

The play of mirrors
Representation of the self and the other in fragmented globalisation

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After the deconstruction of the unitary concept of West into several Wests, the epistemic revision taking place in social and cultural studies is examined with reference to the notion of symbolic violence (chap. 1). It is the fundamental concept of the entire essay, indicating the pervasive symbolic dimension of the construction of identity, which, according to the case in question, has become injurious interiorization of distorted images of the *self*. By means of the categories of memory and repression, the notion of symbolic violence is employed in the diagnosis of the ‘condition of concealment of the post-colonial past’ of the European *polity* (chap. 2). Through the concept of adaptive preferences, which should be understood as a variant of the notion of symbolic violence coined by *gender studies*, it is possible to examine some forms of inequality and difference, having in common various kinds of subjugation to domination (chap. 3); such an approach is useful to provide more ductile and effective tools for their analytical identification and conceptual definition, so as to facilitate their elimination, on the level of concrete *policies* (chap. 4).

1. *The way the European West deals with the categories of symbolic violence*

We assume to be in an age of Occidentalism¹, in which the direction of the *classifying and defining perspective* has changed *consciously*. In some respect, a deliberate reversal among scholars and depositories of expert knowledge has occurred. Something changed, no doubt. In the the so called scientific *establishment*, the *model* of intellectual *élite* prevailing until the middle of the last century and made up of *white male western* scholars has been replaced by something that is

¹ E. Said, *Orientalism. Western Conception of the Orient*, Vintage, London-New York 1976; S. Shimada, *Aspetti della traduzione culturale: il caso dell’“Asia”*, in B. Henry (a cura di), *Mondi globali*, ETS, Pisa 2000, pp. 137-159.

constituted by more *gender-sensitive, decolonized and decentralized* currents and energies. However, there is a long way before the legitimization of such a model takes root in curricular and academic policies². And certainly such an ideal revolution is slow to permeate common consciousness, that is, the levels of awareness existing throughout western societies.

It should not indeed be forgotten that it is only in the last few decades that the depositories of the cultural heritage of the European West have been observed and studied *methodically and by the institutions in which knowledge is produced* by those who were once subject to processes of domination. This does not at all mean, as will be confirmed further on, that the processes of colonization really occurred on a *tabula rasa*, in a *terra nullius*; on the contrary, they occurred against the background of pre-existing socio-institutional histories and structures, which, even when they were destroyed or radically assimilated, influenced the colonial symbolic and material patterns of domination. In any case, the myth of peoples without a past is what the subjugated have been led to believe, in some countries, and for generations. One of the gravest injuries inflicted on the collective self-awareness of the colonized by the mechanisms of subjugation is precisely the denial and concealment at an institutional and scientific level of not only the relevance, but even the existence, of such shared and *entangled histories*³; in them, the existing asymmetries between the position of the dominated and the canonical descriptive language did not totally cancel the native aspects of self-representation. These elements came together in an spurious form and constituted partly the images of the identity of the dominated themselves, portrayed and stored in the minds of the colonists. For the dominated to have any visibility, such self-representations were already the product of processes of accommodation, selection and mutation. The notion of auto-ethnography defines such situations of cultural interchange⁴ as *not free of domination*. They were multilateral constructions, diversified context by context, marked by processes of creative resistance, or of self-regulation. In them,

² Id., *Globalizing literary study*, in "Publications of the Modern Language Association of America", 2001, 116, pp. 64-68, p. 65.

³ S. Conrad, S. Randeira, *Einleitung. Geteilte Geschichten, Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt*, in Id. (Hrsg.), *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Campus, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2002, pp. 9-50.

the reactive aspects combine with the proactive aspects, symbolico-cultural crystallizations endowed with a stable and shared meaning, the results of which are neither pre-constituted nor predictable.

Such processes therefore initiated practices of symbolic creation through the construction of the nomenclature of all realities, natural and social. As such, they had a structural importance for the identities both of the colonizers and of the colonized, in that they established the very conditions of the visibility of physical and human entities, of individuals and social roles, of collective aggregates, of the spatial and symbolic structuring of the territories in which the colonists and colonized interacted asymmetrically. The antithesis between city and country, between savage world and civilized world, was rewritten *in loco*, and the transformation of the pre-existing urban structures was pursued in such a way as to redefine the identity of populations⁵.

The theme of domination needs to be reinterpreted, with the necessary critical caution, as symbolic violence, in the sense of processes and vocabularies of asymmetrical and penalizing construction of the identities of the dominated⁶. This, with the restatement of the precious warning already suggested above by the mention of auto-ethnography: if such individuals and groups were marginal in the weaving of the symbolic narratives that were socially and politically determining for themselves and their own descendants, then the ubiquitous consistence of the assumption should be contested, and related, context by context, to the situations and ways in which symbolic violence is countered by languages of creativity, as

⁴ M.L. Pratt, *Introduction*, in Id., *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Routledge, London/ New York 1989, in part. pp. 6-7.

⁵ Impossible to mention all the literature on the subject. Emblematic H.L. Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, Plon, Paris 1955; for an overall, updated vision, F.M. Tedesco, *Violenza simbolica* [Voce], in M. Flores (a cura di), *Diritti umani. Cultura dei diritti e dignità della persona nell'epoca della globalizzazione*, vol. II, *Dizionario* (H-W), Utet, Torino 2007. From the point of view of the *cultural geography* oriented towards colonial studies see: S. Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism*, Blackwell, London 2007; D. Clayton, *Critical Imperial and Colonial Geographies*, in K. Anderson, Domosh, Pile, Thrift (eds), *The Handbook of Cultural Geography*, Sage, London 2003, pp. 354-368. ID, *Imperial Geographies*, in J. Duncan, N. Johnson, R. Schein (eds) *A Companion to Cultural Geography*, Blackwell, London 2004, pp. 449-68. S. Berthon, A. Robinson, *The Shape of the World : The Mapping and Discovery of the Earth*, George Philip Ed., London 1991.

⁶ The expression indicates the normalization of domination, the fact of the omnipresence and the cognitive, perceptive and symbolic interiorization of it by the dominated. "Le cose stanno così, e devono essere così, nessuno se ne stupisce, o si indigna". In this sense, G. C. Spivak, *Can the Subaltern speak?*, in Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Univ. of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago 1988, pp. 271-313.

well as of resistance⁷. It remains, however, true that symbolic violence is exercised whenever the depositories of languages “lay down the law”, adopt a perspective that is surreptitiously over-ordered, because falsely neutral and universal, on every dimension of social reality different from their own. One of such master narratives is now to be considered and criticised by means of the category of symbolic violence.

2. Memory and repression of the colonial past; the European West confronting itself

With respect to the self-representations of which we, European westerners, are capable, the example of *French republican colonialism* would be paradigmatic for at least one of the most effective and pervasive narratives with which Europe has nourished its own identity, the universalism of the rights of freedom and equality, the lexicon of liberation from oppression. In drawing up and justifying such a narrative, the social subjects and beneficiaries of such an account would remain blind in the face of their own internal contradictions. Should the European West ever realize what it implies to be looked at in turn by someone else, it should confront at least three typologies of non-acknowledgement/concealment of its own misdeeds with respect to the colonial past and to the present: ignoring, forgetting, repressing⁸. As developments in the qualitative social sciences show us, the three modes of concealment are by now part of a vocabulary that is shared by studies of memory and of remembering, and is no longer strictly restricted to the languages of psychoanalysis, of psychology, of schools of psychotherapy; rather it is enriched and complicated thanks to the contributions of the historical social disciplines, and those of political science.

If, on the one hand, by memory (individual) is meant today a conceptual territory limited to the acquisition and maintenance (archiving, storing) of lived experiences and past actions⁹, on the other, by the concept of remembering is meant

⁷ P. Bourdieu, *Il dominio maschile* (1998), Feltrinelli, Milano 1999.

⁸ I owe the classification to Alberto Pirni.

⁹ Unlike common philosophical knowledge, (the same employed in the construction of the school and university system in Italy half a century ago), in which the concept of memory indicated “la

consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) of lived experiences and past actions *in so far as they are past*¹⁰. The said category of repression, not in mere antithesis to remembering, should no longer be considered an exclusive monopoly of the Freudian scholarship¹¹. Rather, the descriptive nucleus relevant here for repression is that relating to the social mechanisms of partial remembering, oriented towards the diminution of painful states. Such mechanisms elude, avoid, procrastinate the acknowledgement by the group of situations, conditions, states of things: the conscious public treatment of such matters is perceived as heralding suffering and laceration. Such mechanisms are triggered if the origin of the predicted pain are guilty acts committed in the past and not yet admitted or punished. Such repression produces social pathologies because it misleads and falsifies, to the detriment of the actors, the construction of the perspective that links the generations in a shared narrative, which cannot in any way coincide with self-deception and concealment, without the identify-forming narrative being condemned to implausibility and therefore to ineffectiveness.

Such concealment has produced the gravest aporia: an unduly selective, and therefore unjustified, ascription of such dignity of universal beings to some human groups, but not to all, even if provisionally. The unity of the human kind was seen symbolically as a mission still to be accomplished with and through civilizing, not yet as an actual reality. We should not be reassured by the fact that such a process was put into effect by universalist politics, outside and even antithetical to the racist theories that preach the natural and insurmountable irreducibility of biological type between the higher human strain and those strains defined as inferior. What really establishes, legitimizes and perpetuates the conditions, both outer and inner, of subordination is the proclamation itself, for a population, of its temporary, but indefinite, existence in a status of cultural, institutional and social

presenza al soggetto di un passato stato di coscienza, riconosciuto per tale” [E.P. Lamanna, E. Adorno, *Dizionario di termini filosofici*, Le Monnier, Firenze 1969]. As can be seen clearly, in such a definition memory encompasses remembering, if such a definition is compared with the semantic specification between the two terms, mentioned in the text* *in testo*.

¹⁰ M. Quante, *Identità* [Voce], in N. Pethes, P. Ruchatz (a cura di), *Dizionario della memoria e del ricordo*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2002, pp. 243-245.

¹¹ As well known, it's the theory of the stages through which the drives of the child are formed and reformed with respect to the potentialities of the *libido*, so that the child can achieve for him/herself security and vital equilibrium through *elusions*. This processes occurs by means of the harmonizing of one's own desires with the will of the family sovereign

minority; this status that can only be overcome under the guidance of and through emulation of the model of the colonizers.

Refusing to confront the conceptual and symbolic subordination generated by the asymmetrical confrontation set up by the dominators with respect to “other” cultures, means failing to evaluate the true weight of colonial culture within not only French, but also European *and* Western culture¹². The most subtly poisonous aspect of such a long-lasting and permanent non-declaration of one's own aporias is that this cognitive “repressed content” is still deceitfully pervasive with respect to the *universalist and progressive* model of emancipation, which, despite the recurrent criticisms regarding its effectiveness, is still considered by many to be the unquestioned conceptual cornerstone of the civil conscience and political identity of the Union *tout court*.

If such an *apparatus* is not deconstructed, all the legitimate claims to be defending the lasting unassailable nucleus of the language of rights and emancipation against its detractors could be nullified. If such an *apparatus* is to be consolidated, because of its veritable core, a profound revisiting of its lexicon should be undertaken and the harm inflicted on the subjugated in their self-representations should be taken into consideration; such moral “disablements” are the most long-lasting, also because they have not yet been recognized as such.

Accepting as one's own a configuration, a form of the self made by others and for others is only one part of what has happened. The real problems are elsewhere: in the first place, what occurred, occurred because other models or other methods, possessing sufficient credibility and adequate for conceiving and making others, were not available. The identity that is available is so inadequate and oppressive because it is the dictate of those who establish its contexts, constraints and rules proves to be the sole one, exclusive, homogeneous, excluding possible alternatives. In the second place, the occlusive and disempowering effects of such a *reductio ad unum* cannot be cancelled with a mere act of will or conscious reflection, but last over time and over generations, producing, in the majority of cases, moral, social and political asphyxia. Such outcomes are induced by processes by which the

subordinate subjects interiorize an identity that is made to measure for others, but is inadequate, “ill-fitting” for them; for them it is a matter of adapting to identity constructs made up of socially appreciated qualities, and fixed as a universal objective of emancipation for all, without distinctions. It is precisely such constructs that the subordinate are called to emulate, deforming themselves in order to fit the single model. The hetero-induced distortion cited by Charles Taylor¹³, is another name for what reflection on gender calls “ill-fitting” identity¹⁴ or adaptive preferences, that is to say, the mechanisms through which the model is propagated are processes of interiorization, mimetic adaptation being the condition for the subordinate to be able to emerge in the competition for social resources.

There is a need for critical studies in which the deconstruction of the concept of culture brings out the limits of a legitimizing acceptance of the taxonomy between civilized and non-civilized cultures; it should be stated that such a contraposition is in line with a false postulate, that according to which *the existence of an untranslatability between cultures and of cultural prisons* is accepted and propagated as true. French republican colonialism and its contradictions constitute a clear example of what has just been outlined regarding the acceptance of the dichotomic vision according to which “my” culture is in its fundamentals untranslatable into the terms of “another” culture, because the latter is still in a condition of immaturity with respect to mine. This aggravates therefore the task of those who, whether scientists and citizens, are setting about the work of revealing and recognizing the repression of identity that affects us.

«Un homme à cheval sur deux cultures est rarement bien assis»¹⁵. The implicit reference is to the assumption that considers cultures mutually impermeable dimensions, shut in on themselves: the postulate of the incommunicability between

¹² D. Costantini, *Per l'anamnesi di una malattia europea: il “nuovo discorso coloniale” Francese e i suoi critici*, Tesi di Perfezionamento, in cotutela fra Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna – Pisa e Université de Paris VIII – Vincennes-Saint-Denis, 2006.

¹³ Ch. Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition” in A. Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992, pp. 25-73 [“La politica del riconoscimento”, in A. Gutmann (a cura di), *Multiculturalismo. La politica del riconoscimento*, trad. it. di G. Rigamonti, Anabasi, Milano 1993, pp. 41-103; taken up in J. Habermas, Ch. Taylor, *Multiculturalismo. Lotte per il riconoscimento*, trad. it. di L. Ceppa e G. Rigamonti, Feltrinelli, Milano 2005⁶, pp. 9-62].

¹⁴ G. Zincone, *Uno schermo contro il razzismo*, il Mulino, Bologna 1994; Id. (a cura di), *Secondo rapporto sull’integrazione degli immigrati in Italia*, il Mulino, Bologna 2001.

cultures can even prepare the way for the naturalization of cultural differences. The presumption of incontrovertibility of the attribution, does not change, even if the contents and the sign, positive or negative, that is attributed to such features is modified. The positive values attributed by the colonized to the civil and social model being emulated are the confirmation of the position of inadequacy and inferiority in which subordinate persons find themselves with respect to such a model.

From this point on, we will attempt to define and verify such a hypothesis, by dealing with more concrete situations of coexistence, in conditions of asymmetries of power. This is why, from now onward, we will try to deconstruct some common linguistic usages, taken for granted, but erroneously considered innocuous with respect to the position of individuals in relations of power, if we share the assumption that power is symbolic, defining and constitutive of identities.

3. Adaptive preferences, deconstruction of languages

As a concrete example starting from a particular context, let us take a riding lesson; the instructor should impart commands to a composite group of persons on horseback distinguishing “the horsemen” from the “horsewomen. If on the contrary he/she used the term “horse-riders” without distinction, he/she would obscure the fact that there are also women that practice the same sport; few know that the “horsewomen” are in the majority and reach extremely high levels in competitions. It is right to ask ourselves why female persons should be put into a single category, conceived moreover only as male, and therefore not even *genuinely* neutral. We might not accept the levelling out of the two genders with the use of neutral gender; however, if we consent to it, we must demand that it be at least on ground that is truly neutral. In the previous case, apparently one of the most innocuous, we would have the identification of the female with the male, which unduly takes it upon itself

¹⁵ A. Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé précédé de portrait du colonisateur*, Gallimard, Paris 1957.

to include in itself and to represent incorrectly, that is, to be in the place of that which it is not, pretending unduly to be universal¹⁶.

Such precise definition should prevent the concealment, the implicit repression, the automatic nature of a language of domination that structures minds, leaving no openings for insidious questions about the state of things. On the occasion, for example, of a lecture or congress, it is rare on the level of common awareness for the minority presence of female students to be noted. A completely male auditorium, and even more so a podium composed of only male speakers, does not in fact arouse any surprise, it is normal, and no-one understands why it should be otherwise. When, on the other hand, one sees assemblies, extremely rare, of women only, the fact arouses amazement on the part of those present. In the presence of men only, this does not happen because it is the norm. The normalization, the naturalization of relationships is what epistemic violence refers to, if we want to use it *in the only specific and appropriate sense*.

It should not however be forgotten how the category of epistemic violence, if absolutized in its oppressive hyper-dimensionality and ubiquity, can become a trap even for those who would like to change such a situation. The question that is rightly raised, against Spivak's position, is about how we enable the subordinate to speak. If they do not have critical and reflexive capacity, being totally pervaded by the determining categorization and nomenclature, it can be excluded that they are able to express themselves in their own voice. This type of reasoning is has the same origin as the above-mentioned dualism relative to the taxonomy between a civilized and non-civilized cultures. Despite the criticism of epistemic violence,

¹⁶ Examples of a linguistic kind can help to understand more underhand and prejudicial shifts in the meaning of words. In the German language the term *Mensch* means, grammatically, the “human kind” and continues to be used consciously as a term of universal meaning whenever both genders taken together are being spoken of. Along the lines of the verse from Genesis, it can be said that «male and female was created man *alias* human kind». The term *homme* also meant originally “human being” and still does not indicate univocally “male man”. However, it is in this last meaning that the term has surreptitiously absorbed into itself also the second gender, appearing as the one signifier for two different meanings, the male and the female. The place of such an undue

Spivak in some of his formulations seems to reproduce the dualism according to which there are the dominating and the dominated, and the latter are crushed by their being dominated. Spivak, despite his attempts, does not seem to accept coherently what the critics of this approach call cultural dynamism, osmosis, interrelation, conflictuality¹⁷. Relationship, interrelation, conflicts can change things, in a way which is unpredictable. It is an act of arrogance to think that the subordinate are poor, rejects, victims of destiny, and therefore incapable of reacting or planning, needing something originating elsewhere to enable them to speak.

This is the double limit of such an approach: on one hand, that of fixing and “condemning”, again from the outside, even if with the assumption of liberation, the dominated to heteronomous definitions of their selves. On the other hand, the limit is to assert that there is *the* universal definition of domination, valid everywhere and for every situation. If we make use of an other category we could be more successful than in the previous case.

4. *Gender studies and pragmatic of vital languages*

Those who make proper use of the concept of adaptive preferences¹⁸, have affirmed that it is not true that there exists a reciprocal incommunicability of languages and cultures. Nussbaum suggests an example; if Indian women are put into contact with the language of human rights and are shown that such a language

assimilation heralded significantly epochal consequences; the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* in 1789 has constituted the paradigm of the language of rights beyond imagination.

¹⁷ G. C. Spivak, *Critica della ragione postcoloniale* (1999), Meltemi, Rome 2004.

¹⁸ Some feminist scholars, going beyond the concept of subordination, speak, on the subject of women, not of subordinate groups, but of “moral minorities”. In this way the problem of minority in quantitative terms is thus cleared away. Women are in fact in the majority in merely numerical terms. It is not therefore a problem of numerical minority, but of moral minority. The moral majority is the dominant group that dictates the models of behaviour and of attitude. Such models are dictated in an apodeictic, absolutely incontrovertible, manner. Everyone knows that it is so and no-one calls it into question. The moral minority is, however, that group, which can even be enormous, of those who either cannot or does not want to be mimetic with respect to that set of identifying qualities. The discussion about the concept of adaptive preferences, as the feminists say, relates therefore exactly to the idea that the moral minority is that group upon which weighs the label of inferiority with respect to the dominant model.

“works”, they will use it as an instrument of struggle against oppression¹⁹. Whether it is therefore a matter of human rights, or of dignity, is of no importance; women employ, in the majority of cases, a multiplicity of theoretical weapons, if it enables them to be free, independently of their belonging to a particular culture. Therefore, particular attention be paid to the ways in which women assimilate, or not, the “adaptive preference. Indeed, we must not let ourselves be deceived. Resistances, micro-resistances, are often used by women, who act by resorting to the simulacrum of the patriarchal discourse; they empty it from the inside, by means of micro-systems of autonomous creations, of development of marginal subjective identities, yes, but still female, and of a certain type²⁰. They are therefore forms of ‘sabotage from within²¹’.

. Examples as such are not valid in all situations; they are narrative. There is not a will to generalize, but an extreme attention to differences, to particular, real situations, that are interconnected and changeable. Starting from the application of such modesty on the part of those observing, it must be presumed that there is an equally “unobtrusive” activity of internal erosion. That is, it must be recognized that not all the resistances of the subordinate are remarkable, or “insurrectionary”, as occurred, for example, recently in Burma or in Tibet. There are, for example, interesting forms of resistance, like those taking place in Yemen, in which highly original case studies have been carried out. Thanks to such studies it was observed

¹⁹ M. Nussbaum, *Diventare persone. Donne e universalità dei diritti* (2000), il Mulino, Bologna 2001.

²⁰ Bartoli C., *Subalternità, rappresentazioni sociali e rappresentanza politica*, in «Ragion pratica», 2004, 23.

²¹ Moreover, one can also come to the conclusion that it is not possible to be emancipated from everything, since it is impossible to escape from certain “opacities”, conditionings, unavoidable material constraints. If therefore it is true that not all the victims of adaptive preferences are victims forever, it is also true that one cannot free oneself definitively from all the distorted or prejudicial images of one's self. Social psychology in this connection speaks of the plasticity and pervasiveness of predispositions, of postures and moral attitudes, of the way we are accustomed to seeing ourselves in the mirror. Not all adaptive preferences can be eliminated and not always completely, because it is not so much a question of rationality, as of being part of a body that is a material-symbolic, historical and social, construct, which is indeed going through a process of change, but slowly and in not painless forms.

how Yemeni women, although forced to wear the full veil, have created places of feminine criticism and resistance. They have created a network that has linked up with international agents and observers.

Furthermore, the global distribution of craft products, such as ethnic fashion, both niche and commercial, is what has been achieved by women's enterprises in Afghanistan. These women have, that is, begun to work towards winning economic independence. A form of economic independence is not everything, but can make them less subordinate and so less victims. Even if their husbands were to leave them, they would in fact be able to maintain themselves and their offspring without having to accept specific and lethal forms of domestic and family violence. Economic autonomy is obviously not *the* solution, but one of the possible solutions.

Afghanistan and Yemen are two examples in which, paradoxically, despite the situations of oppression of every kind that women are subjected to, there are commercially interesting examples of women's entrepreneurship that are beginning to work and to find responses abroad. With the acquisition of a greater visibility towards the outside, there is also transversality. Not only external/internal exists, there are the non-governmental organizations, there are international institutions, there are returning emigrés. There exists, that is, a plurality of agencies and networks. There exist various individuals that work, and act on situations, in various positions of power. Such pluralities must be kept in mind when initiating research that is oriented towards action, not forgetting that we must avoid giving credit *ex antea* to our domestic vision of a particular reality. Thus reflexively controlled social praxis is configured with respect to the theory of the social sciences. Praxis becomes therefore the arena for the new scientific research. In language there is grammar, syntax, pragmatics; this last indicates and analyses the lived uses of the first two. The great teaching of praxis is that, if it becomes *pragmatics of vital languages*, it is at the same time the object and the context of knowledge. This requires, of course, an infinity of cases, of possibilities, of microscopic pieces of research. This obviously does not mean not having pre-constituted concepts, but admitting having them, and being prepared for them to be demolished or rectified.

Therefore is appropriate even the metaphor of the journey towards the ideal point that is not known. Such a metaphorical journey presupposes the humility of those

who abstain from asserting and imposing their own vision of things. It is the humility of those who, going to a distant, and culturally alien country, do not speak for a year, but limit themselves to listening. Such a way of approaching events and situations is precisely the overturning of epistemic violence. This implies the following: to try to perceive, to allow oneself to be aroused from within, not only through the mind, but also through modes of self-situating and acting, without obviously excluding the possibility of saying no to certain fundamental questions, and rejecting imitation as such. However, it is not only a matter of moral humility, but of a fundamental cognitive attitude. An extremely rich, and not only evocative, dimension of the hermeneutics, that of listening, should be recovered. Such a sphere of meaning contains within it the idea of allowing oneself to be carried away by languages, and by the feelings that emanate from them, under the control of a reflexive and feed-back methodology. Such methodological ductility goes hand in hand with the intellectual honesty according to which it is necessary to start from the assumption that phenomena are probably different from how we consider them at first. The solution will be reached, it is to be hoped, in the end. Starting from this predisposition one can therefore try to understand with an openness, as was said above, that is not only moral, but also cognitive. It is mental openness, and the willingness to let oneself be influenced, not mechanically, or mimetically, but rather in a nobly pragmatic manner.