworld and phenomenological lifeworld

In some essays that represent the very foundation of semiotics as a discipline, Charles Sanders Peirce showed how human beings have no ability to derive cognitions directly from objects, without previous knowledge – which he calls “interpretants” – intervening to structure our point of view. The name chosen by Peirce is interesting: Peirce calls elements of previous knowledge interpretants because they interpret the world before the subjects and direct us to interpret things in one direction rather than another. Therefore, according to Peirce, interpretants are mediating representations which fulfill “the office of an interpreter, who says that a foreigner says the same thing which he himself says” (CP 1.553). Interpretants mediate our knowledge and experience of the world and illuminate objects under some respect or capacity. Let us consider an example.

For my mother’s generation, it was absolutely inconceivable not to vaccinate their children. Not because they believed in vaccines more than we do now, but because no one even thought of forming an opinion on these delicate issues, which were delegated to a series of experts (doctors), who truly knew the subject. In the contemporary world, where a culture of conspiracy (see Leone 2016) accompanies a general distrust of others and an uncontrolled amount of information circulating freely on the internet, people have started to think that doctors – pharmaceutical companies’ partners in crime – are hiding some fundamental information about the harmfulness of vaccines because they draw an economic advantage from vaccinating children. Thus, a rather large movement of parents who have decided

not to vaccinate their children has emerged, exposing them to enormous risks. But what do these parents know about vaccines? Does the knowledge based on which they decide not to vaccinate their children come directly from the objects? Have they ever been in a laboratory? Have they ever looked through a microscope? Have they ever read a scientific medical essay? Absolutely not. Their knowledge about vaccines comes from previous knowledge circulating in the open space of the non-scientific community, with all the manipulations and naiveties that characterize it. Where the scientific community of experts has shown that vaccines do not pose a real health risk, dozens of cases contradicting this idea circulate on Facebook, on non-institutional websites often not managed by doctors, and on social networks. Many people today decide to believe these sources rather than those of the scientific community.

Here is an example of what Peirce was saying: our knowledge of the world is formed by knowledge that comes from objects, and by elements that come from previous knowledge circulating in the open space of the community. Therefore, knowing is to exercise expertise on the signs circulating in the community and to epistemically evaluate them. For this reason, in my opinion, doing semiotics is to appraise our knowledge and experience (cf. Paolucci 2017), exactly as we appraise a house or a good when we want to buy it, to determine the right value and pay the right price. Not all information circulating about vaccines is of the same level and has the same value: semiotics consists in appraising this information. *Semiotics is an appraisal on the values circulating in the community*, an assessment on the interpretants that constitute the lifeworld. After all, the *interpre*s (from which “interpretant” derives) was originally precisely the mediator, the one who ensured the passage of the good for a correct value.

According to historians of language, the word *interpre*s originally refers to one who mediates a transaction, one whose good offices are necessary for an object to change hands ... The “*interpre*s” thus ensures a passage; simultaneously, he is careful to recognize the exact value of the transmitted object and assist in the transmission to ensure that the object passes from one hand to another intact. (Starobinski 1974: 23, my translation)

The interpretant is then exactly an *interpre*s that allows passing through a series of mediations, starting from a specific configuration of values internal to one domain to another configuration of values internal to another domain. “Interpreting” means translating a system of signs into another heterogeneous system of signs, transitioning from one domain of the lifeworld to another heterogeneous domain, between which a mediation is constructed. What is at stake is a thought of passage and mediation between domains internal to the lifeworld (Serres 1972; Souriau 1943), and, through Peirce’s thought, it is useful to *conceive semiotics as a science of appraisal and mediation*: by denying that we possess the ability to intuitively know

things, in fact, we deny that we are able to access reality directly, without the mediation of a whole series of previous knowledge that represents the background of our perception of the world (cf. Basso Fossali 2017; Latour 2012; Paolucci 2017, 2020; Paolucci et al. 2023).

This world of interpretants, this realm of previous knowledge that we cannot bracket using a method or through phenomenological reduction, but which we must inhabit through semiotic appraisals, certainly resembles a *semiotic lifeworld*. With *Lebenswelt*, Husserl (1970 [1936]) was indeed thinking precisely of that set of previous knowledge representing “the universally known,” “the horizon of a simply imperfect knowledge” which is sufficient “for the praxis of pre-scientific life,” and upon which science not only relies, but which it purifies through a “logical-objective” paradigm.

Is not the life-world as such what we know best, what is always taken for granted in all human life, always familiar to us in its typology through experience? Are not all its horizons of the unknown simply horizons of what is just incompletely known, i.e., known in advance in respect of its most general typology? For prescientific life, of course, this type of acquaintance suffices, as does its manner of converting the unknown into the known, gaining “occasional” knowledge on the basis of experience (verifying itself internally and thereby excluding illusion) and induction. This suffices for everyday praxis ... There has never been a scientific inquiry into the way in which the life-world constantly functions as subsoil, into how its *manifold of prelogical validities* act as grounds for the logical ones, for theoretical truths. And perhaps the scientific discipline which this life-world as such, in its universality, requires is a peculiar one, one which is precisely not objective and logical but which, as the ultimately grounding one, is not inferior but superior in value. But how is this completely different sort of scientific discipline, for which the objective sort has always been substituted up to now, to be realized? (Husserl 1970 [1936]: 123–124)

Peirce’s semiotics is a response to this question by Husserl. However, despite the apparent consonances, these two “*lifeworlds*” – the semiotic *Lebenswelt* and the phenomenological *Lebenswelt* – are actually different. Husserl’s *Lebenswelt* is indeed irreducible to the knowledge and language of science, it is based on *perception* and has its roots in *intuition*.

The idea of objective truth is predetermined in its whole meaning by the contrast with the idea of the truth in pre- and extrascientific life. This latter truth has its ultimate and deepest source of verification in experience which is “pure” in the sense designated above, in all its modes of perception, memory, etc. These words, however, must be understood actually as prescientific life understands them; thus, one must not inject into them, from current objective science, any psychophysical, psychological interpretation. And above all – to dispose of an important point right away – one must not go straight back to the supposedly immediately given “sense-data,” as if they were immediately characteristic of the purely intuitive data of the life-world. What is actually first is the “merely subjective-relative” intuition of prescientific world-life. (Husserl 1970 [1936]: 124–125)

In contrast, Peirce's semiotic *Lebenswelt* is grounded in his pragmatism and the corresponding need to fix beliefs inside the lifeworld using the "scientific method of fixing belief" (CP 5.410). It is *discursive* and *categorical*, not *pre-logical* and *pre-categorical*, as it is founded on *anti-intuitionism* and the *semiotic primacy of discourse over perception*. To shed light on all these points, it is worthwhile to read the first question of Peirce's first anti-Cartesian essay, where through the demonstration of the non-existence of that intuition so fundamental to Husserl's *Lebenswelt*, these themes are masterfully clarified in just a few lines.

3 A semiotic lifeworld: Peirce, Kant, Husserl

Question 1: Whether by the simple contemplation of a cognition, independently of any previous knowledge and without reasoning from signs, we are enabled rightly to judge whether that cognition has been determined by a previous cognition or whether it refers immediately to its object. (CP 5.213)

Since the first line of his first anti-Cartesian essay, Peirce opposed a perceptual model grounded in presence and based on the "simple contemplation" of cognition, to an inferential model in the absence of an object, where cognitions are thought of as being the effect of "previous knowledge" drawn from "reasoning from signs" (CP 5.213). The textual opposition between "cognition" and "previous knowledge" is clear and evident, as well as that between "intuition" and "reasoning from signs": can we truly construct a "cognition" intuitively, without previous knowledge (interpretants) intervening in the phenomenological structuring of the phenomenon presented to the mind? Peirce then wondered if it was really possible to derive cognition directly from the object that appears to be "seen" ("by the simple contemplation of a cognition"), without previous semiotic cognitions intervening in the phenomenological structuring of this same contemplation. Through numerous examples, Peirce denied this possibility, making it one of his famous four incapacities (anti-intuitionism): the courtroom witness does not truly know whether what he says is what he *saw* or what he *inferred from what he saw* (CP 5.216), the third dimension of space and the continuity of the perceptual field are not *seen*, but *learned*, *inferred*, and *reconstructed* (CP 5.219–5.223), etc. If what manifests itself is therefore a *sign, something that comes into presence under a certain aspect*, this sign cannot show or make known anything without previous cognitions in the absence of an object intervening, which *makes the manifestation of the phenomenon itself possible*. There is, therefore, nothing that presents itself immediately to the mind and that we can intuitively grasp in its presence, embracing it in a single glance, with the "eyes" of an intentional consciousness.

Peirce further specified this position in reference to Kant's theory, which exactly combined a "presentative-observational" moment linked to a representation immediately connected with its object (aesthetic intuition) and a "representative-discursive" moment linked to a representation mediately connected with the same object (logical concept).

Kant's whole philosophy turns upon his logic. He gives the name of logic to the greater part of his *Critic of the Pure Reason*, and it is a result of the great fault of his logical theory that he does not extend that name to the whole work. This greatest fault was at the same time the greatest merit of his doctrine: it lay in his sharp discrimination of the intuitive and the discursive processes of the mind ... He drew too hard a line between the operations of observation and of ratiocination. He allows himself to fall into the habit of thinking that the latter only begins after the former is complete ... His doctrine of the schemata can only have been an after-thought, an addition to his system after it was substantially complete. For if the schemata had been considered early enough, they would have overgrown his whole work. (CP 1.35)¹

It is easy to understand what Peirce means here by "schema." It is a theoretical object that combines the characteristics of both the aesthetic and the logical (similar to Kant's "determination of time" in his transcendental analytics): for example, a set of observable relations (aesthetic) that embody or realize a set of purely logical (semiotic-inferential) relations.² Peirce does not hesitate to affirm that if such a theoretical object had not been a kind of belated rethinking, it would undoubtedly have undermined the true cornerstone of Kantian doctrine, namely, the established difference in nature between the "aesthetic" and the "logical," between the "observational" and the "discursive," in Peirce's terminology. Now, Peirce is universally considered the father of this very representation, which also forms the constitutive element of his conception of logic as semiotics. Indeed, for Peirce, "logic" is another name for "semiotics," to the extent that Peirce could have easily said that Kant's mistake was not to have called the entire *Critique of Pure Reason* "Semiotics." We will understand shortly what this means. What, then, is this "greatest fault" (CP 1.35) that prevented Kant from calling the entire *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) "logic" or "semiotics"?

In Kant, there are two types of representations (*Vorstellung*) that differ in nature: intuitions, or representations *immediately* connected with their objects that

¹ Eco (1999: 66) rightly observes how this Peircean passage appears as "a research program, the identification of a breach through which one should arrive at a non-transcendental Kantism." However, in 1885, when Peirce writes the passage in question, this research is by no means yet to come; rather, it has already been successfully completed in the period from 1861 to the three cognitive essays of 1868.

² Peirce later coined the term "diagram" to refer to the type of representation capable of embodying logical elements in aesthetic evidence (perceptual-sensory), and, in several instances, he demonstrated how the diagram is nothing more than a schema (e.g., CP 2.778, 2.385; NEM 4: 313–319; MS 293).

present them directly; and concepts, or representations *mediately* connected with their objects that only *represent* them through the mediation of another representation, be it another concept or an intuition. In Kant, immediate representations are aesthetic (“perceptual-sensory”), and mediated ones are logical (“discursive,” as he himself says). The union of at least one immediate representation with a mediated representation in Kant gives rise to the *phenomenon*: it presents something, namely, the “empirical object in its coming into presence,” which is indeed “that in whose concept an intuitive manifold is unified” (1998: B137). As is evident then, in Kant, there are non-logical representations, namely, aesthetic ones: intuitions. The aesthetic, the sensory, the perceptual are for Kant something constitutively *non-logical*, but intuitive, and therefore directly connected to their objects. This is why they are blind for Kant, while, on the other hand, concepts without intuitions are empty, since they are not immediately connected to their objects.

Now, as we have seen, Peirce will show that it is not so, that we have no capacity for intuition and that all representations – including those sensory or related to perception – ultimately turn out to be mediated representations not immediately connected to their objects. All representations are *representamina*: they have the mediated form of signs, regardless of their sensory or intelligible nature. Therefore, all representations, including aesthetic ones (perceptions, emotions, feelings, etc.), possess a logical form, that is, a discursive and mediated form, in which *something is presented always through something else*.³ For Peirce, then, every representation is always a representation of representation, that is, a mediated representation, regardless of its sensory or non-sensory nature. But what is the name that Peirce attributes to these mediated representations, which are the only ones that exist and which unite even what for Kant belonged to the presentational and observational order of immediate representation?

I do not use the word “representation” as a translation of the German “*Vorstellung*,” which is the general term for every product of our cognitive abilities. “Representation” is not a perfect translation of that term, because it seems to necessarily imply a mediated reference to its object, which “*Vorstellung*” does not do. However, I would not limit the term either to what is mediated or to what is mental, but I would like to use it in its broader sense, which is also the usual and etymological one, namely as anything supposed to stand in place of something else. (W 1: 257)

Put simply, a representation is a *representamen*, and *representamina* are always mediated representations, that is, discursive, regardless of whether their nature is

3 “Logical” in Peirce means primarily this: a syllogism displays the same form of mediated relationship in which one goes from a premise to a conclusion only through the mediation of another premise, and never directly. The same goes for the Logic of Relatives, where the mediation of the triad comes before the relations of Firstness and Secondness, from which it cannot be derived.

logical or aesthetic, perceptual or conceptual. Obviously, *representamina* are also *semiotic* representations, since they are nothing but signs.⁴ This is how Peirce can reconcile a continuity between the observational and discursive, between the “aesthetic” and the “logical,” without relinquishing either the primacy of the discursive or the constitutive semiotic structure of both. Therefore, Peirce can say that if Kant had not continued to distinguish too sharply between the observational and discursive moments, and to think that there are non-logical (non-semiotic, intuitive) sensory phenomena, he could easily have called “Logic” the totality of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Or rather, he might have called it “Semiotics,” when he realized that signs, as understood by Peirce, are exactly “schemes,” and therefore elements that possess both observational (aesthetic) and discursive (logical) properties.

In “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” Peirce will then draw the consequences of these moves. Just as they are always mediated representations, *representamina* are also always *phenomena that present themselves to the mind*, regardless of their aesthetic or logical nature.

Whenever we think, we have present to the consciousness some feeling, image, conception, or other representation, which serves as a sign. But it follows from our own existence ... that everything which is present to us is a phenomenal manifestation of ourselves. This does not prevent its being a phenomenon of something without us, just as a rainbow is at once a manifestation both of the sun and of the rain. (CP 5.283)

If everything that can manifest itself is indeed a sign, if everything that can come into presence – be it a perception, a feeling, or a concept – must necessarily exhibit a semiotic structure, then it follows that for something to come into presence, it must necessarily do so through a *representamen*. But if all phenomena are signs, how then does a *representamen* have the capacity to present something? In what way is it able to assume this constitutive phenomenological function that the Peircean position seems to attribute to it?

⁴ In order to understand Peirce’s position and that of semiotics, it is important not to confuse his idea of the *representamen* (sign) with the contemporary idea of representation. For example, this confusion has led the vast majority of supporters of enactivism to take phenomenological and anti-semiotic positions, as a representationalist interpretation of Peirce’s concept of mediation (sign) and *representamen* has become widespread. In Paolucci (2021: ch. 3), I have shown that this is not the case, that Peirce’s position is radically anti-representationalist and therefore compatible with an enactivist theory of cognition. In fact, all representations are signs (*representamina*), but not all signs are representations.

4 Semiotics and phenomenology, “telling” and “showing”: Peirce, Husserl, Heidegger

According to Peirce, a sign is a *representamen* that stands for its object (relation of *Secondness*), taking its place and illuminating it “under some respect or capacity” (relation of *Firstness*). However, the light shed by the sign on the object depends on a “something” (relation of *Thirdness*), which is neither the subject nor the interpreter, but *the interpretant*, that regular set of previous knowledge that interprets the world before the interpreters do. Peirce’s semiotics teaches us that a *representamen* can present an object only through the mediation of another *representamen* that represents it under a different respect. A *representamen* can thus present something and bring it forth as a phenomenon only by referring it to another mediating representation that says “that a foreigner says the same thing which he himself says” (cf. CP 1.553). For something to be manifested in its presence and illuminated under a certain aspect (form of visibility), it is necessary for it to be referred to other interpretant signs, that is, to previous or subsequent knowledge in the absence of an object, which say that the object is “such and such” (form of sayability), *even if this is not true*.

Hence the semiotic structuring of Peirce’s phenomenology (phaneroscopy): what comes into consciousness can only do so by representing itself through *representamina*. A *representamen* can present an object and bring it forth as a phenomenon only by representing it through an interpretant sign, which inherently possesses a discursive essence (it “says”). And it is precisely through this discursive essence, projecting onto the object a series of previous knowledge obtained in its absence (interpretants), that the sign is able to illuminate its object under a certain respect. Every presentation always passes through interpretant representations. Thus, Peirce’s celebrated anti-intuitionism consists precisely in this: *every presentation is always a re-presentation (or mediated presentation)*, since there are no pure presentations, or presentations immediately connected with their object, as are, for example, intuitions. This is why phenomenology, which deals with presentations, always refers to intuitions, whether sensible or categorical. Unlike phenomenological intentional consciousness, which *sees* the object in its appearing, semiotic intentionality can only illuminate the object by referring it to a further representation, which takes place through a mediating representation that *says* something about how the sign *makes its object visible*. The interpretive nature of semiotics for Peirce is essentially “discursive” and not “observational,” “re-presentative” and not “presentative”: where Husserlian-Heideggerian phenomenology *sees*,⁵ Peircean

5 Consider, for example, the intensive use of the photological metaphor: being is the light that makes the entity visible in its coming into presence.

semiotic phaneroscopy *says*, and it is only through the form of *saying* that it can *show* something.

Of course, we are fully aware of the significant differences between the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger, as well as Husserl's explicit rejection of paragraph 7 of *Being and Time*. We are also fully aware that it is primarily the phenomenology of the early Husserl – before the formulation of the *Lebenswelt* – that is radically based on the idea of intuition. However, what interests us here is the primacy of perception over discourse, of vision over enunciation, which seems to us to unite, at least on this point, the positions of Husserl and Heidegger if compared to Peirce's one.

This is why this semiotic revolution, this properly semiotic transformation of phenomenology which defines what presents itself through the semiotic structure of what is represented through *representamina*, determines first and foremost a primacy of the “*sayable*”⁶ over the “*visible*.” In order to manifest and come into presence, phenomena must inherently refer to a third element, the interpretant, which by its nature possesses a discursive essence: it is because the interpretant *says* something about its object that the first sign can *show it through the mediation of this saying*, and never directly in the unmediated vision of an intuition (primacy of Thirdness over the relations of Firstness and Secondness).

Let us consider an example. Why can Priam decide to bring the Trojan horse containing the Greek warriors devised by Odysseus inside the walls of Troy? The Trojan horse is a sign that stands in place of an object and illuminates it under a certain respect or capacity (“the Greeks have retreated”). As such, it conceals the object and takes its place, telling a story that stands in place of the real world (in reality, the Greeks are merely well-hidden). But the horse can tell this story and illuminate the world it replaces under that light (“the Greeks have retreated from battle”) only because previous knowledge directs our cognitions and interprets the world before the subjects, structuring perceptions of the lifeworld, which are anything but “intuitive.”⁷ In Greek culture, it was customary to leave a gift to the gods when retreating from battle, and it was believed to bring misfortune if this was not accepted: this is why Priam brings the horse inside the walls of his city, after a complex “reasoning from signs.” His lifeworld is constructed and perceived through customs and through the interpretants that illuminate Odysseus' horse under a certain aspect. It is in this sense that within the semiotic lifeworld, the “discursive”

⁶ In the sense of interpretant representation, certainly not in the sense of “verbal language.”

⁷ Of course, not even a die-hard intuitionist would claim that the Trojans, when they notice the horse, immediately “see” the assumption that the Greeks have left: the example is only meant to show the primacy of discourse over perception, the primacy of the interpretant over the sign in the building of “what is present to the consciousness.”

takes primacy over the “perceptual,” the “saying” over the “showing”: interpretant signs first and foremost have a discursive structure (they “say”), and through this same discursive structure, they make things visible. This is what Peirce calls the primacy of Thirdness over Firstness and Secondness relations: while the sign illuminates the object it replaces, the interpretant “says that someone else says the same thing which he himself says” (CP 1.553), and it is only because the interpretant “says” certain things (“when retreating from battle, one leaves a gift to the gods”) that the sign can show the world under a certain respect and draw a series of inferences through a “reasoning from signs” (“the horse is a gift to the gods, so the Greeks have left”).

This leads to another important consequence regarding the relationship between phenomenology and semiotics.

Although both Peirce, Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty⁸ speak of a “science of phenomena” and give the very same definition of the discipline, Peirce’s phenomenology is profoundly different from that of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. For all four of these authors, phenomenology studies the phenomenon in its manifestation and in its coming into presence, but the way in which this same “manifesting” and “coming into presence” is thought about is profoundly different. In order to stress the difference between phaneroscopy and phenomenology in the clearest way possible, without building a straw man, in this section, we will deal especially with Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty’s positions. While European phenomenology is indeed based on showing “itself in itself, the manifest” (Heidegger 1927: 51), Peircean phaneroscopy is instead based on a complex relationship between forms of visibility and forms of sayability: something presents itself and can be *seen* under a certain respect only because it is referred to the *sayability form of another interpretant sign*, which *says* something about it, *even if this is not true*. Far from being a “return to the things themselves,” Peirce’s phenomenology is the establishment of an open space of masking that opens up to a game of credentials, in which what manifests itself *claims* to be one thing, but may well be lying. Hence its semiotic structure, since semiotics studies “everything that can be used in order to lie” (Eco 1975: 17).

If phenomenology operates for presentations through intuitions, which are representations directly connected with their object that make it visible in its *truth*

⁸ Even though we are well aware of the profound differences between the phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, in this passage we approach the positions of these three authors “in continuity,” since we are dealing with characteristic points that seem to be present in all three approaches. These are aspects that could be considered as those that “make phenomenology what it is,” regardless of their different interpretations. Our aim is therefore to show how another science of phenomena is possible, and how this “new phenomenology” has a semiotic and phaneroscopic nature in the sense of Peirce.

(in its coming into presence, in its unhiddenness, *a-letheia*),⁹ phaneroscopy operates for representations through *representamina*, which are representations mediately connected with their objects that can always be used to lie. What manifests itself, in Peircean phaneroscopy, is always a sign, and a sign conceals its object by taking its place and referring it to another sign that *says some things about that object, even though nothing guarantees that this is actually the case* (cf. Eco 1975: 17). On this point, the gap between phenomenology and phaneroscopy could not be wider.

To have a science of phenomena means to grasp its objects in such a way that everything about them which is up for discussion must be treated by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly. (Heidegger 1927: 59)

Here is exactly what *cannot* be a science of phenomena for Peirce. Not only does Peirce deny the existence of *direct* manifestations, since all representations are mediated representations (signs); but, in addition to this, nothing can be shown without there having been an interpretant that says something, representing the condition of possibility of this “showing” and “making manifest” (see Heidegger 1927: 56).

Revealing of the difference in nature between phenomenology and phaneroscopy is the reworking of the concept of “discourse” carried out in *Being and Time* by Heidegger. In an attempt to illustrate the sense of the “*logos*” of phenomenology, Heidegger asserts that, although it is the quintessential polysemous word, the fundamental meaning of *logos* is that of “discourse,” and that all further translations of the term as “reason,” “judgment,” “concept,” “relation,” etc., “may still miss the fundamental signification” (Heidegger 1927: 55). However, what is the fundamental meaning of “discourse,” if “discourse (*logos*)” represents the “-logy” in phenomenology?

Logos, as “discourse,” means to make manifest what one is “talking about” in one’s discourse ... The *logos* lets something be seen, namely, what the discourse is about; and it does so either for the one who is doing the talking (the medium) or for persons who are talking with one another, as the case may be. Discourse “lets something be seen”: that is, it lets us see something from the very thing which the discourse is about ... The function of the *logos* lies in letting something be seen by pointing it out. (Heidegger 1927: 56)

Here is what a discourse is for phenomenology: a making visible, a pointing out, a form of visibility that resides within any form of sayability and makes it possible. This position is the opposite of Peirce’s. It is therefore essential to emphasize a

⁹ In order to stress even more the heterogeneity inside European phenomenology, it is worth saying that the *epoché*, as the fundamental methodological device of Husserlian phenomenology, consists in bracketing out all questions about a truth behind the phenomena. So there is a clear difference between Husserl and Heidegger on this point, but this topic goes far beyond the aims of this paper.

fundamental point: the semiotic *Lebenswelt* is based on an *antilogos* that refers to a phanerescopy rather than to a phenomenology, as the *logos* of phenomenology seems to imply the primacy of “showing” over “saying,” of the phenomenological “visible” over the phaneroscopic “sayable.” Hence our anti-phenomenological stance in favor of a semiotic *Lebenswelt* founded on the primacy of “saying” over “showing,” which – perhaps not surprisingly – we find in identical form within the foundations of structural linguistics as described by Gilles Deleuze in his essay “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?,” with which we conclude our investigation.

5 Structuralism, phanerescopy, lifeworld: Deleuze, Peirce, Merleau-Ponty

In an essay that forms the foundation of structural epistemology, Gilles Deleuze (1973) first identified a very general criterion by which structuralism is recognized. While attributing the origin of structuralism to linguistics, not only to Saussure, but also to the Moscow and Prague schools, Deleuze hastened to clarify that although structuralism subsequently extends to other disciplinary domains such as psychoanalysis (with Lacan), anthropology (with Lévi-Strauss), epistemology (with Foucault), or literary criticism (with Barthes), it does not merely import methods equivalent to those that have yielded good results in language analysis. Instead, this development is fundamentally due to a constitutive problem of structural epistemology, more precisely a problem of object and perspective, concerning what a discipline “sees” when it “looks” at something, what it can recognize in the things it observes.

There is good reason to ascribe the origin of structuralism to linguistics: not only Saussure, but the Moscow and Prague schools. And if structuralism then migrates to other domains, this occurs without it being a question of analogy, nor merely in order to establish methods “equivalent” to those that first succeeded for the analysis of language. In fact, language is the only thing that can properly be said to have structure, be it an esoteric or even non-verbal language. There is a structure of the unconscious only to the extent that the unconscious speaks and is language. There is a structure of bodies only to the extent that bodies are supposed to speak with a language which is one of the symptoms. Even things possess a structure only in so far as they maintain a silent discourse, which is the language of signs. (Deleuze 1973: 170–171)

This idea has nothing to do with Barthes’ linguocentrism or Lotman’s notion of language as the primary modeling system, both of which placed the model of verbal language at the center of every semiotic system. It is a different story here. Deleuze is not saying that every structure must be based on the model of language and that even non-linguistic systems must be based on the structure of linguistic ones.

Instead, he is saying that *there is no structure except for that which is language*, and therefore *every language is essentially a structure* and therefore *a structure by its very essence “speaks,”* meaning it possesses a *discursive essence*, not a *perceptive or presentative one*. This is his method for moving beyond phenomenology through structural semiotics (see Deleuze 1968, 1984: ch. 3). It is his method of exiting from

the idea of an original experience, a first complicity with the world which for us would form the basis of being able to speak about it, and would make the visible the basis of the enunciable (phenomenology, the “World speaks,” as if visible things already murmured a meaning which our language had only to take up, or as if language backed on to an expressive silence). (Deleuze 1984: 54)

Exit phenomenology. Exit Merleau-Ponty’s “world speaks”: this is the first fundamental watchword of a structuralist-based epistemology. Every time a primacy of the perceptual level is advocated, and thus of the “visible” over the “sayable,” of the “perceptual” over the “discursive,” this refers to a constitutively phenomenological approach. As Visetti notes with great clarity:

The primacy of perception can only imply the primacy of a perceptual sense whose description evidently conditions the possibility of recognizing elsewhere, on other grounds, the “same” modes of constitution: a thesis that correlates with the idea that one is situated within a framework where phenomenology plays the role of a transition or mediation from which one cannot break free. (Visetti 2004: 5, my translation)

Therefore, structuralism, which is constitutively founded on the primacy of the “discursive” over the “perceptual,” of the “saying” over the “showing,” of the “re-presentation” over the “presentation,” inherently positions itself outside a phenomenological tradition. It is no coincidence that the great post-structuralist French thinkers, from Deleuze to Foucault to Derrida, used structuralism precisely in a strong anti-phenomenological key to surpass the positions of Merleau-Ponty and the early Sartre, who were the guiding lights of the philosophical generation with which they were engaged in an open polemic.¹⁰

Indeed, for Husserl, as for Merleau-Ponty, there exists a pre-categorical moment, essentially perceptual and experiential, that forms the foundation of meaning and all higher-order cognitive activities. Their *Lebenswelt* inherits this pre-categorical, pre-logical dimension, whereas, according to Peirce, a phenomenon can only come into presence through the categorical relations of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, which are aptly termed “phaneroscopic categories.” Moreover, the

¹⁰ Here, too, the landscape is complex and heterogeneous: being in a clear polemic with both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, Derrida owes both Heidegger and Peirce a lot. On the contrary, Deleuze is much more influenced by Husserl in his *Logic of Sense* and, in *Difference and Repetition*, very critical of Heidegger with respect to his ideas on inauthentic existence.

phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty is founded on a constitutive “form of visibility” embodied in phenomenological intentionality that sees the object in its manifestation. For example, consider the intensive use made of the metaphor of light, which renders the entity visible in its coming into presence.

Thus, when Deleuze tells us that there is no structure except for what is language, he is first and foremost asserting the primacy of the discursiveness of “saying” over the visibility of “showing,” the categorical primacy of structure over the phenomenological and pre-categorical complicity between the body and the world, which would constitute a sensible and perceptual “visible” foundation for the enunciable. This entails the reversal of the primacy of perception over other higher-order cognitive activities. As we have seen, this position was precisely the one advocated by Peirce in the essay “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” where semiotics was founded precisely on the reversal of the primacy of the aesthetic over the logical, of the “perceptual” over the “discursive,” of the “presentative” over the “re-presentative.” The central move of Peirce’s essay was, in fact, to “reduce all kinds of mental action to a single class of modifications of consciousness,” represented by valid inference (see CP 5.264–5.317), and characteristic of “reasoning from signs.” Indeed, beyond the possible immediacy of emotion, perception, feeling, and sensation, Peirce was able to find a single form of relation that was constitutively logical, that is, semiotic, since for Peirce logic was nothing but a part of semiotics.

This was Peirce’s way of stating something that many began to articulate only many years later, namely that there is semiosis even in perception, and thus the semiotic guides our perceptual and aesthetic processes from the very first sensory impressions, which it pervades and informs through its singularities. However, the way Peirce said that there is semiosis in perception was completely different from how it has been articulated since. It has now become commonplace to emphasize the perceptual, and, more generally, sensorimotor and kinesthetic grounding of every meaning effect, in order to construct a continuity linking perception and language, thereby founding semiosis on a phenomenological syntax of the sensible. Peirce’s position, however, was profoundly different: if there is a continuity between any kind of cognitive activity and if there is meaning even in perception, it is because the universe of the sensible and the perceptual (aesthetic) operates in the same identical way as the “conceptual” (logical) one. This “same identical way” is the semiotic, which is essentially categorical, so that semiotics is a discipline that interweaves relations with the logic of relations and the phaneroscopy, with their relations of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. The semiotic *Lebenswelt* is thus logical and categorical and defines a primacy of “saying” over “showing,” whereas the phenomenological *Lebenswelt* is pre-logical and pre-categorical and is defined by a primacy of “showing” over “saying.” As Sonesson stresses:

To Peirce perceptual reality itself is made up of signs, and in this capacity it may also contain Dicisigns (i.e. propositions). To Husserl, on the other hand, the perceptual world is pre-predicative (or ante-predicative, as Merleau-Ponty has accustomed us to say). It is certainly not itself made up of signs or representations in any other sense. The world of perception, in fact, is the primary stratum of the Lifeworld, the world that precedes every other experience. (Sonesson 2017: 117)

Due to its dual foundation in structural linguistics and pragmatism, semiotics has placed at the core of its interests the relationship between the “sayable” and the “visible,” between forms of sayability and forms of visibility. This was in a sense its destiny, given that the Indo-European root of the word ‘sign’ – *sak* – simultaneously means ‘to say’ and ‘to show’.¹¹ Modern semiotics, with its dual interpretative and structural nature, emerges precisely from the articulation and declination of these two constitutive etymological dimensions of its object. More precisely, modern semiotics has founded its epistemological enterprise under the banner of the primacy of the “sayable” over the “visible,” of the “saying” over the “showing,” in a strongly anti-phenomenological key and with the aim of reformulating from the ground up a theory of the phenomenon. It is therefore not a matter of “moving away from phenomenology,” but rather of moving away from a *certain type* of phenomenology, in order to construct another phenomenology based on *semiotic foundations* (phaneroscopy), with its own lifeworld.

If we take, for example, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, which in its own way is very attentive to the signs and innovations introduced by structural linguistics, we see that the structure speaks only because “things” speak through it, passing through a fundamental complicity between body and world that constitutes the visible as the very basis of the enunciable.

In Merleau-Ponty (1964: 204), indeed, things speak because there is a pre-categorical experience in which we witness the “birth of meaning or a wild sense, an expression of experience through experience that clarifies the special domain of language.” It is only because this space of pure presentation exists that meaning finds itself to be

the integral of all the differentiations [... in which] the whole landscape is overrun with words as with an invasion, it is henceforth but a variant of speech before our eyes ... And in a sense, as Valéry said, language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests. (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 155)

Where Deleuze tells us that every experience is a language, Merleau-Ponty tells us that every language is an experience, wildly original and pre-categorical. Where Deleuze tells us that experience arises only through meaning (through language,

¹¹ See Pianigiani 1907: “Segno.”

through structure), thus finding the condition of possibility of any experience in semiotic processes, Merleau-Ponty instead tells us that meaning arises thanks to experience, an original and wild experience placed at the very foundation of sense. Where structuralism tells us that meaning is given through differential relations, Merleau-Ponty tells us instead that it is *the integral of all differentiations*, which is precisely the opposite process, *resolving* and *nullifying* differences by reducing them to variations. Indeed, it is well known that, in mathematics, differential relationships between elements in reciprocal determination are *resolved* through the integral that defines the curve in their vicinity, with the integral being nothing other than the *opposite* and *resolutive* process of every differentiation. The integral resolves differences and makes the reciprocal determination relationships between the differential elements disappear.

Moreover, worth noticing in Merleau-Ponty's text is the singular reference to the "voice of things." Already Derrida (1967b) noted how every phenomenology harbors within it a privileged relationship between voice and phenomenon, since both are founded on the same self-guarantee of a presence they continuously seek and never cease to find. To this properly phenomenological coupling, Derrida (1967a) then opposed a *sui generis* concept of "writing" presented as a trace, that is, as a sign that stands in for a nonexistent or always absent impressor, and very rightly noted how *Peircean phaneroscopy had nothing to do with the phenomenon of phenomenology*, but rather with this semiotic absence that comes to presence as a reference to something *else*.¹² In this way, Peirce's phaneroscopy clearly defines the impossibility of a wild, original presentation that is not already deferred in a relational and differential structure (in Peirce, every presentation is always deferred toward the light proper of another interpretant and referred back to it).

In Merleau-Ponty, it is indeed only because there exists a *pre-categorical* space of emerging in which things emerge wildly without necessarily having to be re-presented through interpretants that they have a voice and "speak." In contrast, in Peirce, *nothing emerges pre-categorically*: every phenomenon is always the incarnation of all three phaneroscopic categories, and nothing is able to present itself without passing through the mediation of an interpretant which says that what it says is the same thing said by someone else, under another aspect. The two positions could not be further apart: for *phenomenology*, it is because things *present* themselves through a pre-categorical experience that they have a voice and "speak"; conversely, for *phaneroscopy*, it is because objects are *re-presented* through a saying that they can come into presence and be "seen."

¹² In criticizing Derrida's reading of Peirce, Eco (1990) had absolutely nothing to object to on this fundamental point so lucidly noted by Derrida.

Thus, the union of *structuralism* and *Peircean phaneroscopy* gives rise to the interpretative paradigm in semiotics (Eco 1975; Paolucci 2010, 2020, 2021; Violi 1997). A semiotic lifeworld is structured by interpretants and relations with which we are in structural coupling and which we must inhabit by appraising them, as they represent the background of our perception of the world.

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