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Eugenio Coseriu

“My” Pagliaro

I must immediately draw attention to three difficulties I am going to encounter in my paper. First of all, unlike others, such as Belardi or De Mauro, I was not a direct pupil of Pagliaro. Although I was in Rome during the war years, I failed to grasp the genuine sense of his political commitment and I did not attend his lectures. The second difficulty is that anyone who undertakes a study of Pagliaro's work finds himself having to deal with an extraordinary quantity and variety of writings — as Belardi has already pointed out — and this makes any synthesis an arduous task. Further, in connection with the general theory of language, Pagliaro, like Humboldt, wrote the same work several times over, sometimes repeating his phrases almost word for word, other times varying them by shades of meaning, or laying aside one particular concept and introducing new ones. As with Humboldt, it is very difficult to pick out any line of development in his thought. Lastly, there is the third difficulty. As I said, I did not attend Pagliaro's lectures while I was in Rome. Pagliaro I discovered later, during the years I spent in Milan and then in Montevideo. After my discovery, or rather my *discoverta* of Pagliaro, I became, one could say, “pagliarized”: I identified with his thought, by him I was led to other authors and thinkers, and no longer am I able to distinguish what is Pagliaro's thought from what is an interpretation or a subsequent development. As I proceed, I shall try to observe this distinction, but I must point out that for me it is problematic. In essence, here I shall be presenting what I owe to Pagliaro, “my” Pagliaro, which will also be one way of describing what linguistics and the theory of language today owe to Pagliaro.

Before going any further, I will say what, in my opinion, Pagliaro's main merit is: it is that of having reacted vigorously to the environment in which he found himself, by which I mean the Italian environment and the environment of international linguistics existing at the time. Many Italian linguists tried des-

perately to adapt to Croce's theses, all but competing with whoever most closely resembled Croce. Others — and this happened especially outside Italy — rejected not only and not so much Croce's philosophy, but philosophy as a whole, and prided themselves on being "positive" linguists, without any philosophical basis. Pagliaro was one of the few courageous enough to think independently. He uncovered and described the limits of Croce's idealism in relation to linguistics and immediately suggested ways in which these limits could be overcome.

We are familiar with Croce's thesis which identifies language with aesthetic activity and, therefore, aesthetics with general linguistics, or better, with the philosophical contents of general linguistics. The main shortcomings of this thesis are the following. In first place, individual creativity is regarded as an aspect of the universal subject, the Spirit, and hence as an aspect of the universal history of the Spirit. This leads Croce not to consider the actual historicity in which the universal history of the Spirit is formed. He asserts the role of history and declares himself to be an historicist, yet at the same time he tends not to consider the actual history in which the linguistic creativity of the concrete speakers is set.

The second shortcoming lies in the fact that other forms of expression do not manifest themselves as language. Works of figurative art remain individual works. Language, on the other hand, always appears as a *langue* (namely a single, specific mother tongue). Croce proposes to relegate the *langue* to the practical sphere, as though it were without importance for the constitution of linguistic expressions of aesthetic value.

The third shortcoming can be outlined thus: in Croce the linguistic sign, considered to be expression identified with intuition, is treated as though it were a lexical sign, a single word which cannot be analyzed any further. He fails to note that a linguistic sign contains not only lexical signs, but relational signs as well. Because of these, the linguistic sign has a structure and therefore cannot be likened either to the single lexical sign or to the work of art as a free-standing unit; for the work of art, in fact, contains no morphemes, signs or parts of relational signs. At most, the work of art can be thought of as an *onomázein*; language, instead, is always and at any one time an *onomázein*, or naming, as well as a *légein*, or speaking. Of course, relational signs are also to be found in poetic works of art, namely works expressed by means of the language of a specific mother tongue. And it was Pagliaro himself who showed us how the humble, ordinary preposition *per* is the real pivot of Francesco d'Assisi's *Cantico delle creature*.

Surmounting these inadequacies, Pagliaro brings language back to the reality known to all its speakers, to their concrete everyday experience, to the language common to a whole community of speakers, not just one individual. In this way, he removes the linguistic subject from the Spirit's eternal and ideal history to actual, concrete history, which is where the history of the Spirit takes place. And as Belardi has rightly observed, this he does already in his

first work, the *Sommario*, a work written in haste, due to teaching needs, but not at all hurried, indeed extraordinarily thoughtful and extraordinarily mature, if one thinks that Pagliaro was not yet thirty.

Some have chosen to see in this work evidence of Pagliaro's initial adherence to Croce's idealism, and later on Pagliaro himself hinted at something of the kind, saying that it was only afterwards that he discovered the empiricists (with whom, in truth, he was already familiar). And here I must recall De Mauro's very acute observation about these presumed signs of Pagliaro's adherence to the idealism expounded by Croce. Two people hesitated to see any agreement with Croce's idealism in the *Sommario*. One was Croce himself, ever attentive of those who took up his ideas on linguistics, who never recalled Pagliaro's having suggested identifying art and language: evidently he perceived something in this identification which did not tally with his own ideas. The other was Antonio Gramsci, who certainly was no idealist and spoke very warmly about the *Sommario* precisely because he realized that it went beyond Croce's positions.

But to the two already mentioned I would add a third: Pagliaro himself. He declares his adhesion to Croce's idealism, yet in the same breath expresses reservation about it and departs from it. I quote this passage from the *Sommario*:

No longer is it appropriate to dwell on these postulates [namely, Croce's theses] which are common sense. What we want to do here is to point out that the suggested identification of intuition with language is clearer and more evident than that of intuition with art. In every speech act, from the simplest to the most elevated, there is an act of intuition. In the work of art as understood in common usage, intuition must possess a certain quality, because of which, in practice, aesthetics cannot in fact be identified with linguistics nor criticism with historical linguistics.

Croce's theses apparently are accepted, but at the same time limits are placed on their scope. They are accepted, but they are defined as "postulates" and, what is more, as common sense postulates, in my opinion with a subtle irony visible to anyone initiated into Pagliaro's style. Without dwelling too much on these postulates, Pagliaro aims at showing us that we can and we must do linguistics and historical linguistics, by bringing the subject of linguistic creation into the domain of history and without surrendering the identification of intuition with expression. Indeed, this move into history occurs in the *Sommario* because — it is stated — to appreciate the speech act also as a fact of an aesthetic nature, this act must first be understood and to be understood it has to be set in the historicity to which it belongs, namely the language used by a certain community in a certain era. And language, notes Pagliaro as he makes a distinct departure from Croce, is not an abstraction, but rather it is the first and most important step towards historical knowledge of linguistic activity.

Already in the *Sommario* linguistic activity is seen as intrinsically historical: no language is formed and no individual speaks if not in a specific language, and on the strength of this he can be assigned to a clearly defined place in history and considered in relation to all those who, using the same language,

are participants in the same historicity. This happens in the phase of genesis as well: in the moment a sign is first created, in which Pagliaro has on occasions said he recognizes a component of poeticness, creation is a creation in relation to others (that is to say, with alterity), it is creation in the language specific to a community of speakers.

Basing ourselves on these ideas expressed by Pagliaro, and on his references to Aristotle and Hegel, we can characterize Pagliaro's theory of language by means of the five universal dimensions of language which, prompted by Pagliaro, I have identified as creativity, semanticity, alterity, materiality and historicity.

Creativity: from his first to his last writings Pagliaro grants idealism the merit of having placed language among the finalistic phenomena, removing it from the sphere of causality. Dominating the speech act is its purpose of objectifying (for the self and for others, Pagliaro specifies, but we shall return to this) the motion of the mind (the whole motion, explains Pagliaro, not just the aesthetic aspect), and language itself, in as much as it is a functional form of the self's expression and of understanding, it is inherently purposive in nature. This finalistic nature characterizes not only language, but all the activity of the spirit, which finalistically is objectified also in science, art, philosophy, culture. For the moment, I shall leave to one side the characteristic which specifically distinguishes language, semanticity, and look at the third of the universal dimensions I referred to earlier.

Alterity: this is a notion found mainly in Pagliaro's early and last writings. As a form of objectivation of the mind, language is an "externalization of the self", but it is an "externalization of the self" by an individual who in expressing himself, because he has to use the mother tongue as a set of "values known to" a community, is an individual necessarily able to externalize himself. Alterity, expression of the self by objectifying the self for the self and for others, is the basis of sociality: linguistic communication is always communication with another person. Hence the importance of the fifth dimension I have listed: materiality.

Materiality: the linguistic sign, because of its finalistic nature, must be such for the self and for others, it must be embodied in perceptible forms which can be inscribed within the received or "known" forms of a particular language specific to a particular community of speakers.

Historicity: finalistic character, alterity, materiality, such are the premises from which there necessarily derives the intrinsic concrete historicity of every speech act, which is always constituted because of synchronous solidarity with a given community and, therefore, adhesion to a given linguistic tradition. Only when this *obligatio*, this link with a given form of historicity, is accepted, is it possible for the individual freely to manifest in his expression the motion of his mind and to convey it using signs to others. And this brings me to the feature which distinguishes language from other activities of the spirit.

Semanticity: unlike the concept of logic and the image and intuition of the work of art, meaning — asserts Pagliaro — is "generic knowledge". Because of this, because of this generic semanticity, from time to time the linguistic sign is able to function as the bearer of logical universal values or of particular concrete intuitions; hence the autonomous and primary nature of the knowledge which is objectified in language.

In drawing our conclusions, let us consider the question whether Pagliaro did in fact depart from idealism. Certainly, he departed from what he called "our domestic idealism" (i.e. "Italian idealism"), and for him this meant Croce, the only person specifically mentioned. None the less, it is important to note that Pagliaro — as stated earlier — assigns to the whole of idealism, "domestic" included, the merit of having considered language as an activity of a finalistic nature. But if we look at the whole panorama of Italian and European idealism, the connection seems to be far deeper.

In first place, there is the relationship with Gentile. It is known that Pagliaro, partly for personal reasons, did not care for him. But if we read Gentile's *Sommario di pedagogia* we find important sections on freedom of language which — it is stated — is indeed absolute, but which, if it is to assume any concrete form, must be part of a specific historicity, and must use the words and forms used by a given community in a given era. Pagliaro cannot have been unaware of these pages and these reflections which, in any event, coincide with his own almost to the letter. On one occasion I had the privilege of being able to put this question to Pagliaro in person. I reminded him of Gentile's pages and told him that I recognized their validity, that to me it seemed evident. Pagliaro made no protest. He simply smiled and said: "Indeed". And that was his only comment.

But, above all, even though his elaboration reaches far beyond Hegel's, in my opinion Pagliaro needs to be considered in relation to the tradition of reflections on language ushered in by Hegel. His idealism, Pagliaro's idealism, is not literary Italian idealism. It is a realistic idealism, nurtured by scientific theory. Pagliaro is following in Hegel's wake when, in exactly the same way as Hegel, he states that language is the creation itself of man's world, and only through language is man able to operate with things, appropriate them and, having done that, to think of them.

Even though no express mention is made, Pagliaro puts forward considerations coinciding with Hegel's ideas, especially those dating from the years he spent at Jena. In exactly the same way as Hegel, he acknowledges that the two constitutive dimensions of man are work and language. Work is the modification and creation of the physical world originally given to man and adapted by him, through his work, to his own mode of existence and his own needs. Language is the modification and creation of the spiritual world, of the world of possible and imaginable existences. When we read what Pagliaro writes about manual labour, it seems as though we are reading Hegel and his eulogy of the

hand: man, capable even of making an instrument of his own body, has turned himself into a tool of his own ability to modify the physical world.

As in European idealism, work and language are placed on the same level, like phenomena of a finalistic nature through which man, by modifying nature, makes himself part of history. In so doing, the life of the individual has a means of not extinguishing. Each one is perpetuated in the reality in which he has been objectified, a reality of a material and a spiritual nature destined to survive him. This is a privilege exclusive to the human spirit, which works on matter through the hand, and fixes and objectifies in the symbols of language the cultural heritage of individuals and communities in the chain of generations.