Stefania Guerra Lisi Gino Stefani

PRENATAL STYLES in The Arts and the Life

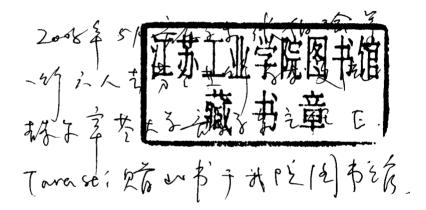
arts and the life

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Gino Stefani

ACTA SEMIOTICA FENNICA XXIV

Prenatal Styles in The Arts and the Life



Acta Semiotica Fennica Approaches to Musical Semiotics

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Acta Semiotica Fennica XXIV

International Semiotics Institute at Imatra Semiotic Society of Finland Università Popolare di MusicArTerapia 2006 This book is a publication of

The International Semiotics Institute

http://www.isisemiotics.fi/

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Cover design by Stefania Guerra Lisi

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Printed by E Print, Castel Madama (Roma) 2006

ISBN 952-5431-15-0 ISSN 1235-497X ACTA SEMIOTICA FENNICA XXIV

INTRODUCTION

In this book the authors develop a theory of styles of expression that are constituted before birth, during intra-uterine life. The theory interprets artistic expressions – fine and plastic arts, poetry, music, dance – as well as behaviors of both infant and adult, including so-called "nonsensical" ones of persons with serious handicaps. We start with the assumption that prenatal life, with its universal archetypes and unique imprinting, leaves deep and indelible traces on the person's further development. Those traces are particularly evident in artistic activities, in stages of infancy, and in persons with handicaps. This insight has been theorized and put to use in the Globality of Languages (Globalità dei Linguaggi), a discipline created, practiced, and taught by Stefania Guerra Lisi for more than thirty years.

The authors identify seven phases of fetal development in the womb, corresponding with as many psycho-motoric expressive styles of explicit artistic pertinence. The first traces of humanity and the roots of "symbols" in contemporary art evolve in ways that are similar to those of fetal development in the womb. Such development has led to the formation of styles that may be understood intuitively as a primordial metaphor of the "aggregation of energy into matter". From Chaos to Symbolic condensation is the process unconsciously re-lived by the child in any culture, even the contemporary artist who arrives at "nullification" as a form of liberation and regeneration.

Based on the Globality of Languages theory, the authors have used music-art therapy on patients with serious psycho-physical handicaps. Their work has focused on the common traits of human beings who live according to the principle of auto-satisfaction – expressed through "stereotypes" and other behaviors in which the original, psycho-sensory genesis of the person is, so to speak, relived. Study of the auto-satisfaction principle brings new awareness of the unquenchable psycho-physiological aesthetic capacity – the vital function of the symbolic-imaginative human constitution. That function is always at work, even under the most

extreme circumstances, making art a kind of safety valve for man – even when he finds himself in dehumanizing conditions. Our awareness of Prenatal Styles derives from observing and comparing a host of different human expressions: in pre-natal life, early infancy, pathological behaviors, and artistic forms. At bottom, all these different types of expression have a common imprint.

This research has a parallel in the study of common musical competence. By virtue of their essentially synaesthetic nature, the meanings derived from both daily and extraordinary musical experience find their deepest roots in the human body. For that reason, music reveals itself as an especially rich representation of lived bodily experience. It is little wonder, then, that one observes such continuity and symbiosis between semiotics of music and the Globality of Languages. Hence, among the metaphors designating the Prenatal Styles, some have been chosen from the musical realm.

In sum, what we proposed here is a psycho-physiological aesthetics as well as a semiotics – an aesthetics-semiotics – by which one can explicate the relations between various phenomena and the archetypal values that motivate them. Such phenomena include the most varied forms of our universe – from physical ones, such as those linked to the laws of gravity, to psychical ones, wherein human perception, operating by homology, transposes natural things into mental forms. Our semiotics is at the same time a semeiotics, in as much as it supplies instruments for diagnosing certain "irrational" and pathological behaviors as symptoms of an obsessive or regressive condition that corresponds to a given phase of prenatal development. Such diagnoses aid in the choice of fitting and effective courses of treatment for those conditions.

The volume opens with an overview of the theoretical framework of the research (Preludes). That is followed by an introduction to each of the seven styles (Models) in terms of their prototypical traits, described in terms of fetal development, and exemplified by various artistic productions of different times and cultures. A final excursion (Explorations), based on the proposed models, presents further interpretations of authors and works, thus covering yet more styles, processes, and behaviors.

Our general theory leaves room for exploitation on many levels, ranging from

the mundane to the specialized. Hence, the book is addressed to a wide and varied audience. In particular, it is proposed as a tool for training teachers of communication, both verbal and nonverbal, at basic levels of education. It should also prove useful for teachers and students of the humanities – literature, arts, psychology, education sciences – as well as for educators and social workers of all kinds.

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PRELUDES

From Cosmos to Womb

Nothing better expresses the continuous synthesis of opposites – yin and yang, unity in multiplicity – than does the body in motion. The present, however, is pregnant with the past, which is aroused or reawakened by the associative behavior of the senses. For the body, nothing is sheerly *now*. While from the first pulsation of life we are shaping *space* – that immense entity regenerated by every gesture it contains – *temporality*, living in us, in turn shapes us bit by bit, both constructing and deconstructing us "within time".

A Psychophysiological Semiotics-Aesthetics

To understand the Prenatal Styles, which form constants of human expression, it is necessary conceive them as contained in living space and in the psycho-biological time which animates us. Out of the interaction of space and time is born the alternation of those movements which we recognize in the form of psychomotor styles in the arts, in human behaviors, and in multi-sensory traces at a universal level.

Ongoing research in the Globality of Languages relates the art of living, in all its spontaneity and variety, to artistic expressions of all kinds, times, and places (Guerra Lisi 1987, 1996). We are in search of the common features of a psychophysiological semiotics-aesthetics that joins together the most varied forms of our universe, both physical and psychic. Features of the former are related to the laws of gravity, biology, mathematics, and so on. Psychic forms are filtered through human experience and perception, which, starting from bodily sensations, transposes the things of nature into mental analogies. It is a very human tendency to perceive this double, psycho-physical reality as connecting the external world to the internal one. In this way, one derives pleasure from perceiving the congruence between self and world. Such is the narcissistic, mirroring, Man-Nature that we call self-satisfaction.

Man is endowed with a specific "creative redundancy" that goes beyond the functions of pleasure, adaptation to environment, or communications needed for survival. Indeed, self-satisfaction manifests in art specifically as an aesthetic sense.

It is that sense which, for example, results in the shell patterns on a prehistoric bowl, made so that the rim slants gently, causing the liquid to pour out gradually — in a way that reflects the protruded lips of someone drinking without spilling a drop. The rectilinear projection of the circular rim is just the right thickness for the index-thumb grip (as Vespignani noticed and painted). The *hand*le, in all its diverse variants, reflects the *hand*. Just think of the infinite aesthetic solutions designed to help us get a "grip on reality". Understanding self-satisfaction helps us understand the host of images produced to satisfy that human need: from a simple bowl, to a ring decorated with floral scrolls, to ever more complex variants.

In "primitive" cultures, everyday objects can serve as occasions to speak of things other than their function; in fact, their pragmatic use may be so camouflaged that their essential function is seen to be that of beauty. The further an object is removed from use, through the prevalence of the metaphor of decoration, the more it becomes identified with ritual, cult, culture. Thus, in respect to the body, the "naked monkey" of Desmond Morris is adorned with symbolic attributes of power and, at the same time, the capacity to make the conform to itself as an animal.

The first tendency of the human Collector is to choose. In a nature so rich in colors and forms, to *recognize* and *choose* what one considers "good form" gives evidence of something more than the promise of pleasure: it is the self-satisfaction derived from superposing reality on memory.

The desire to meet with some "beautiful form" transforms the Collector into a Researcher. The collector used to move in the inarticulate, articulating it himself with the first experience. The latter is accompanied by *reflection*, which consists of the dual action of *bending* to catch-collect, and of *reflex* or formal affinity. That is to say, the collected object has a formal affinity with the collecting hand, with the visual perception, with the ancestral memories that permit *selection*: of a single rock from a mound of stones, a single berry from a cluster of grapes, and so on.

There is great beauty in the way the hollow of the hand adheres to the curve of a pear, in the way the iris of the eye matches a lunar corona, in natural simulations (such as a cluster of grapes) of breasts and nipples, which mythology transforms into Maya, Semele, Cybel, Cerere, Proserpine – all marvelous women, ripe for deflowering, as seen from a masculine perspective. The more difficult it is to find the rose among the thorns, the gold amid the silt, the more the Researcher rejoices in recognizing and choosing the good form from amidst the inarticulate tangle that surrounds it.

Everything is both inarticulate and articulate at the same time – scrawls among scrawls – until the Researcher looks for the one that coincides with the inner image of the *desire* and sets him free from the mess. This exercise of *singling-out* ripens the associative capacities, momentarily calling forth the similarities amidst the

many chromatic and formal resemblances. It is perhaps in this way that the substitutive, consolatory sense comes to be structured – a sense which we notice in emergencies, as when a new-born baby, in desperate need of milk, keeps itself alive by putting its finger in its mouth. *Tension* develops the sensory attitude that causes good Apollonian form to emerge, while *relaxation* develops the inarticulate, the Dionysian – all this in a rational culture, whose education systems instill inhibition and anathematize whatever emerges from an unrestrained unconscious.

"Often it is possible to wear the same countenance listening to a piece of music, tasting good food or perceiving a good odor" (Wittgenstein, quoted in Pignotti 1993:58). A tendency is growing in our culture to enhance the value of associative perceptions that do not come from just one sensory mode, but that emerge from multiple, synaesthetic pleasure. In this way, atrophied senses are reassessed: touch, taste and smell come more into use in communication formerly limited to verbally rationalized schemes. Touch, taste, and smell are ineffable memories having no trace of sight or sound. They are images of affective impressions: precise yet without clear delineation.

The Connecting Structure

Some of the most reliable data concerning ontogenesis are related to the sensory-motor function, with which neuropsychology deals. An important part of that function is the apparatus that puts the baby in a relation with its mother and its environment surrounding it, thus enabling the child to grow physically and mentally.

From the point of view of psycho-physiological aesthetics, each form corresponds to a life function. Hence, the alphabet of universal formal archetypes is inscribed in the transformations of the body, from the first cell on. These things are recognizable in the articulations and artifacts of all forms of communication. The individual, in continuity with his own species, and beyond the space and time of his existence, is both message and messenger: he expresses himself through manenvironment interaction, which in turn determines the forces and lines, the archetypal schemata, that lie behind concrete forms and their transformations. The form, then, is the *trace* resulting from the dialectics between internal and external tensions, between confining-confined, between point, line, surface, and volume.

To become conscious of this existential, morpho-alphabet is to find "that wider knowledge which is the glue holding together the stars and the sea mammals ... overcoming the boundary which is supposed to enclose the human being" (Bateson 1984: 17). Even in behaviors that are apparently senseless, we can discover sense, by means of aisthetiké. That inherent, human sense-ability derives from the

story of what came before – imprinted within every child and which makes possible his development. Knowing the morpho-alphabet helps us to understand the innermost creative expressions of children, artists, and the handicapped.

Bateson's views of mind and nature resonate deeply with our own, as does his project "to teach the psychiatrists of Palo Alto and the youths of the School of Fine Arts of California searching for the structure which connects the crab with the lobster, the orchids with the primrose, and all those four with me, me with you, and all six of us with the amoeba on the one hand, and the schizophrenic on the other" (ibid.: 21). Our own pedagogical-therapeutic experience has enabled us to observe the continuity about which that scholar speaks. We have found that each human being has within himself signs and criteria by which to interpret them, and all those correspond to the very signs and criteria in the world which he observes and creates.

Ontogenesis recapitulates psychophysically the phases of a psycho-motor development, which is the transformation of both the external structure and of the internal, proprioceptive psycho-writing that accompanies the evolution of movement in the amniotic liquid. As early as in the 1950s, the psychic development of the fetus was being investigated in terms of its object relationship with the external world. Such research began attempts to understand of how fetal psychic development could be inhibited by perception of internal objects. More specifically, inquiries were made into those inherited objects that integrate primary instincts with the nature of the primitive magical thought, and into the unconscious fantasy that lurks behind the primary repression. A. Rascovsky (1980: 29) describes such study as a development of the researches of Freud and Melanie Klein into the

... predominance of the fetal ego which follows the transitory attention of the post-natal integrations of the Ego in face of the impact of paranoid and insuperable depressive anxieties. Usually, our limited ability to endure the destructive impact of reality compels us to regress, so as to be able to completely satisfy ourselves in the fetal regression constituted by sleep, and to dream a sort of compromise with the need of readapting ourselves to the external world from the background of our regression.

In the Globality of Languages, the stereotypes and "sensorisms" that make up the "art of living" assume that regressive-adaptive function, as they do in artistic work as well. Starting from Freud's statement that "the Ego is above all a corporeal entity", artistic activity in its most primitive and physical sense – which refers both to the very small child and to the handicapped in their spontaneity – can be seen as the quintessence of a psychosomatic, adaptive action involving both mind

and body in the relationship with "mother-matter", in a constant interaction of space-time-intensity.

Creativity is a continuum between the external and the internal world, a reawakened past symbolically transposed into a present action. It is the continuity between the unconscious and the consciousness of a tangible self-trace, in a *presentiment* of gestural consequence.

According to the Globality of Languages, one re-actualizes one's unconscious, associative memories in real, psycho-corporeal activities. Every creative act is an auto-therapeutic psycho-drama, an exorcism of ones own memories – particularly traumatic ones. In such actions, one possesses them instead of being possessed by them, by making aesthetic choices that demonstrate

our subjective capacity to feel.

Our ability to be satisfied, both with ourselves and with others, correlates with our psycho-senso-motor preferences, which arise according to a universal code in the "choreographies of the womb" (stereotypes, sensorisms). These last serve not merely for consolation, but above all as effort to communicate, as does artistic work, which is both subjective and universal at the same time.

Unfortunately, such behaviors are normally tagged meaningless and hence disqualified on the level of communication. They are categorized as "autistic" behaviors, by a socio-cultural context that has denied the body and, hence, its memories, of their ancestral, psychophysical message. As against that view, we argue that such a message *can* be decoded if account is taken of those unconscious, psychomotor associations, established during prenatal imprinting, which allow for emo-tono-phonic understanding between individuals of the same species, and particularly, the capacity to transpose originally intersensory, lived experiences into synaesthetic and symbolic expressions.

Perhaps nowhere are neurophysiology and psychoanalysis so near one another as in the study of the prenatal life. Rascovsky affirms as much, when he explains the *motor-sense function* as an ontogenetic neurophysiological datum connected with the development of the *relational* apparatus by which the fetus communicates with the environment-mother. In his view, the investigation of that apparatus is of a *psychological-analytic* nature. In his own words, it is a kind of inquiry that deals with "the primitive object relations, their dynamics and the emotional consequences produced in the mental life of the adult" (Rascovsky 1980:35).

A characteristic datum of intra-uterine life, in the last months of gestation, is sleep with Rapid Eye Movement under the eyelids (the REM phase), a phenomenon that continues throughout our lives when we are dreaming. Whereas REM sleep has been investigated by physiology (especially in the last 50 years), the study of dreams has been the province of psychoanalysis. The roots of a psy-